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Examining the Impact of Quality of Work Life Dimensions on Early Retirement Intentions among Academicians

Meneliti Kesan Dimensi Kualiti Kehidupan Kerja terhadap Niat Persaraan Awal dalam Kalangan Ahli Akademik

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ABSTRACT

Today, higher education's role has expanded beyond traditional functions to include knowledge transfer, innovation, research, and social and community engagement. These high expectations and responsibilities have adversely affected psychological well-being and job satisfaction, potentially influencing academicians' intentions to retire early. This study examines the impact of Quality of Work Life (QWL) dimensions on early retirement intentions among academicians in a single Malaysian comprehensive university. A multistage sampling technique was employed, with one state randomly selected to represent each of the five main geographic regions. Structured questionnaires were distributed online, and 215 responses were obtained. Seven QWL dimensions comprising job stress, job security, fair compensation, career development, physical work environment, work–life balance, and perceived organisational support represent the independent variables, whereas early retirement intention was the dependent variable. Multiple regression analysis indicated that only job stress significantly predicted early retirement intention. These findings extend the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model by demonstrating that job demands had a greater impact on early retirement intention than job resources, which suggests psychological strain plays a more critical role than structural or organizational factors in shaping retirement decisions. The findings underscore the importance of stress management interventions and supportive workplace policies to retain experienced academicians and mitigate early retirement. However, the study's generalizability is constrained by its focus on a single university, within one state per region, and its cross-sectional design. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and incorporate additional key individual, institutional, and psychological variables to better understand early retirement decision-making.

Keywords: Quality of Work Life, Early Retirement Intentions, Academicians, Job Stress, Perceived Organisational Support

ABSTRAK

Peranan pendidikan tinggi pada masa kini telah berkembang melangkaui fungsi tradisional, merangkumi pemindahan ilmu, inovasi, penyelidikan serta penglibatan sosial dan komuniti. Jangkaan dan tanggungjawab yang tinggi ini telah memberikan kesan negatif terhadap kesejahteraan psikologi dan kepuasan kerja, sekali gus berpotensi mempengaruhi niat ahli akademik untuk bersara awal. Kajian ini meneliti kesan dimensi Kualiti Kehidupan Bekerja (Quality of Work Life, QWL) terhadap niat persaraan awal dalam kalangan ahli akademik di sebuah universiti komprehensif di Malaysia. Teknik persampelan pelbagai peringkat telah digunakan, dengan satu negeri dipilih secara rawak bagi mewakili setiap satu daripada lima wilayah geografi utama. Soal selidik berstruktur telah diedarkan secara dalam talian dan sebanyak 215 maklum balas telah diperoleh.Tujuh dimensi Kualiti Kehidupan Bekerja yang merangkumi tekanan kerja, keselamatan pekerjaan, pampasan yang adil, pembangunan kerjaya, persekitaran fizikal tempat kerja, keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan dan persepsi terhadap sokongan organisasi telah ditetapkan sebagai pemboleh ubah bebas, manakala niat persaraan awal merupakan pemboleh ubah bersandar. Analisis regresi berganda menunjukkan bahawa hanya tekanan kerja merupakan peramal yang signifikan terhadap niat persaraan awal. Dapatan ini memperluas Model Tuntutan-Sumber Pekerjaan (Job Demands-Resources Model, JD-R) dengan menunjukkan bahawa tuntutan pekerjaan memberikan kesan yang lebih besar terhadap niat persaraan awal berbanding sumber pekerjaan. Hal ini mencadangkan bahawa tekanan psikologi memainkan peranan yang lebih kritikal berbanding

faktor struktur atau organisasi dalam membentuk keputusan persaraan. Dapatan kajian ini menekankan kepentingan pelaksanaan intervensi pengurusan tekanan serta dasar tempat kerja yang menyokong bagi mengekalkan ahli akademik yang berpengalaman dan mengurangkan kecenderungan untuk bersara awal. Walau bagaimanapun, kebolehgunaan dapatan kajian ini kepada konteks yang lebih luas adalah terhad kerana kajian hanya melibatkan sebuah universiti, dengan satu negeri mewakili setiap wilayah, serta menggunakan reka bentuk kajian keratan rentas. Kajian pada masa hadapan disarankan untuk menggunakan reka bentuk longitudinal dan memasukkan pemboleh ubah individu, institusi dan psikologi tambahan yang relevan bagi memahami dengan lebih mendalam proses pembuatan keputusan berkaitan persaraan awal.

Kata kunci: Kualiti Kehidupan Bekerja, Niat Persaraan Awal, Ahli Akademik, Tekanan Kerja, Persepsi terhadap Sokongan Organisasi

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, universities focused on disseminating knowledge, producing graduates for professional careers, and contributing to societal progress. Apart from teaching and research, the contemporary role of higher education now extends to incorporate a "third mission" of knowledge transfer, community engagement, and collaboration with external stakeholders (Ismail & Elihami, 2025). The growing emphasis on the third mission drives innovation, co-production of knowledge, and sustainable regional and societal development (Dube & Hendricks, 2023; Rusciano, 2024; Saidi & Boti, 2023). Consequently, the workload of academicians has expanded beyond teaching to include research, publishing, consultancy, and handling administrative duties. This multifaceted role is further intensified by institutional pressures to strive for national recognition in worldwide university rankings (Edu, 2025).

Highly motivated academics are the most important resource of a university and are necessary to meet institutional and societal expectations (Aslan et al., 2014). However, fast-changing conditions in the contemporary academic environment have drastically increased work intensity and faculty workloads (Franke, 2015; Urbina-Garcia, 2020). Academics are under increasing pressure to balance the traditional teaching and research duties with a growing “third mission” of community engagement and knowledge transfer (Rusciano, 2024; Saidi & Boti, 2023). Such juggling of multifaceted roles often leads to severe role overload, emotional exhaustion, and work-home interference that directly threaten their professional and personal well-being (Chuan-Chiew & Hwa, 2018; Dube & Hendricks, 2023).

Consequently, maintaining a high Quality of Work Life (QWL) has become critical, as its decline profoundly influences job satisfaction and career decisions (Rafie et al., 2023). The failure of institutions in safeguarding the faculty’s well-being against persistent operational demands increases the academics’ view of early retirement as a conscious strategy to mitigate burnout and protect their health (Jasiński & Derbis, 2022; Pei et al., 2024).

Although the issue of early retirement is increasingly deliberated in research (Muhammud et al., 2022; Mustapha et al., 2023; Naziman et al., 2022; Saad & Rashid, 2023; Yean, 2025), these studies focused on public servants and teachers, with less attention to academicians. For example, Mustapha et al. (2023) found that the changing nature of academic roles and increasing emphasis on workload have caused some Malaysian teachers to reconsider their career paths. Similar findings also show that contextual factors (such as workload and policy changes), personal factors (health and financial), and organisational factors influence the early retirement intentions among primary and secondary school teachers and public servants (Muhammud et al., 2022; Naziman et al., 2022; Saad & Rashid, 2023; Yean, 2025). These findings suggest that pressures related to job

satisfaction and overall well-being could result in early retirement. Therefore, as academicians also face this situation, this study aims to explore early intentions for retirement among academicians in university environments.

In the ever-evolving landscape of academia, academic institutions face a growing challenge in attracting and retaining top talent due to rising turnover rates within the educational sphere (Ahmad Saufi et al., 2023). Leitão et al. (2019) state that employers need to raise workers' perceived QWL if they want to sustain high productivity and employee motivation. A great company can develop skilled and competent people and offer a good quality of work-life to its employees (Handayani & Khairi, 2022). Given the high value of human resources, the organisation must preserve the standard of work-life balance and develop its personnel to maximise their willingness to contribute to the achievement of organisational objectives (Sinambela & Ernawati, 2021).

QWL is a multidimensional construct encompassing both tangible and psychosocial aspects of the work environment. In academic settings, seven key dimensions have been identified comprising of Job Stress, Job Security, Fair Compensation, Career Development, Physical Work Environment, Work Life Balance, and Perceived Organisational Support (Ehido et al., 2020). Although distinct, each of these dimensions is interrelated facets of the academic experience covering the pressures of high job demands and emotional exhaustion to the adequacy of compensation, opportunities for professional growth, and the physical and organizational context in which work is performed.

Recent research highlights QWL dimensions as critical determinants of early retirement. Findings indicate high job stress, poor environmental conditions, and job insecurity increases workforce exit due to burnout and declining health, while robust organisational resources such as perceived organisational support (POS), transparent career development, work–life flexibility, and positive psychosocial environments safeguard against strain (Hngoi et al., 2024; Jung et al., 2024; Pei et al., 2024). Ultimately, optimizing these QWL dimensions enhances job satisfaction, sustains long-term engagement, and effectively reduces withdrawal intentions among aging employees (Chen et al., 2024; Khair et al., 2024; Mori et al., 2024).

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory serves as the theoretical foundation of this study. JD-R Theory differentiates between job demands and job resources as two fundamental types of work characteristics that influence employee outcomes (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job demands are aspects of work that require sustained efforts and entail psychological costs, whereas job resources facilitate goal achievement and buffer the impact of demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001). It is presumed that when demands persistently exceed resources, employees may resort to resource-protective withdrawal, and early retirement intention is one such adaptive response. This framing is especially appropriate for academic settings, where the constant pressures of teaching, research, and administrative tasks can gradually deplete academics' bandwidth, leading them to consider an early exit to protect their health and well-being. In this study, job stress is considered the main job demand, as the strain and emotional exhaustion associated with increased academic work. The six other QWL dimensions (i.e. job security, fair compensation, career development, physical work environment, work–life balance, and perceived organisational support) are conceptualised as job resources that provide material, psychological and social support.

QUALITY WORK LIFE AND RETIREMENT INTENTION

The degree to which an employee is satisfied with their personal and professional requirements while achieving the organization's goals is known as the quality of work life (Bandar et al., 2018). The QWL encompasses the physical, psychological, social, and financial aspects of employment, in which a high QWL environment is anticipated to lead to positive consequences for both the employee and the company (Bhende et al., 2020). In contrast, a negative impact due to a lack of work life balance and poor QWL, such as severe chronic stress and burnout, decreased productivity, which may intensify early retirement intentions among employees. A quality company is one that provides a quality work life for its employees and develops skilled, competent workers (Handayani & Khairi, 2022). Since human resources are a very valuable asset, the business must preserve the quality of work life and fully develop its employees to maximise their contributions and meet organisational objectives (Sinambela & Ernawati, 2021). In higher education institutions, QWL is crucial as academicians face challenging work demands due to heavy workloads, research expectations, and administrative responsibilities. These conditions can influence academicians' job satisfaction, well-being, and ultimately their decisions regarding career continuation or retirement.

Early retirement is defined as "the exit from an organizational position or career path of considerable duration, taken by individuals after middle age, and taken with the intention of reduced psychological commitment to work thereafter" (Feldman, 1994). Early or voluntary retirement is the complete exit from a long-term organisational job or career path decided by individuals of a certain age in the mid or late career before mandatory retirement age, intending to reduce their attachment to work and close a process of gradual psychological disengagement from working life (Topa et al., 2018). Early retirement is a major life change that may result from either a planned early retirement or an early retirement due to health issues, job satisfaction or financial literacy (Naziman et al., 2022).

Based on prior literature, various aspects were considered in determining QWL. The current study will examine QWL among academicians based on the dimensions described by Ehido et al. (2020), which comprises job stress, job security, fair compensation, career development, work-life balance (WLB), physical work environment, and perceived organisational support. Each of these dimensions may influence academicians' attitudes toward their work and their intentions to remain in or exit the workforce. Examining the role of QWL dimensions helps to facilitate the understanding of the factors influencing academicians' retirement intentions. Subsequently, the potential impacts of QWL dimensions on early retirement intention are hypothesized and discussed.

JOB STRESS AND EARLY RETIREMENT INTENTION

Job stress is a significant threat to an employee's QWL, precipitating psychological strain, reduced productivity, and heightened turnover intentions (Aruldoss et al., 2021; Mosadeghrad et al., 2011). In academia, job stress is a pervasive threat to employee well-being, fuelled by a relentless mix of heavy teaching loads, publishing pressures, grant competition, and administrative burdens. When demand exceeds an individual's capability, it fails to meet desired outcomes (Ehido et al., 2020), and prolonged stress erodes job satisfaction and drives professionals to seek an exit. Chukwuebuka et al. (2023) found that working experience influences work-related stress among lecturers in a tertiary educational institution in Nigeria. If the environmental elements that lead to stress were

reduced, young lecturers who have not spent as many years in service could experience less work-related stress, leading to the issue of early retirement among senior lecturers, whose prolonged exposure to systemic pressures. Ultimately, faculty members increasingly view early retirement not just as a career change but as a vital self-preservation strategy to protect their remaining health and mental well-being (Jasiński & Derbis, 2022; Pei et al., 2024). Thus, it is hypothesize that:

H1: *Job stress has a significant positive relationship with the early retirement intention of academicians.*

JOB SECURITY AND EARLY RETIREMENT INTENTION

In gaining a high QWL, employees are also concerned about job security. Employees seek job security because they do not want to be at the mercy of their employers or to become victims of arbitrary personal policies (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2013). Besides, job security mirrors the stability of employment, including tenure, long-term contracts, and supportive policies. With secure employment arrangements, academicians have greater confidence in their career stability and long-term professional development. In contrast, perceived job insecurity heightens early retirement intentions. Studies have shown that job insecurity deteriorates organizational attachment and increases employees' turnover intentions (Hngoi et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2024). In the academic context, insecure employment conditions among non-tenured or provisional staff may encourage individuals to pursue alternative career paths or consider early retirement. Therefore, the second hypothesis is:

H2: *Job security has a significant negative relationship with the early retirement intention of academicians.*

FAIR COMPENSATION AND EARLY RETIREMENT INTENTION

Compensation contributes greatly to employees' perceptions of fairness and organizational support. Fair compensation signals recognition and organizational support. Compensation and rewards are motivating factors, as the best performers are rewarded, which creates competition among employees to work hard and achieve both organisational and individual goals (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2013). Within academic institutions, compensation may come in the forms of salary, research grants, performance incentives, and retirement benefits. Equitable pay and benefits boost satisfaction and retention, whereas dissatisfaction can accelerate withdrawal intentions. Prior research indicates a strong relationship between perceptions of compensation fairness and job satisfaction and retention outcomes (Chen et al., 2024; Couri, 2025). Alinno (2020) discovered that unsafe working environment, insufficient and unfair compensation, a lack of opportunities for personal growth and job security, constant infringement on personal leisure and family needs, a lack of protection for personal privacy, dissent, and due process are the major factors impeding proactive human resource management, which prevented improvement in employees' QWL within organisations in Southern Nigeria. This study hypothesizes that:

H3: *Fair compensation has a significant negative relationship with the early retirement intention of academicians.*

CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND EARLY RETIREMENT INTENTION

Employees hope to make progress in their line of work. Therefore, enhancing knowledge, skills, and attitudes aligned with future roles is necessary for people to grow in their careers. QWL is essential to the effective and smooth running of businesses because it fosters employee loyalty and dedication, which allows the development and utilisation of their full potential (Beloor et al., 2017). Career development opportunities enable employees to enhance their skills, advance their professional goals, and achieve long-term career satisfaction. For academicians, career development may include opportunities for promotion, research funding, professional training, and leadership roles. With meaningful opportunities for professional growth, academicians are more likely to remain committed to their work and towards their organizations, whereas withdrawal behaviour may increase when facing limited opportunities (Touni, 2023). Therefore, it is hypothesize that:

H4: *Career development has a significant negative relationship with the early retirement intention of academicians.*

PHYSICAL WORK ENVIRONMENT AND EARLY RETIREMENT INTENTION

The physical work environment and its quality have a significant impact on employee performance. Karoso et al. (2022) found a significant impact of work environment, quality of life, and organisational commitment on employee performance. Thus, it supports the view that high QWL can help employees meet their requirements and achieve organisational goals more effectively and efficiently (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2013). In addition, the physical work environment, including ergonomics, safety, workload, and available facilities, is another important dimension of QWL that can influence employees' well-being and productivity. Health and productivity can be sustained with supportive environments, while poor conditions may negatively affect employees' physical and psychological health, which may lead to tendencies of increased withdrawal (Chen et al., 2024; Jung et al., 2024). Thus, the next hypothesis is:

H5: *Physical work environment has a significant negative relationship with the early retirement intention of academicians.*

WORK LIFE BALANCE AND EARLY RETIREMENT INTENTION

Work life balance (WLB) balances the professional obligations and personal life, serving as a critical determinant of employee well-being and organizational retention (Helvaci et al., 2017; Issahaku et al., 2020). In contemporary academia, academicians are not just educators, but also researchers, mentors, and, in many cases, active participants in institutional service and governance. This diverse function has forced faculty members to forfeit personal downtime and work from home during weekends, blurring traditional home-work boundaries (Cannizzo & Osbaldiston, 2016). Ferdous et al. (2021) found that WLB is inversely correlated with turnover intentions and positively correlated with well-being. WLB reflects employees' ability to manage the demands of their professional and personal lives. Poor WLB can increase stress, fatigue, and

reduced well-being, which elevates workforce withdrawal intentions. On the contrary, supportive organisational practices such as flexible work arrangements and age-friendly work policies can improve well-being and encourage employees to remain active in the workforce longer (Couri, 2025; Jung et al., 2024; Mori et al., 2024). This study hypothesizes that:

H6: *Work–life balance has a significant negative relationship with the early retirement intention of academicians.*

PERCEIVED ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT AND EARLY RETIREMENT INTENTION

Perceived organisational support (POS) is defined as the "employees' beliefs concerning the extent to which the organisation values their contribution and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger et al., 1986: p. 501). A high level of POS fosters a reciprocal psychological contract, prompting academic staff to respond with stronger organisational commitment, engagement, and loyalty (Lin & Chen, 2004; Stephen, 2023). Social support from colleagues, supervisors, and organisations critically shapes employees' work attitudes and outcomes, boosting satisfaction, commitment, retention and mitigating early retirement intentions (Canboy et al., 2023; Hngoi et al., 2024; Khair et al., 2024). The organisational support experienced by the employees minimizes burnout and reduces the likelihood of leaving the organisation (Wang & Wang, 2020), fosters long-term loyalty (Hoo et al., 2024), and strengthen overall job satisfaction (Likardo & Praningrum, 2025). As supportive organizational environments influence retirement decisions that safeguard a prolong career longevity, it is hypothesized that:

H7: *Perceived organisational support has a significant negative relationship with the early retirement intention of academicians.*

Overall, this study hypothesised that QWL dimensions either positively or negatively influence early retirement intentions among academicians.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research design to examine the impact of Quality of Work Life (QWL) dimensions on early retirement intentions among academicians at a single comprehensive university system in Malaysia. While the institution functions as a single unified university system, its organizational structure comprises branch campuses across various states. Recognizing the inherent diversity across academic disciplines, this research captures perceptions from academicians across a wide range of fields, including humanities, social sciences, engineering, and technology.

A multi-stage sampling technique was utilized to select respondents. In the first stage, one state was randomly selected to represent each of the five main geographic regions: Terengganu (East Coast), Kedah (Northern), Johor (Southern), Selangor (Central), and Sarawak (East Malaysia). The target population across the branch campuses in these five selected states was 3,656 academicians. Based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a population of 3,656 requires a target sample size of 348. Accordingly, structured questionnaires were self-administered via the internal mail

system to proportionate stratified samples across the selected campuses. In total, 215 completed and usable responses were returned, yielding a response rate of 61.78%. A response rate of 60% or greater is typically considered acceptable in social research, but rates exceeding 70% are optimal for guaranteeing representativeness (Ballin et al., 2016). Similarly, Craig and Egerton-Warburton (2013) contend that an appropriate response rate for surveys, including basic stratified random surveys, is typically around 60 -70%. A response rate of 70% is considered optimal for ensuring external validity, while rates between 60% and 70% may still be acceptable. Therefore, the current response rate is considered for further analysis.

In addition, although 215 responses fall short of Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) ideal target, the final sample size was evaluated against statistical power requirements for multiple linear regression. According to Green's (1991) sample size formula ($N > 50 + 8m$, where m is the number of predictors), a minimum sample size of 106 is required for seven independent variables. As the final sample of $N = 215$ exceeds Green's (1991) threshold by more than double, the data provide robust statistical power (> 0.80) to test the research hypotheses reliably.

The sources of the survey instruments used in this study are summarised in Table 1. The survey design facilitates measuring both independent variables (QWL dimensions) and the dependent variable (early retirement intention) at a single point in time.

TABLE 1. Survey Instruments

Section	Measure	Explanation
A	Demographic Information	Questions related to the demographics of the respondents, such as gender, age, marital status, the number of children, qualification, campuses, faculty, job position, job tenure, years of experience, and administrative position.
B	Quality of work life	The items adopted from Ehido et al., (2020) measured 7 dimensions of QWL (Job stress, Job Security, Fair Compensation, Career Development, Physical Work Environment, Work-Life Balance, and Perceived Organisational Support) on a Likert-type scale, with values ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree).
C	Intention for early retirement	This study adapted five questionnaire items from Hellemans and Closon (2013) to measure academicians' intention to retire early. While the original scale evaluated the intention to remain at work until the legal retirement age, the scale direction was inverted for this study to assess early retirement intention. Positively worded items measuring the preference to remain in service (Q3: 'Do you prefer to continue to work as long as possible?' and Q5: 'Do you wish to work until legal retirement age?') were reverse-coded before composite score calculation (Inverted Score = 11 - original score). Consequently, higher overall composite scores consistently reflect a greater intention to retire early.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The local mail system was used to provide the online questionnaire, spanning over the data collection period of two (2) months. In all, 215 (61.78%) returned the questionnaires. SPSS was conducted to analyse the collected data using descriptive and inferential statistics, which focused on summarizing the respondents' demographic profiles and QWL perceptions, and testing the hypothesized relationships of the study, respectively.

RESPONDENTS' PROFILE

The results of frequency count and percentage indicated that 169 (78.6%) respondents are female, with the majority aged between 40 and 50 years (50.2%), followed by those aged 50 to 60 years (28.4%). Mostly (78.1%) were married, with 50 (23.3%) respondents had no children, whereas

others had between one and seven (or more) children. In terms of education, most respondents held postgraduate qualifications, with 119 (55.3%) possessing a Master's degree and 95 (44.2%) a PhD. However, 130 (60.5%) did not have a professional qualification. Respondents were mainly from the Science and Technology cluster (38.1%), followed by Business and Management (34.9%) and Social Sciences and Humanities (27.0%). More than half of the respondents (51.6%) held the DS13 position. Nearly half (48.8%) had 10 to less than 20 years of work experience, and 68.8% had gained administrative experience. The respondents' profile indicate their credibility as respondents of the study.

RELIABILITY OF INSTRUMENT

Table 2 presents the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and reliability test for all constructs. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.880, indicating a good level of sampling adequacy (Kaiser, 1974) and successfully passing the recommended threshold of 0.60 (Hair et al., 2019; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Additionally, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity reached statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 6514.542$, $df = 990$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that the correlation matrix is suitable for factor analysis.

A factor loading threshold of $\geq$ 0.60 was applied for item retention. Items that were less than 0.60 were dropped from further analysis in this study, including Job security (Items 3, 5, 7), Fair Compensation (Item 9), Career Development (Items 3, 4, 5, 6), Physical Work Environment (Items 1, 2, 3), and Work-Life Balance (Item 2).

Original items from seven constructs, i.e., job stress, job security, fair compensation, career development, physical work environment, work-life balance, and perceived organisational support, were designed as the initial instruments. Following item pruning, internal consistency was evaluated. All seven constructs demonstrated high reliability, exceeding the standard baseline threshold with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.718 to 0.953. Overall, the retained scale demonstrates satisfactory internal consistency and construct validity.

TABLE 2. Factor Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, and Item Retention

Items	**Factor loading**	**Reliability Statistic Cronbach's Alpha)**	**Retained / Original Items**
Job Stress		0.944	13/13
I felt nervous as a result of my job	0.626		
Working here makes it hard to spend enough time with my family	0.799		
My job gets to me more than it should	0.795		
I spend so much time at work	0.802		
Working here leaves little time for other activities	0.828		
There are lots of times when my job drives me right up the wall	0.796		
Sometimes when I think about my job, I get a tight feeling in my chest	0.787		
I frequently get the feeling I am married to my job	0.792		
I have too little time to do all the work I have	0.784		
I feel guilty when I take time off from a job	0.649		
I feel like I never have a day off	0.831		
I sometimes fear the telephone ringing at home because the call might be job- related	0.637		
Too many people at my level in the university get burned out by job demands	0.711		
Job Security		0.723	4/7
I can keep my job for as long as I want it	0.662		
This job has retirement security	0.640		
There is a real need for my position in this university	0.638		

I can be sure of my job as long as I do good work	0.722		
Fair Compensation		0.944	9/10
I currently receive much more benefits (e.g. medical, loan, bonus, etc.) compared with others working for this university	0.790		
Compared with others in my job category at this university, I receive many more benefits (e.g., medical, loan, bonus, etc.).	0.831		
Compared with others in my job category outside of this university, my current benefits are much more	0.869		
Compared with others I know with similar abilities and training, my current benefits are much more	0.876		
Compared with others my age, my current benefits are much more	0.899		
Compared with others at my level of seniority, my current benefits are much more	0.894		
Compared to my friends and family, my current benefits are much more	0.754		
Compared with the benefits I need to meet my financial needs, my current benefits are much more	0.763		
My most recent raise, when compared to my expectations, was much more than I expected	0.702		
Career Development		0.718	2/6
I make an effort to engage in the greater professional community	0.679		
I proactively modify my work approach in order to develop the best practice	0.771		
Physical Work Environment		0.783	3/6
My work premises are well-suited for the work to be performed	0.716		
The shared staff areas (i.e. common areas, e.g. parking, common room, etc.) are clean	0.764		
There is sufficient space at my workplace	0.715		
Work-Life Balance		0.953	3/4
I currently have a good balance between my work and non-work activities	-0.663		
The balance between my work and non-work activities is just about right	-0.635		
Overall, I believe that my work and non-work life are balanced	-0.693		
Perceived Organisational Support		0.925	4/4
The university values my contribution to its well-being	0.847		
The university strongly considers my goals and values	0.819		
The university cares about my general satisfaction at work	0.792		
The university takes pride in my accomplishments at work	0.799		
Cronbach's Alpha		0.852	
Barlett's Test of Sphericity (Chi-Square Value)		0.001 (6514.542)	
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.880	

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

This study examined the impact of the seven QWL dimensions (i.e., job stress, job security, fair compensation, career development, physical work environment, work–life balance, and perceived organisational support) on the early retirement intention among academicians. The associations between the independent and dependent variables were examined using a multiple regression analysis.

Firstly, the need to assess the normality assumption, which is commonly done by comparing skewness values with standard errors. Skewness measures the symmetry of a variable's distribution (Hair et al., 2019), and normality is confirmed when the value does not exceed value of 3 (Chou & Bentler, 1995 and Kline, 1998, in Dayana, 2010). The range of skewness values for all variables, from -0.992 to 0.044, as depicted in Table 3, is within commonly accepted thresholds for approximate normality. Overall, no severe asymmetry was observed in the distributions; the normality assumption is reasonably satisfied.

TABLE 3. Descriptive Statistics & Correlation Analysis

Constructs	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Statistics Skewness
Job Stress	215	1	10	6.126	2.136	-0.414
Job Security	215	1	10	7.794	1.593	-0.992
Fair Compensation	215	1	10	4.957	2.106	0.044
Career Development	215	2	10	7.621	1.553	-0.268
Physical Work Environment	215	1	10	7.357	1.815	-0.783
Work-Life Balance	215	1	10	5.558	2.359	-0.068
Perceived Organisational Support	215	1	10	5.665	1.970	-0.261

TABLE 4. Correlation Analysis

Construct	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Description
Job Stress	0.487	0.001	Significant
Job Security	0.007	0.915	Not Significant
Fair Compensation	0.007	0.918	Not Significant
Career Development	-0.084	0.221	Not Significant
Physical Work Environment	-0.088	0.199	Not Significant
Work-Life Balance	-0.340	0.001	Significant
Perceived Organisational Support	-0.133	0.051	Not Significant

Table 4 presents the results of a Pearson correlation analysis assessing the relationships between the dependent variable and the independent variables. It is revealed that two constructs, job stress and work-life balance, demonstrated statistically significant correlations ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, a moderate positive correlation was observed between the job stress construct and the intention for early retirement construct ($r = 0.487$, $p = 0.001$). In contrast, work-life balance exhibited a moderate negative correlation with the intention for early retirement construct ($r = -0.340$, $p = 0.001$). However, no statistically significant relationships (all with p-values> 0.05) were observed for the other constructs of job security, fair compensation, career development, physical work environment, or perceived organisational support, indicating that these factors do not associate with the intention for early retirement.

Next, before performing the multiple regression analysis, multicollinearity among the independent variables was assessed. The results of the Collinearity Statistics (Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)) in Table 5 indicate no multicollinearity in this study's model. All VIF values fell between 1.141 and 2.204, well below the cut-off of 10, and all tolerance values, ranging from 0.454 to 0.877, exceeded the standard threshold of 0.10 (Hair et al., 2019; Pallant, 2011).

TABLE 5. Multicollinearity Diagnostics for Independent Variables

Construct	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Job Stress	0.537	1.862
Job Security	0.837	1.194
Fair Compensation	0.792	1.262
Career Development	0.877	1.141
Physical Work Environment	0.764	1.308
Work-Life Balance	0.454	2.204
Perceived Organisational Support	0.652	1.534

Subsequently, in evaluating the predictive power of related QWL dimensions, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The results are summarised in Table 6.

TABLE 6. Model Summary

R	R^2	Adj. R^2	Std. Error of The estimate	F Value	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
0.512	0.262	0.238	2.11	10.523	7	207	0.001

The results indicate that the regression model was statistically significant ($F(7, 207) = 10.523$, $p < 0.001$), showing that QWL dimensions collectively predict academicians' intention to retire early. The model explained 26.2% of the variance in early retirement intention ($R^2 = 0.262$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.238$), suggesting that while QWL dimensions contribute to explaining retirement intentions, a substantial proportion of the variance may also be influenced by other factors not tested in this study. The result supports the study's general premise that workplace conditions play an important role in shaping employees' retirement-related decisions (Jung et al., 2024; Pei et al., 2024).

TABLE 7. Regression Coefficients for Predictors of Intention for Early Retirement

Constructs	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
(Constant)	5.149	1.207		4.265	0.001
Job Stress	0.537	0.092	0.474	5.819	0.001
Job Security	0.101	0.099	0.066	1.017	0.311
Fair Compensation	0.020	0.077	0.018	0.261	0.794
Career Development	-0.251	0.099	-0.161	-2.527	0.012
Physical Work Environment	0.021	0.091	0.016	0.235	0.814
Work-Life Balance	-0.054	0.091	-0.053	-0.597	0.551
Perceived Organisational Support	-0.009	0.091	-0.007	-0.095	0.924

As summarised in Table 7, among the QWL dimensions examined, job stress emerged as the only significant predictor of early retirement intention ($\beta = 0.474$, $p = 0.001$). The positive coefficient indicates that higher levels of job stress are associated with a greater likelihood that academicians will consider early retirement. This finding supports H1, demonstrating that job stress positively influences early retirement intentions among academicians. Driven by relentless teaching, research, and administrative burdens, persistent stress triggers burnout and emotional exhaustion, severely reducing work engagement (Pei et al., 2024). Consequently, faculty members increasingly view early retirement as a vital self-preservation strategy to safeguard their health and psychological well-being (Jasiński & Derbis, 2022). This underscores the urgent need for universities to manage workload demands actively, as mitigating academic stress is essential to sustaining long-term workforce participation and preventing premature talent loss (Mori et al., 2024).

Conversely, the remaining QWL dimensions were not significant predictors of early retirement intentions. Notably, job security (β = 0.066, p = 0.311) did not significantly influence retirement intention, leaving H2 unsupported. This finding suggests that concerns regarding job security may not be a primary factor influencing early retirement intentions among the academicians in this study. Instead, their retirement decisions may be more closely associated with other aspects of their work experience, particularly qualitative and day-to-day operational factors such as workload, work pressure, and overall work satisfaction.

While this contrasts with the general evidence that job insecurity substantially weakens organizational attachment (Hngoi et al., 2024), it strongly aligns with findings from other highly institutionalized sectors. Putri et al. (2024) found that in a specialized military hospital setting, job insecurity failed to significantly influence turnover, as internal job satisfaction and day-to-day pressures took precedence over structural factors. Furthermore, Jasiński and Derbis (2022) demonstrated that among midwives, chronic daily workload constraints and resulting exhaustion were the true catalysts for permanently exiting the profession, rather than anxieties over job preservation.

Similarly, H3 is rejected, as fair compensation was not significantly associated with early retirement intention (β =0.018, p = 0.794). This finding indicates that perceptions of fair compensation did not significantly influence academicians' intentions to retire early in the present study. While previous research has established the importance of fair compensation in promoting employee satisfaction and retention, the present finding suggests that financial rewards may not be a decisive factor in academicians' early retirement decisions within the context examined. This result may reflect the multifaceted nature of academic employment, in which career-related decisions involve various work- and professional-related considerations beyond compensation. Previous studies have highlighted the relevance of non-financial aspects of academic work, including intellectual engagement, scholarly development, research activities, and professional fulfilment (Jung et al., 2024; Mori et al., 2024). Thus, the finding suggests that the role of fair compensation in shaping early retirement intention may be less pronounced in the present context, although the underlying factors contributing to this relationship should be interpreted cautiously based on the variables examined in the study.

Next, career development opportunities (β = -0.161, p = 0.012) did not significantly predict early retirement intentions, though the negative direction of the data is in line with H4. This suggests that while promotions, research funding, and professional development help keep academicians engaged in their careers, their actual impact on the decision to retire is likely indirect, moderated through institutional culture or an individual's career stage. Career development opportunities reinforce job satisfaction and tie professionals closer to their organizations by offering a sense of long-term fulfilment (Touni, 2023). However, within academic careers, many senior academicians may have reached major career milestones, namely securing tenure, achieving full professorships, and building their research legacies. At this stage, the availability of further development opportunities may play a relatively smaller role in influencing their retirement decisions compared with other factors such as workload pressures, health considerations, or personal life priorities. Thus, career development may influence talent retention in earlier academic journeys rather than being a deciding factor when they are contemplating the final exit.

Likewise, the physical working environment (β = 0.016, p = 0.814) did not significantly predict retirement choices, leading to the rejection of H5, as knowledge-based academic work relies more on cognitive engagement than on physical labour. In many higher education institutions where basic facilities and office technologies are generally adequate, marginal

variations in physical working conditions are simply not severe enough to affect retirement intentions. This aligns with findings that in white-collar or stable public sectors, day-to-day qualitative workloads and internal stressors consistently override anxieties about the physical environment (Jasiński & Derbis, 2022; Putri et al., 2024).

The analysis further revealed that work–life balance was not a significant predictor of early retirement intention ($\beta = -0.053$, $p = 0.551$), resulting in the rejection of H6. This finding indicates that work–life balance, as measured in the present study, did not significantly influence academicians' early retirement intentions. Although previous literature has linked work–life imbalance to employee stress and burnout, the present findings suggest that other factors may be more relevant to shaping academicians' decisions regarding early retirement. Previous studies have suggested that professional identity, intrinsic fulfilment, and the nature of academic work may influence how academicians perceive and manage work-related demands (Jung et al., 2024; Mori et al., 2024).

Finally, perceived organisational support ($\beta = -0.007$, $p = 0.924$) did not significantly influence retirement decisions, indicating that H7 was not supported. This indicates that while institutional backing builds daily commitment, it lacks the structural weight required to dictate retirement timing decisions. When employees feel supported by their organization, they experience less burnout and are far less likely to leave (Wang & Wang, 2020). High organizational support directly builds employee commitment and fosters long-term loyalty (Hoo et al., 2024), and reducing turnover intentions by strengthening overall job satisfaction (Likardo & Praningrum, 2025). An academic's decision to permanently step away is dominantly driven by personal, financial, or health considerations rather than by workplace conditions alone (Mori et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2023).

Overall, aligning the study's results with the Job-demand Resources (JD-R) perspective, job stress is a job demand that drains psychological resources, whereas the six non-significant dimensions are job resources that should buffer strain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The prominence of the demand dimension indicates that the health impairment pathway was more active than the motivational pathway in this sample. This aligns with Schreurs et al., (2011), who found that job demands are directly related to early retirement intention, particularly among white-collar workers. Implicitly, these results suggest that interventions focused on academic job demands, rather than mere resource enrichment, may be more effective at retaining experienced academicians.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of multiple QWL dimensions on academicians' early retirement intentions. The findings indicate that a significant regression model explains a moderate proportion of the variance in early retirement intentions. Specifically, job stress emerged as the only significant QWL dimension, indicating that higher levels of work-related stress increase academicians' early retirement intentions. Meanwhile, other QWL dimensions (job security, fair compensation, career development, physical work environment, work–life balance, and perceived organisational support) were insignificant predictors of early retirement intentions among academicians. Overall, this study contributes to the JD-R literature by providing empirical evidence on how job demands and job resources relate to early retirement intention among academicians.

Moreover, it offers practical insights that are useful for institutional policies and practices, ultimately fostering a more sustainable and satisfying academic career path. It helps in developing a human capital strategy for academicians, and aiding the government in planning recruitment at universities. The findings may be adopted by universities, colleges, and academic institutions worldwide to promote a healthy and sustainable academic environment. From a theoretical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of psychological strain in shaping retirement decisions**,** suggesting that stress-related factors may play a more influential role than structural workplace conditions in predicting early retirement intentions among academicians.

A limitation of this study is due to the sample that is drawn from a single comprehensive university within one state in the selected regions - the Northern, Southern, Central, East Coast, and East Malaysia regions, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other occupational sectors. Future research could address other variables that moderate the relationship between QWL and intention for early retirement, such as other characteristics of the respondents, types of universities, levels of top managerial support, or family circumstances. Additionally, further studies may employ longitudinal designs and include additional variables such as financial readiness, health status, or career stage to provide a more comprehensive understanding of retirement decision-making. Besides, mediating or moderating variables, namely job satisfaction or burnout, may also be explored to better explain how workplace conditions influence retirement intentions.

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