Validating the Dimensions of Preschool Teachers' Quality of Life in Malaysia: An Exploratory Factor Analysis with Policy and Management Implications

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Abstract

Research on the quality of life (QOL) among preschool teachers in Malaysia remains limited, with most existing studies focusing on primary and secondary school teachers. This lack of attention represents a significant theoretical gap, given that preschool teachers face unique occupational demands, including emotional labor, high workload, and limited career progression, which may differently shape their work-related well-being. This study addresses this gap by validating the dimensions of QOL among preschool teachers through an exploratory factor analysis (EFA). A purposive sampling approach was employed, and data were collected via structured survey questionnaires distributed to 101 public preschool teachers across six districts in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The instrument, adapted from previous higher education Quality Work of Life studies and modified for the preschool context, consisted of 51 items measured on a 10-point interval scale. Reliability analysis demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the 0.7

threshold across seven dimensions: job stress, job security, fair compensation, career development, work-life balance, physical work environment, and perceived organizational support. Findings indicate that preschool teachers' QOL is in a generally positive state, and the validated dimensions provide a robust framework for future research and policy initiatives aimed at enhancing teacher well-being in Malaysia.

Keywords: Quality of work-life, preschool teachers, exploratory factor analysis, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Teachers constitute the foundational human capital of any society, as the quality of instruction, pedagogical expertise, and professional commitment directly shape the resilience and performance of educational systems. Despite their central role, teaching consistently ranks among the most demanding professions worldwide and is closely associated with occupational stress, burnout, and mental health challenges (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021; Mota et al., 2021). Scholars such as Machado (2022) have emphasized that teachers must not only transmit knowledge but also develop life qualities values, attitudes, and emotional capacities that enable them to support students in navigating uncertainty and problem-solving in dynamic environments. However, emerging research suggests that teachers' emotional intelligence, psychological needs, and coping resources play a pivotal role in shaping their quality of life, job satisfaction, and resilience (Han, 2022; Adhiya & Gawali, 2022). This highlights a tension between professional expectations and the lived realities of teachers, underscoring the need to examine the determinants of their well-being within the workplace.

Quality of Work Life (QWL) is a multidimensional construct encompassing compensation, job security, workload, organizational support, and career development opportunities, all of which are integral to teachers' well-being (Lee et al., 2007; Kumar, 2017). Evidence from international and local contexts shows that teachers frequently endure stressful working conditions, which manifest in physical and psychological health issues ranging from anxiety and hypertension to musculoskeletal and voice disorders (Dabiran et al., 2018; Tai et al., 2019). While QWL has been widely studied in various professional groups, including higher education academicians, the literature on preschool and early childhood educators remains underdeveloped (Koulierakis et al., 2019). Most research in preschool settings has concentrated on pedagogy and child outcomes rather than the work-related experiences of teachers themselves. This imbalance reveals a theoretical gap, as preschool educators occupy a distinctive professional niche where occupational demands and resource constraints may influence QWL differently than in other teaching contexts.

Existing studies in Malaysia primarily focus on primary and secondary school teachers, highlighting associations between QWL and organizational commitment (Hakim & Pristika 2020), burnout (Norly et al., 2023), or health-related quality of life (Zamri et al., 2022). These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of QWL but also demonstrate fragmented conceptualizations, with inconsistent dimensions measured across studies. For example, while some focus on psychosocial stressors, others emphasize health or organizational variables, limiting theoretical consolidation. Moreover, most studies rely on generic QWL frameworks without adapting them to the specific context of preschool teachers, who often

face unique stressors such as high emotional labor, limited career progression, and constrained organizational support. This gap suggests a pressing need for research that systematically validates QWL dimensions tailored to the preschool setting.

In light of these gaps, the present study aims to contribute by validating seven QWL dimensions job stress, job security, fair compensation, career development, work-life balance, physical work environment, and perceived organizational support among preschool teachers in Malaysia. By employing an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) procedure, the study addresses ongoing debates regarding the appropriate dimensions to measure QWL and offers empirical grounding for a more context-specific framework. This focus is significant because it extends QWL scholarship into an underexplored population, provides methodological rigor through scale validation, and informs both policy and practice aimed at improving teacher well-being. In doing so, the study advances the theoretical discourse on QWL by integrating contextual realities of preschool education into broader models of occupational well-being and human resource management. Based on the above discussion, this study aims to answer these research questions;

1. What are the underlying dimensions of Quality of Life (QOL) among preschool teachers in Malaysia as identified through exploratory factor analysis (EFA)?

2. How reliable are the identified QOL dimensions job stress, job security, fair compensation, career development, work-life balance, physical work environment, and perceived organizational support in measuring preschool teachers' quality of life?

3. What do the descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) of the QOL dimensions reveal about the overall state of preschool teachers' quality of life in Malaysia?

The quality of work life (QWL) of teachers is shaped by multiple interrelated dimensions, yet research shows that these dimensions often manifest differently across educational settings. Job stress has been widely documented as a central factor influencing teacher well-being, with both positive and negative effects. While moderate stress may enhance productivity, excessive stress impairs performance and contributes to burnout (Akrani, 2011; Kavita & Hassan, 2018). Teachers are particularly vulnerable, as heavy workloads, scarce resources, and challenging classroom dynamics heighten occupational stress (Leroux & Théorêt, 2014). International evidence, such as from China (Yang et al., 2009), and regional findings (Jaminal, 2015), consistently highlight its detrimental impact on quality of life. However, few studies in Malaysia have examined job stress specifically among preschool teachers, creating a theoretical gap in understanding how early childhood educators manage stress and how it affects their professional sustainability.

Other core QWL dimensions, including job security, fair compensation, and career development, are also crucial but remain underexplored in the preschool education context. Research indicates that job insecurity undermines psychological well-being and organizational engagement (Falowo & Balogun, 2025), while equitable pay is directly linked to employee motivation and retention. Career development opportunities are likewise central

to teacher growth, creativity, and educational innovation (Adnyani & Dewi, 2019; Mulyoto et al., 2024). Although these relationships are well established in higher education and corporate settings, empirical evidence among preschool teachers in Malaysia is limited. This neglect reflects a theoretical gap, as early childhood educators often encounter stagnant career paths and limited financial rewards, yet their roles are fundamental in shaping children's formative learning experiences.

Work-life balance and the physical work environment further influence teachers' quality of life, with implications for job satisfaction and retention. Balanced integration of work and personal responsibilities has been linked to improved well-being and organizational outcomes (Clark, 2000; Parkes & Langford, 2008). Yet, studies such as Di et al. (2023) demonstrate that demographic and institutional factors such as teaching tenure, school ranking, and rural versus urban placement create inequalities in QWL assessments among preschool teachers. Similarly, workplace safety, resources, and teaching conditions are critical in retaining teachers and ensuring effective instruction (Cassidy et al., 2011; Panuelos & Pili, 2024).

While international frameworks, including International Labour Standard or ILO recommendations, emphasize these structural factors, Malaysian preschool education research rarely integrates them, leaving a theoretical gap regarding how environment-specific conditions shape QWL in early childhood education. Perceived organizational support (POS) is another dimension that strengthens employee resilience and enhances workplace commitment. Defined as the extent to which employees believe their organization values their contributions and cares about their welfare (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), POS has been shown to improve work-life balance and retention (Zumrah & Ali, 2025). While its importance has been validated in corporate and youth employment contexts, little is known about how POS operates within preschool settings in Malaysia. This omission is a significant theoretical gap, as organizational support may buffer the effects of stress, limited compensation, and career stagnation experienced by preschool teachers. By addressing these underexplored dimensions collectively job stress, job security, fair compensation, career development, work-life balance, physical environment, and organizational support this study provides a more comprehensive framework to understand and measure preschool teachers' QWL, thereby extending the theoretical discourse on occupational well-being in education

2. Method

This study employed a cross-sectional research design to establish reliable measures for the Quality of Work Life (QWL) construct among preschool teachers in six districts of Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The approach for this study is quantitative, and data was obtained using adapt and adopt questionnaire and modify to suit the study.

Participants consisted of 101 public preschool teachers who voluntarily completed the survey, distributed via Google Form with the assistance of district preschool officers. A purposive sampling approach was applied to ensure that the respondents represented the target group. Data collected were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 29.0, where Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed to validate the measurement structure.

The study adopted a structured questionnaire adapted and modified from Ehido et al. (2020), originally developed for academicians in Malaysian research universities, to better suit the preschool context. the instrument comprised 51 items measured on a 10-point interval scale (1 = strongly disagree to 10 = strongly agree). Construct included job stress (13 items). Job security (7 items), fair compensation (10 items) career development (6 items), work life balance (4 items), physical work environment (7 items) and perceived organizational support (4 items). This quantitative approach provided a comprehensive evaluation of the QWL dimensions, enabling the study to capture preschool teachers' perspectives on work-related challenges and organizational support mechanisms.Upon completion of all requisite modifications based on pre-test findings, the researcher disseminated the questionnaire to respondents to collect a minimum of 100 responses for exploratory factor analysis (Rahlin et al., 2020; Hair et al., 2018; Rahlin et al., 2019).Researchers preferring 10-point Likert scales in their analyses because of multiple benefits concerning validity, accuracy, and data qualities. The transition from conventional 5-point scales to those offering additional response alternatives is driven by the need for more nuanced data that can more accurately reflect the complexities of respondents' opinions and views (Jebb et al., 2021;Xu & Leung, 2018).

3. Results

The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) for Quality of Work Life (QWL) construct The quality of work life construct consists of 51 items in a questionnaire. The 10-point interval scale was supported by Awang et al. (2016), who state that 10 points scale is more accurate when compared to 5 points scale in the measurement model because of more extensive choice and more independence. The items are coded as Q1 to Q51 (Table 1). The results in Table 1 show the descriptive statistics for each item measuring the QWL construct. The mean value for every item ranged from 3.60 to 8.51, while the standard deviation of the value ranged from 1.60 to 2.65.

Table 1. The Descriptive Statistics for items measuring QWL Constructs

Item Statement	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
Job Stress	**4.31**	**2.00**
I have felt nervous as a result of my job	4.69	2.66
Working here makes it hard to spend enough time with my family	3.62	2.33
My job gets to me more than it should	3.97	2.33
I spend so much time at work	4.70	2.52
Working here leaves little time for other activities	4.15	2.26
There are lots of times when my job drives me right up the wall	3.81	2.50
Sometimes when I think about my job I get a tight feeling in my chest	3.60	2.43
I frequently get the feeling I am married to my job	3.48	2.58
I have too little time to do all the work I have	4.75	2.56
I feel guilty when I take time off from a job	5.51	2.91
I feel like I never have a day off	4.34	2.68

Item Statement	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
I sometimes fear the telephone ringing at home because the call might be job- related	3.69	2.58
Too many people at my level in the university get burned out by job demands	5.74	2.83
Job Security	**6.97**	**1.32**
I can keep my job for as long as I want it	7.59	2.40
This job has retirement security	8.25	2.20
I am not really sure how long my job will last	4.35	2.84
There is a real need for my position in this school	6.95	2.30
If my particular job were phased out, the school would try hard to replace it	6.27	2.96
I can be sure of my job as long as I do good work	8.25	1.60
I am afraid of losing my job	7.11	2.82
Fair Compensation	**4.74**	**1.73**
I currently receive much more benefits compared with others working for this school	3.79	2.53
Compared with others in my job category at this school , I receive much more benefits	3.40	2.29
Compared with others in my job category outside of this school , my current benefits are much more	6.38	2.59
Compared with others I know with similar abilities and training, my current benefits are much more	3.52	2.40
Compared with others my age, my current benefits are much more	3.76	2.41
Compared with others with my level of seniority, my current benefits are much more	3.92	2.25
Compared to my friends and family, my current benefits are much more	4.73	2.69
Compared with the benefits I need to meet my financial needs, my current benefits are much more	5.12	2.40
The size of my last raise was very fair	6.87	2.20
My most recent raise when compared to my expectations was much more than expected	5.89	2.31
Career Development	**7.34**	**1.44**
I make an effort to engage in the greater professional community	6.83	1.98
I proactively modify my work approach in order to develop the best practice	7.21	1.82
My supervisor provides feedback on a regular basis to develop my expertise	6.60	1.94
I have frequent contact with more experienced people in the same field I work	7.82	1.80
My work involves multiple roles and responsibilities	8.51	1.68

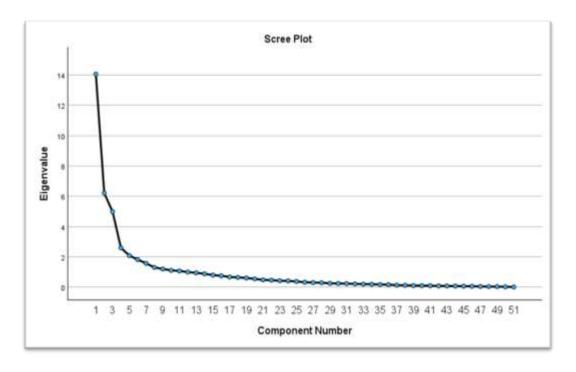| Item Statement	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
Physical Work Environment	**7.15**	**1.37**
I am aware of the hazards of my work environment	5.71	2.49
My school is committed to ensuring the safety of its employees	7.44	1.93
I am aware of my role in protecting my personal safety in the workplace	8.04	1.74
My work premises are well suited for the work to be performed	7.65	2.08
The shared staff areas are clean	7.94	1.64
There is sufficient space at my workplace 8	7.15	2.21
There are no problems with being too hot or too cold at my workplace	6.09	2.49
Work–Life Balance	**5.72**	**1.36**
I currently have a good balance between my work and non-work activities	6.42	2.12
I have difficulty balancing my work and non-work activities	4.46	2.40
The balance between my work and non-work activities is just about right	5.67	2.08
Overall, I believe that my work and non-work life are balanced	6.33	2.25
Perceived Organizational Support	**6.83**	**1.79**
The school values my contribution to its well-being	6.91	1.81
The school strongly considers my goals and values	6.90	1.90
The school cares about my general satisfaction at work	6.74	1.96
The school takes pride in my accomplishments at work	6.75	2.00

Figure 1. The Scree Plot for QWL Construct extracted four components

The screen plot in Figure 1 shows that ten components surfaced from the EFA procedure for this construct. The EFA procedure grouped the 51 items into ten distinct components. Each component has a certain number of items. The rotated component matrix shows the items that are grouped under which component.

3.1 KMO and Bartlett's Test

The EFA procedure using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax Rotation was carried out on the 51 items assessing QWL construct. The results in Table 2 show that the Bartletts' Test of Sphericity is significant (*p-value* < .05). Additionally, the measure of sampling adequacy by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) (.788) is acceptable since it is above the minimum value of .60 (Awang, 2012; Bahkia et al., 2019, 2020; Rahlin et al., 2020). These two results (Bartlett's Test is significant and KMO > .60) indicate that the data is satisfactory to continue with the data reduction technique (Awang et al., 2015; Hoque et al., 2018; Shkeer & Awang, 2019)

Table 2. The KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	**Measure of sampling adequacy**	**.788**
Bartlett's test of sphericity	*Approx. Chi-square sphericity*	4319.951
	df	1275
	Sig.	<.001

3.2 Total Variance Explain

The results in Table 3 shows there are twelve components from the EFA procedure based on the Eigenvalue greater than 1.0. The eigenvalues ranged from 1.078 to 14.055. While the variance explained for component 1 is 27.559 %, component 2 is 12.182 %, component 3 is 9.771 %, component 4 is 5.095, component 5 is 4.105, component 6 is 3.571, component 7 is 3.100, component 8 is 2.572, component 9 is 2.367 and component 10 is 2.196, component eleven is 1.078 and component twelve is 1,970 . The total variance explained for measuring the QWL construct is 76.602%, and has surpassed the minimum requirement of 60% (Awang et al., 2015; Noor et al., 2015; Yahaya et al., 2018).

Table 3. The Total Variance Explained for the construct

Total Variance Explained

Component	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% Of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Of Variance	Cumulative %
1	14.055	27.559	27.559	14,055	27.559	27.559
2	6.213	12.182	39.741	6.213	12.182	39.741
3	4.983	9.771	49.512	4.983	9.771	49.512
4	2.598	5.095	54.607	2.598	5.095	54.607
5	2.094	4.105	58.712	2.094	4.105	58.712
6	1.821	3.571	62.283	1.821	3.571	62.283
7	1.581	3.100	65.383	1.581	3.100	65.383
8	1.312	2.572	67.955	1.312	2.572	67.955
9	1.207	2.367	70.322	1.207	2.367	70.322
10	1.120	2.196	72.518	1.120	2.196	72.518
11	1.078	2.114	74.632	1.078	2.114	74.632
12	1.005	1.970	76.602	1.005	1.970	76.602

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

3.3 Factor loading

Table 4 present one dimension or components emerged and their respective items resulted from the EFA procedure. The factor loading for every item should be greater than 0.6 in order to be retained (Awang, 2012; Yahaya et al., 2018; Rahlin et al., 2020 and Bahkia et al, 2019). The item needs to be deleted if it failed to achieve the minimum requirement for factor loading of 0.6 (Awang, 2012, 2014; Awang et al., 2015, Noor et al., 2015; Hoque et al., 2018, 2018; Yahaya et al., 2018; Rahlin et al., 2019 and Bahkia et al., 2019).

Table 4. Components, Item and Factor Loading

Rotated Component Matrix												
Component												
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**
JB1	.697											
JB2	.766											
JB3	.844											
JB4	.874											
JB5	.857											
JB6	.861											
JB7	.822											
JB8	.865											
JB9	.782											
JB10												
JB11	.830											
JB12	.594											
JB13	.706											
JS1				**.798**								
JS2				**.8.21**								
JS3												
JS4												
JS5												
JS7				**.505**								
FC1		.814										
FC2		.876										
FC4		.914										
FC5		.883										
FC6		.886										
FC7		.733										

3.4 Internal Reliability

The Internal Reliability for the Instrument Measuring QWOL Construct. Finally, the study needs to compute the value of Cronbach's Alpha which reflects the Internal Reliability for the retained items in measuring their latent construct. The internal reliability or internal consistency indicates how strong the respective items are holding together in measuring the respective construct. The value of Cronbach's Alpha should be greater than 0.7 for the items to achieve Internal Reliability (Awang, 2012; Muda et al., 2018). Table 5 presented the Cronbach Alpha for the QWOL construct. The Cronbach value indicate the items have good internal reliability for measuring the QWOL construct (Cronbach = 0.844).

Table 5. Reliability

Reliability Statistics		
Construct	**N of Items**	**Cronbach's Alpha**
Job Stress	13	.947
Job Security	7	.580
Fair Compensation	10	.895
Career Development	6	.855.
Work Life Balance	7	.774
Physical Work Environment	4	.445
Perceived Organizational Support	4	.950
Total	**51**	**.844**

4. Discussion

4.1 Practical Implications

The findings of this study carry important practical implications for policymakers, school administrators, and education stakeholders in Malaysia. The validation of seven Quality of Life (QOL) dimensions highlights the need for a holistic approach in managing preschool teachers' well-being. While teachers reported strong perceptions of job security and career development, moderate levels of stress and difficulties in balancing work and personal life remain areas of concern. Educational authorities could implement structured stress management and wellness programs, such as mindfulness training, counseling services, or workload redistribution, to mitigate stress and prevent burnout. In addition, flexible

scheduling and family-friendly policies would directly address work-life balance issues, supporting teachers in managing both professional and personal commitments more effectively.

The results also suggest that although compensation is adequate in some aspects, perceptions of fairness remain mixed. Schools and governing bodies may consider revising compensation structures, ensuring transparent performance-based incentives, and aligning benefits more equitably with industry standards. Strengthening organizational support is equally critical: regular recognition of teachers' contributions, constructive feedback mechanisms, and professional mentoring can further enhance job satisfaction and retention. Collectively, these interventions not only improve the overall quality of work life for preschool teachers but also contribute to higher teaching quality, reduced turnover, and stronger outcomes in early childhood education.

This study also supports the findings of Md Shah et al. (20240) and Norly et al. (2023), whom conducted study in Malacca and Perak state. Their findings suggest a positive correlation between work-life balance and burnout, highlighting questions about the assumption that improved balance alone lowers burnout. Workload and burnout are strongly positively correlated, highlighting the impact of increased expectations on teachers. However, there is a negative correlation between burnout and a favourable work environment, suggesting that a supportive organisational climate acts as a buffer. This study highlights the need for an all-encompassing approach to teacher well-being that considers the intricate connections between workload, personal life, and the workplace.

5. Limitation and Future Research

This study is not without limitations. First, the sample was limited to 101 preschool teachers from six districts in Negeri Sembilan, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions in Malaysia. Second, the cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time, limiting the ability to establish causal relationships. Finally, the reliance on self-reported survey data may introduce response bias, as participants could over- or under-report their experiences. Future research should expand the sample to include preschool teachers from different states in Malaysia to enhance generalizability and allow for regional comparisons. A longitudinal design would also be valuable in capturing changes in teachers' quality of life (QOL) over time and identifying causal relationships between workplace factors and well-being outcomes. Additionally, qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups could complement the quantitative findings, offering deeper insights into teachers' lived experiences. Finally, comparative studies with other educational levels or across countries could further contextualize the unique challenges and strengths of preschool teachers in Malaysia.

6. Conclusion

This study addresses an important gap in Malaysian educational research by focusing on preschool teachers' quality of life, which has been largely overlooked compared to primary and secondary school teachers. Through a validated survey of 101 teachers in Negeri

Sembilan, we identified seven key dimensions that shape their work experience: job stress, job security, fair compensation, career development, work-life balance, physical environment, and organizational support. The results show that preschool teachers generally report positive quality of life, though areas like job stress and work-life balance need attention. The research instrument proved reliable with strong consistency scores across all dimensions. These findings provide a practical framework for improving preschool teachers' working conditions. Policymakers and school administrators can use these seven dimensions to develop targeted support programs, structures, and improved work environments. This study establishes a foundation for ongoing research and policy efforts aimed at enhancing teacher well-being in Malaysia's early childhood education.

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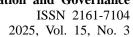
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