A Conceptual Review of Perceived Organizational and Supervisor Support as Pathways to Work-Life Balance among Malaysian Academicians

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ABSTRACT

Work-life balance (WLB) has become a pressing concern in Malaysian higher education, where academicians must meet rising teaching, research, publication and administrative expectations while also carrying family and caregiving duties. Studies of Malaysian academics have examined organizational support, but they seldom distinguish support from the institution from support given by the immediate supervisor, they often treat support as a moderator or examine outcomes other than WLB, and their findings are inconsistent. This conceptual paper proposes a framework explaining how perceived organizational support (POS) and perceived supervisor support (PSS) shape the WLB of Malaysian academicians. The paper follows the five-stage integrative review method of Whittemore and Knafl (2005). Scopus and Google Scholar were searched, and 42 sources were included after screening, purposive selection and citation searching; the quality of empirical studies was checked using the criteria of Hawker et al. (2002). The review integrates social exchange theory, conservation of resources theory, the job demands-resources model and boundary theory, assigning each a distinct explanatory role. It proposes that POS and PSS act as job resources that strengthen WLB directly and also indirectly by reducing work-family conflict (WFC), with a separate indirect pathway for each form of support. Seven propositions are advanced. A comparison with closely related Malaysian studies shows that none of those reviewed has examined POS and PSS together with WFC as a mediator of WLB among academicians, and the review critically assesses how far evidence from other occupations and countries applies to Malaysian academic work. The paper concludes with implications for university leaders, heads of department and policy makers, including supervisor training in family-supportive behaviors and workload policies that protect non-work time.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Perceived Organizational Support, Perceived Supervisor Support, Work-Family Conflict, Academicians

INTRODUCTION

Academic work was long regarded as a flexible and autonomous career, yet that flexibility has become a source of strain. Contemporary academicians are expected to teach larger and more diverse cohorts, publish in indexed journals, secure competitive grants, supervise postgraduate students, sit on committees and contribute to community engagement, often under performance indicators that rise year on year (Kinman & Jones, 2008; Ramachandaran et al., 2025). Because academic tasks can be done anywhere and at any time, work readily spills into evenings, weekends and family time. The result is a profession in which the boundary between work and life is unusually permeable and work-life balance (WLB) is unusually hard to protect.

These pressures are acute in Malaysia. The higher education sector has expanded rapidly as the country pursues high-income status, and both public and private universities compete on rankings, research output and

graduate employability (Ramachandaran et al., 2025). Academicians report that publishing, securing funding, teaching, administration and social-responsibility activities together produce stress and burnout (Makhbul & Khairuddin, 2013). Qualitative work with Malaysian academics shows that overtime, weekend work and the interference of work with family life are the issues they raise most often (Khairunneezam et al., 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic intensified the problem, as the shift to online teaching left many lecturers feeling available around the clock (Ramachandaran et al., 2025).

Organizational support is commonly proposed as a remedy. Perceived organizational support (POS) refers to employees' belief that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986), while perceived supervisor support (PSS) refers to the extent to which employees believe their immediate supervisor offers assistance, encouragement and concern (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Both constructs have been linked to lower work-family conflict (WFC) and lower turnover intention in other sectors (Kossek et al., 2011; Siddiqi et al., 2024). A recent survey of 300 academic staff in Malaysian public universities found that over 65% perceived moderate to high organizational support, yet satisfaction with how work-life policies were actually implemented was lower, and respondents singled out a lack of managerial support as a key concern (Mohamed et al., 2026).

This last finding points to the problem this paper addresses. The literature on academic WLB tends to treat "support" as a single, institution-level resource, expressed through formal policies. It gives less attention to the immediate supervisor, typically the head of department or dean, who translates those policies into day-to-day decisions on teaching loads, meeting times, leave and flexibility. Evidence that separates POS from PSS, and that explains the mechanisms through which each affects WLB, comes mainly from Western settings and from professions such as nursing (Siddiqi et al., 2024). How these two forms of support operate together for Malaysian academicians, whose work is shaped by distinct institutional demands and cultural expectations about family, remains underexplored (Ramachandaran et al., 2025).

Previous research has examined parts of this picture, but not the whole of it. Kossek et al. (2011) showed meta-analytically that supervisor and organizational support, particularly support specific to work-family needs, are associated with lower WFC, but their evidence was drawn from many occupations rather than from academia. Siddiqi et al. (2024) separated POS from PSS and showed that WFC mediated their effects, but their sample consisted of nurses in Bangladesh, whose shift-based work differs from the self-directed and highly permeable work of academicians, and their outcome was turnover intention rather than WLB.

Malaysian studies of academics, in turn, have examined a single form of support, combined the two, or treated WFC as an outcome rather than a mechanism (see Table 4). This paper brings these strands together by separating institutional from supervisory support and specifying how each is translated into WLB among Malaysian academicians.

Accordingly, this paper has three objectives: (1) to synthesize theory and evidence on WLB, POS and PSS as they apply to academicians; (2) to propose a conceptual framework explaining the pathways through which POS and PSS influence the WLB of Malaysian academicians; and (3) to set out testable propositions and practical implications for higher education institutions. The paper contributes by distinguishing institutional from supervisory support, by specifying WFC as the mechanism that links support to balance, with a separate pathway for each form of support, and by comparing the framework with closely related Malaysian studies to show where it extends them.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on an integrative literature review. This approach suits topics in which evidence is spread across several disciplines and research designs, and in which the aim is to build a framework rather than to calculate a pooled effect (Torraco, 2005; Snyder, 2019). The review followed the five stages of Whittemore and Knafl (2005): problem identification, literature search, data evaluation, data analysis and presentation. The guiding question was how perceived organizational support and perceived supervisor support influence the work-life balance of academicians, and through which mechanism.

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Scopus was the main database, and Google Scholar was used as a supplementary source. The searches combined terms for work-life balance, for organizational and supervisor support, and for academic staff. Results were limited to English-language journal articles published between 2000 and 2026 and, in Scopus, to articles with authors affiliated with Asian institutions, in line with the Asian focus of the review.

The full search strings are given in Table 1. Relevant studies that the database search could not capture, such as studies of work-family conflict, studies from outside Asia and seminal theoretical works, were added through citation searching and targeted searches.

Table 1: Search Strategy

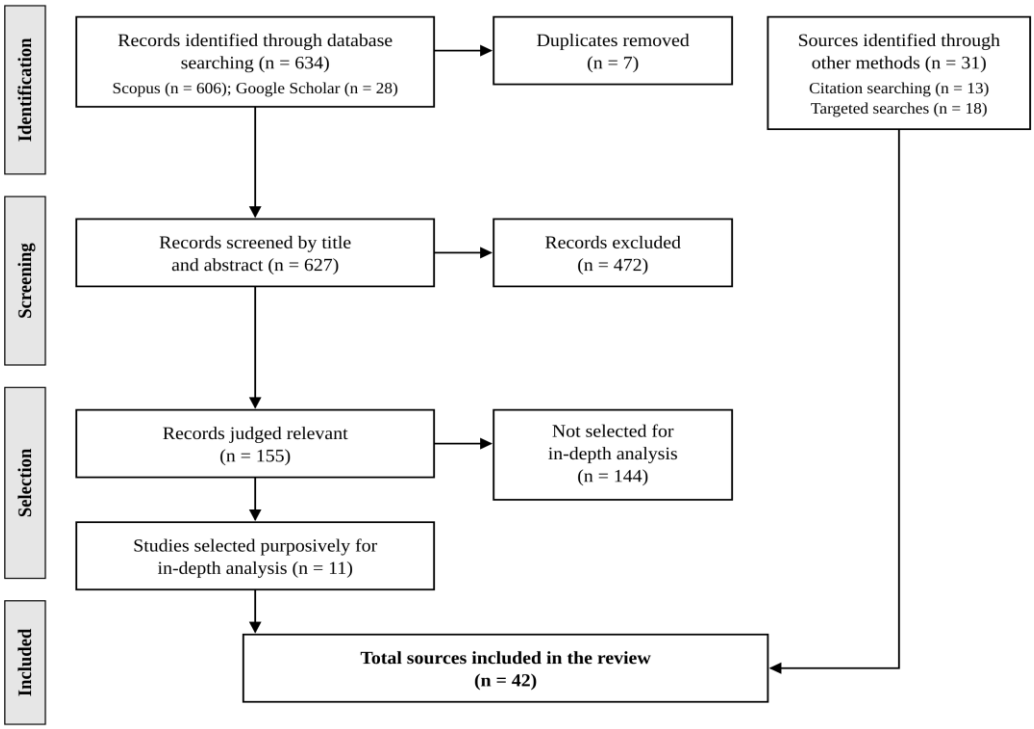
No.	Database	Fields	Search string	Limits	Records
1	Scopus	Title, abstract, keywords	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("work-life balance" OR "work-family balance") AND ("perceived organizational support" OR "perceived supervisor support" OR "family-supportive supervisor behaviour") AND ("academician" OR "lecturer" OR "faculty" OR "university")	2000–2026; journal articles; English; author affiliation in 31 Asian countries (see note)	606
2	Google Scholar (supplementary, via Publish or Perish)	Full text	"work life balance"|"work family balance" "perceived organizational support"|"perceived supervisor support"|"family supportive supervisor behaviour" "academician"|"lecturer"|"faculty "|"university" "malaysia" or "asia"	2000–2026	28

Note. The Scopus affiliation filter covered Bahrain, Bangladesh, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Syria, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam.

Sources were included if they were peer-reviewed, written in English, and examined either work-life balance or work-family conflict among academic staff, or the link between organizational or supervisor support and work-life balance or work-family conflict. The database search found 634 records.

After 7 duplicates were removed, the titles and abstracts of 627 records were screened, and 155 were judged relevant. Consistent with the purposive sampling permitted in integrative reviews (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005), 11 of these were selected for in-depth analysis because they most directly addressed the review question, with priority given to studies of Malaysian academic staff and to studies of academic staff that examined organizational or supervisor support, or other job resources, in relation to work-life balance. A further 31 sources were added through citation searching (13) and targeted searches (18), giving 42 sources in total. Sources cited only for definitions or review methods were not counted. Figure 1 summarizes this process.

Figure 1: Flow Diagram of the Literature Search and Selection Process



Source: Developed by the authors.

The quality of the 11 studies selected for in-depth analysis was assessed with the nine criteria of Hawker et al. (2002), which cover the clarity of the aims, the method and sampling, the data analysis, ethics and bias, the results, transferability and implications. Each criterion was scored from 1 (very poor) to 4 (good), giving totals from 9 to 36; totals of 30 or more were rated high, 24 to 29 medium and below 24 low. The appraisal was drafted with the help of an AI tool from the full text of each study and then checked by the authors. Of the 11 studies, one was rated high, six medium and four low (Appendix Table A1). Following Whittemore and Knafl (2005), no study was excluded for quality alone, but weaker studies were given less weight. The included sources were then analyzed thematically. Each source was coded for its constructs, theory, design, occupation, country and main findings, and the codes were grouped into four themes: the meaning of work-life balance for academicians, the demands that threaten it, the forms of support that protect it, and the mechanism linking support to balance. These themes form the basis of the framework.

As a conceptual paper, this study does not test hypotheses or report original data. The findings of the review are presented in the next section and form the basis of the proposed framework.

FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance has been defined in several ways. Early definitions emphasized equal distribution, describing balance as equal engagement in, and equal satisfaction with, work and family roles (Greenhaus et al., 2003). Border theory reframed balance as "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict" (Clark, 2000, p. 751). Later work moved from equality towards fit, treating balance as an overall appraisal that one's effectiveness and satisfaction in work and non-work roles are consistent with one's life values (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). This view recognizes that balance is subjective and that the same distribution of time may feel balanced to one person and unbalanced to another.

Research with Malaysian academicians supports this subjective, multidimensional view. In a phenomenological study of lecturers with family commitments in private universities, Ramachandaran et al. (2025) found that academicians conceptualize WLB through four themes: harmonization and self-care, work satisfaction and happiness, equilibrium and prioritization, and time management and boundaries. Participants described balance less as shorter hours and more as the ability to look after their own well-being while meeting professional duties. Jayasingam et al. (2023) similarly argue that, for Malaysians, the "life" domain extends beyond family obligations to include personal needs. Across Asia more broadly, WLB is shaped by collectivist values, extended-family obligations and long-hours work cultures that differ from the Western settings in which most WLB theory was developed (Le et al., 2020).

Work-Family Conflict and Work-Family Enrichment

Two processes connect work and non-work life. Work-family conflict is a form of inter-role conflict in which the demands of work and family roles are mutually incompatible, so that participation in one role is made more difficult by participation in the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Conflict may be time-based, strain-based or behavior-based, and it may run from work to family or from family to work. Its consequences include stress, burnout, lower job satisfaction and higher turnover intention (Allen et al., 2000).

Work-family enrichment is the positive counterpart: the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other, for example when skills, confidence or positive mood gained at work carry over to home (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Balance is therefore not simply the absence of conflict. Ramachandaran et al. (2025) note that low conflict combined with high enrichment produces the strongest sense of balance, a view consistent with the work-home resources model, which treats both conflict and enrichment as the result of resources being lost or gained across domains (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Among 307 Malaysian academics, job autonomy was associated with higher work-to-family enrichment and lower work-to-family conflict (Badri & Panatik, 2020).

Job Demands Facing Academicians

Academic work combines several demanding roles. Kinman and Jones (2008) found that UK academics reported high job demands and that work-life conflict was associated with lower well-being. Han et al. (2020) showed that teaching workload and the conflict between teaching and research predicted exhaustion among university teachers, while job resources predicted engagement and satisfaction. In Malaysia, academicians face publication targets, grant requirements, administrative duties and community-engagement expectations (Makhbul & Khairuddin, 2013). Interviews with academics in Malaysian public universities identified overtime, weekend work and the spillover of work into personal life as their main concerns (Khairunneezam et al., 2017), and a later phenomenological study identified excessive workload, mental health problems and time management as the main challenges (Ramachandaran et al., 2024). In private universities, which operate on competitive business models, performance pressure and customer-oriented expectations from students add further demands (Ramachandaran et al., 2025). Digital technologies and the pandemic-era shift to online teaching have extended availability expectations beyond normal working hours (Selim & Kee, 2023).

Perceived Organizational Support

POS is grounded in organizational support theory, which holds that employees form a general belief about how far the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Through the norm of reciprocity, high POS creates a felt obligation to care about the organization's goals and is associated with greater commitment, job satisfaction and performance and with lower strain and withdrawal (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Kurtessis et al., 2017). Fair treatment, rewards, favorable job conditions and supervisor support are its main antecedents (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

In the work-life domain, POS is expressed through policies such as flexible scheduling, leave provisions, childcare support and reasonable workload allocation. Its value depends, however, on whether employees believe they can use these provisions without penalty. Among academic staff in Malaysian public universities, perceived support was moderate to high, but satisfaction with implementation was lower and only 53.7% were

satisfied with existing work-life programs (Mohamed et al., 2026). This gap between policy and practice suggests that institutional support alone may not be enough.

Perceived Supervisor Support

PSS captures employees' views of how far their immediate supervisor values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Because supervisors act as agents of the organization, employees tend to read supervisory treatment as a signal of the organization's stance. Eisenberger et al. (2002) found that PSS was positively related to POS and that POS carried the relationship between PSS and employee retention. A narrower, family-specific form of supervisor support has also been identified: family-supportive supervisor behaviors, which include emotional support, practical help with scheduling, role modelling of balance and creative work-family management (Hammer et al., 2009).

Meta-analytic evidence indicates that both general and work-family-specific support from supervisors and organizations are related to lower WFC, and that work-family-specific support shows the stronger relationship (Kossek et al., 2011). The same meta-analysis found that work-family-specific supervisor support was related to WFC indirectly through perceptions of organizational work-family support. For academicians, the head of department or dean decides timetables, committee assignments, approvals for leave and tolerance of flexible working. These decisions directly shape whether institutional WLB policies are usable in practice.

Evidence from Other Occupational and National Contexts

Much of the evidence on how support affects the work-family interface comes from occupations other than academia and from countries other than Malaysia, so its applicability needs to be judged rather than assumed. The meta-analysis by Kossek et al. (2011), which provides the strongest evidence that both organizational and supervisor support are associated with lower WFC, pooled 115 samples and 72,507 employees across many occupations and was not specific to academic work. Similarly, the clearest test of WFC as a mediator between support and employee outcomes comes from a survey of 383 nurses in Bangladesh, in which WFC mediated the effects of POS and PSS on turnover intention (Siddiqi et al., 2024).

These findings should be transferred to academicians with caution. Nursing differs from academic work in important ways. Nurses work long hours on irregular schedules that require their physical presence (Siddiqi et al., 2024), whereas academicians usually have more autonomy over when and where they work but face highly permeable boundaries, so their conflict arises mainly from work spilling into evenings, weekends and family time (Kinman & Jones, 2008; Ramachandaran et al., 2025). The outcome in the nursing study was also turnover intention rather than WLB. The two professions nevertheless share heavy workloads, emotional labor and a high proportion of employees with caregiving duties, which suggests that the mediating mechanism is plausible for academicians but needs to be tested directly.

Studies of academics in other countries support the central role of WFC in academic work. Among UK academics, those reporting more work-life conflict were less healthy and less satisfied, while those with more control, schedule flexibility and institutional support reported better work-life balance (Kinman & Jones, 2008). In a survey of 2,229 faculty members at Czech public universities, WFC was the strongest predictor of burnout and mediated the effect of workload on burnout (Zábrodská et al., 2018). Among 410 female university teachers in China, WFC was associated with lower job satisfaction through burnout, and POS weakened the link between WFC and burnout (Su & Jiang, 2023). The Chinese evidence suggests that organizational support may protect academicians not only by reducing conflict but also by limiting its harmful effects, a buffering role that the present framework does not model. Evidence from other Asian academic samples also supports the link between support and balance. Among 736 Indonesian lecturers, supervisor support was positively related to WLB (Effendi et al., 2025), and among 150 faculty members at rural colleges in India, organizational support was related to WLB through the work environment and job satisfaction (Kishore & Prakashraj, 2026).

Evidence from Malaysia, however, is mixed. Some studies support a positive role for support. Among 467 academics in Malaysia and China, POS was related to WLB through felt obligation and organization

engagement (Tan et al., 2024), and among academics in private higher education institutions a supportive culture was positively related to WLB (Khan et al., 2022). Among academic staff at a Malaysian public university, supervisor social support moderated the relationship between role ambiguity and work intrusion on family life (Ismail et al., 2013). Other studies report non-significant effects. Organizational support did not moderate the effects of emotional intelligence and job engagement on the WLB of 132 lecturers (Kumarasamy et al., 2022). Several of these studies were, however, rated low in quality, mainly because of small or convenience samples and incomplete reporting (Kumarasamy et al., 2022; Ismail et al., 2013; see Appendix Table A1), so their null findings should be weighed with caution. Supervisor support did not moderate the relationship between WLB and well-being among staff at an open distance learning university (Rahim et al., 2020), and among 278 women employees at a technical university it was not significantly related to either direction of WFC, whereas family support was (Noor et al., 2019).

In the Malaysian public sector, supervisory support was not directly related to WFC and influenced it only through employees' self-efficacy (Abdullah, 2026), although that sample consisted of public administrators rather than academicians, and among 122 academics POS did not significantly predict work engagement (Mohd Fauzi et al., 2026). One explanation, consistent with the Asian literature, is that in collectivist settings family support may partly substitute for workplace support in managing work and family demands (Le et al., 2020; Noor et al., 2019). Another is that general measures of support may miss the work-family-specific support that is most strongly related to WFC (Kossek et al., 2011). These inconsistencies mean that the propositions developed later should be treated as testable claims rather than established relationships, and they strengthen the case for examining POS and PSS separately, using measures specific to work-family needs, in Malaysian academic samples.

Underpinning Theories and Their Integration

The proposed conceptual framework is guided by four complementary theories, each of which explains a different part of the relationship between support and work-life balance. The first is social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), which explains why support matters. According to this theory, relationships at work are built on reciprocity. When the organization or the supervisor provides valued resources such as care, recognition and flexibility, employees respond with commitment and effort and come to regard the employment relationship as fair. Social exchange theory therefore provides the basis for expecting both POS and PSS to be positively related to the work-life balance of academicians. The second is conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which explains how demands and support affect balance. The theory holds that people strive to obtain, retain and protect valued resources such as time, energy and health. Job demands deplete these resources and give rise to conflict between work and family roles, whereas support replenishes them and helps to prevent a spiral of further resource loss. This theory underpins the propositions that POS and PSS reduce work-family conflict, that work-family conflict in turn undermines work-life balance, and that support therefore affects balance indirectly through conflict.

The third is the job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), which organizes these ideas into two processes. Job demands drive a health-impairment process that leads to strain, while job resources drive a motivational process that leads to engagement and well-being. Within this model, POS and PSS are classified as job resources that help academicians to cope with the heavy teaching, research and administrative demands of their work. The model also allows resources to buffer the effect of demands on strain, a role that the present framework does not model but that future research could test. The fourth is boundary and border theory (Clark, 2000; Ashforth et al., 2000), which explains why academicians are particularly exposed to work-life imbalance. Academic work has highly permeable boundaries, since tasks such as marking, writing and responding to students can be carried out at any time and in any place. As a result, the ability to manage transitions between work and personal roles, and the support received in doing so, is central to achieving balance.

These four perspectives are not interchangeable. Each answers a different question, and together they form a single explanatory chain, as summarized in Table 2. Boundary and border theory explains the context, namely why academicians, whose work crosses into home life with few physical or temporal limits, are especially

exposed to WFC. Conservation of resources theory explains the mechanism: when academic work drains time and energy across this permeable boundary, WFC arises, and the loss of these resources reduces the sense of balance. The job demands-resources model locates POS and PSS within this process by classifying them as job resources that offset academic demands, which provides the link between support and reduced WFC. Social exchange theory explains the remaining, direct path: support signals that the institution and the supervisor value the academician, which fosters perceived fairness and positive reciprocity and is associated with greater satisfaction and well-being independently of any reduction in conflict (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Read together, the resource-based theories account for the indirect pathways through WFC, while social exchange theory accounts for the direct pathways from support to WLB.

The perspectives also differ in emphasis, and the framework takes a position on these differences. Social exchange theory treats support as the basis of a relationship that employees reciprocate, whereas conservation of resources theory treats it as a resource that employees draw on to manage stress. The framework accepts both views by treating POS and PSS as resources in the indirect pathways and as relational signals in the direct pathways. Similarly, the job demands-resources model allows resources both to reduce strain directly and to buffer the effect of demands, but the framework adopts only the first of these roles in order to remain parsimonious, and leaves the buffering role for future research.

Table 2: Integration of the Underpinning Theories

Theory	Question it answers	Role in the framework	Propositions
Boundary and border theory (Clark, 2000; Ashforth et al., 2000)	Why are academicians exposed to WFC?	Explains the context: academic work has permeable work-home boundaries	Context for P5
Conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989)	How does WFC reduce balance, and how does support help?	Explains the mechanism: resource loss produces WFC and lowers WLB; support restores resources	P3, P4, P5, P6, P7
Job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017)	Where do POS and PSS fit?	Classifies POS and PSS as job resources that offset academic job demands	P3, P4
Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964)	Why does support relate to balance directly?	Explains the direct paths through reciprocity and perceived fairness	P1, P2

Summary of Key Studies

Table 3 summarizes the key empirical studies and reviews, grouped by the occupation and country in which the evidence was obtained, and indicates how each study bears on the proposed framework.

Table 3: Summary of Key Studies

Study	Design and sample	Country	Constructs	Key finding	Relevance to the framework
Malaysian academics and higher education staff					
Mohamed et al. (2026)	Survey; 300 academic staff, public universities	Malaysia	Organizational support; WLB policies	Over 65% perceived moderate to high support, but only 53.7% were satisfied with	Policy-practice gap; P1, P2

				WLB programs; lack of managerial support was a key concern	
Mohd Fauzi et al. (2026)	Survey; 122 academics, one public university	Malaysia	POS; psychological well-being; work engagement	POS did not significantly predict work engagement	Contrary evidence on POS
Saad et al. (2026)	Survey, PLS-SEM; 90 academicians, one private university	Malaysia	Ability-, motivation- and opportunity-enhancing HR practices; WLB; well-being	WLB mediated the effects of ability- and motivation-enhancing HR practices on well-being; opportunity-enhancing practices had no effect	Institutional provisions acting through WLB; P1
Ramachandaran et al. (2025)	Qualitative interviews; 6 academicians, private universities	Malaysia	WLB conceptualization	WLB understood as harmonization and self-care, satisfaction and happiness, equilibrium and prioritization, and time management and boundaries	Defines the outcome (WLB)
Ramachandaran et al. (2024)	Qualitative interviews; 6 academicians	Malaysia	WLB challenges	Excessive workload, mental health problems and time management were the main challenges	Context for P5
Tan et al. (2024)	Survey; 467 academics	Malaysia and China	POS; felt obligation; organization engagement; WLB	POS was related to WLB through felt obligation and organization engagement	Supports P1; closest prior study
Kumarasamy et al. (2022)	Survey; 132 lecturers, public and private universities	Malaysia	Emotional intelligence; job engagement; organizational support; WLB	Organizational support did not moderate the predictors of WLB	Contrary evidence on POS
Khan et al. (2022)	Survey, PLS-SEM;	Malaysia	Occupational	A supportive culture was	Supports P1

	academics, private higher education		commitment; supportive culture; WLB; burnout	positively related to WLB	
Badri & Panatik (2020)	Survey; 307 academics	Malaysia	Job autonomy; self-efficacy; WLB (conflict and enrichment)	Job autonomy was linked to higher enrichment and lower work-to-family conflict	Resources reduce WFC; P3, P4
Rahim et al. (2020)	Survey, PLS; 94 staff, open distance learning university	Malaysia	WLB; well-being; supervisor and family support	Supervisor support did not moderate the WLB-well-being relationship	Contrary evidence on PSS
Noor et al. (2019)	Survey; 278 women employees (146 academic), technical university	Malaysia	Supervisor support; family support; WFC	Family support, but not supervisor support, was related to lower WFC	Contrary evidence on P4
Achour et al. (2017)	Survey; 250 female academicians, research universities	Malaysia	Work-family demands; management and supervisory support; well-being	Support was positively related to well-being and moderated the demands-well-being relationship	Supports the role of supervisory support
Khairunneezam et al. (2017)	Qualitative interviews; 17 academics, public universities	Malaysia	WLB satisfaction	Overtime, weekend work and spillover of work into personal life were the main concerns	Context for P5
Ismail et al. (2013)	Survey, PLS; academic staff, public university	Malaysia	Role stressors; supervisor social support; work intrusion on family	Supervisor support moderated the role ambiguity-work intrusion relationship only	Partial support for PSS
Malaysian employees in other sectors					
Abdullah (2026)	Survey, PLS-SEM; 618 public	Malaysia	Supervisory support; self-	Supervisory support reduced WFC only	Contrary evidence on P4 (non-academic

	administrators		efficacy; WFC	indirectly, through self-efficacy	sample)
Academics in other countries					
Kishore & Prakashraj (2026)	Survey, SEM; 150 faculty, rural colleges	India	Organizational support; work environment; job satisfaction; WLB	Organizational support was related to WLB through work environment and job satisfaction	Supports P1
Effendi et al. (2025)	Survey, SEM; 736 lecturers	Indonesia	Workload; supervisor support; WLB; productivity	Supervisor support was positively related to WLB; workload was negatively related	Supports P2
Zábrodská et al. (2018)	Survey; 2,229 faculty, public universities	Czech Republic	Workload; WFC; burnout	WFC was the strongest predictor of burnout and mediated the effect of workload	Supports P5 and the mediating role of WFC
Su & Jiang (2023)	Survey; 410 female university teachers	China	WFC; burnout; job satisfaction; POS	WFC lowered job satisfaction through burnout; POS weakened the WFC-burnout link	Suggests a buffering role for POS
Kinman & Jones (2008)	Survey; academic staff	United Kingdom	Job demands; work-life conflict; well-being	Work-life conflict was linked to poorer health and satisfaction; control, flexibility and institutional support were linked to better balance	Supports P1 and P5
Other occupations					
Siddiqi et al. (2024)	Survey, SEM; 383 nurses, four hospitals	Bangladesh	POS; PSS; WFC; turnover intention	POS and PSS reduced turnover intention; WFC mediated these effects	Basis for P6, P7; different occupation and outcome
Meta-analyses and reviews					
Kossek et al. (2011)	Meta-analysis; 115 samples, 72,507 employees	Multiple	General and work-family-specific supervisor and organizational support;	Work-family-specific support was more strongly related to lower WFC than general support	Supports P3, P4

			WFC		
Le et al. (2020)	Systematic review	Asia	WLB	Asian WLB is shaped by collectivist values, family obligations and long-hours cultures	Context for applying the framework in Malaysia

Comparison with Closely Related Malaysian Studies

Table 4 compares the proposed framework with the closely related Malaysian studies identified in the review. Three patterns stand out. First, no study examined POS and PSS together as distinct constructs. Most measured a single form of support, and one combined management and supervisory support into a single measure (Achour et al., 2017). The closest study, Tan et al. (2024), linked POS to WLB among Malaysian and Chinese academics, but it examined felt obligation and organization engagement as mediators and did not consider supervisor support or WFC. Second, where WFC was examined, it was treated as an outcome of support or of other variables rather than as the mechanism linking support to WLB (Noor et al., 2019; Abdullah, 2026). One study modeled human resource practices rather than support as such and treated WLB as a mediator of well-being, without measuring WFC (Saad et al., 2026). Third, support was often modeled as a moderator, and several studies found that it had no significant effect (Rahim et al., 2020; Kumarasamy et al., 2022). The present framework differs from all of these by examining POS and PSS as separate predictors, by positioning WFC as the mediator, and by specifying a distinct indirect pathway for each form of support, with WLB as the outcome. Because the comparison is limited to the studies identified through the search described earlier, this claim of originality applies to that body of literature and should be revisited as new studies appear.

Table 4: Comparison of the Present Framework with Closely Related Malaysian Studies

Study	Sample	POS examined	PSS examined	WFC examined	Role of support	Outcome
Ismail et al. (2013)	Academic staff, one public university	No	Yes (social support)	Work intrusion on family, as outcome	Moderator	Work intrusion on family
Achour et al. (2017)	250 female academicians	Combined with supervisory support	Combined with management support	No (work-family demands)	Moderator	Well-being
Khairunneezam et al. (2017)	17 academics	No	No	Spillover discussed qualitatively	Not modeled	WLB satisfaction
Noor et al. (2019)	278 women employees (academic and non-academic)	No	Yes	Yes, as outcome	Predictor	WFC
Badri & Panatik (2020)	307 academics	No	No	Yes, as part of WLB	Not modeled (job	WLB (conflict and

					autonomy)	enrichment)
Rahim et al. (2020)	94 university staff	No	Yes	No	Moderator	Well-being
Khan et al. (2022)	Academics, private higher education	Supportive culture	No	No	Mediator	WLB; burnout
Kumarasamy et al. (2022)	132 lecturers	Yes	No	No	Moderator	WLB
Tan et al. (2024)	467 academics (Malaysia and China)	Yes	No	No	Predictor	WLB
Ramachandaran et al. (2024, 2025)	6 academicians each	No	No	Discussed qualitatively	Not modeled	WLB (meaning and challenges)
Mohamed et al. (2026)	300 academic staff	Yes (general)	No	No	Descriptive	WLB policies and programs
Mohd Fauzi et al. (2026)	122 academics	Yes	No	No	Predictor	Work engagement
Saad et al. (2026)	90 academicians, one private university	HR practices (institutional provisions)	No	No	Predictor (WLB as mediator)	Well-being
Abdullah (2026)	618 public administrators	No	Yes	Yes, as outcome	Predictor through self-efficacy	WFC
Present framework	**Malaysian academicians**	**Yes**	**Yes, separately from POS**	**Yes, as mediator**	**Direct and indirect predictor**	**WLB**

Research Gaps

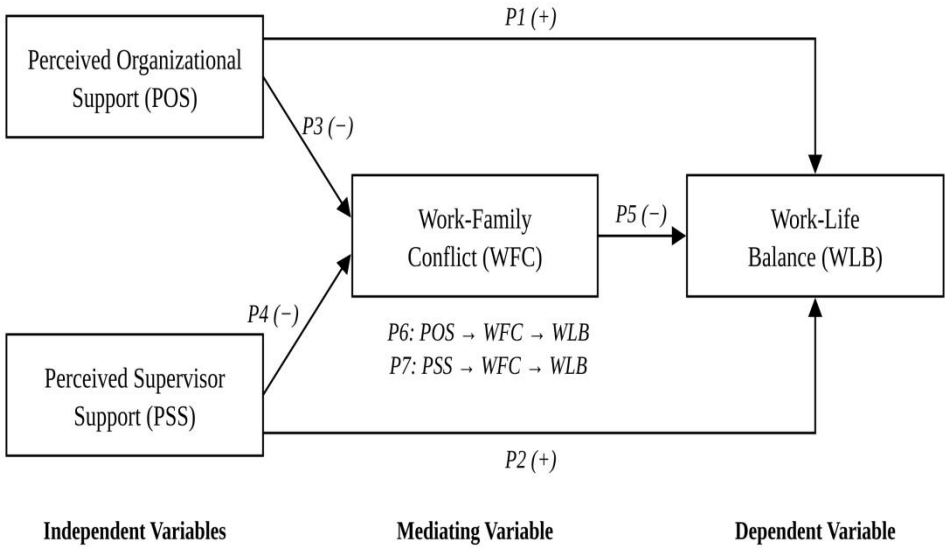
Three gaps emerge from the review. First, studies of academic WLB in Malaysia have mostly examined a single form of support, or have combined institutional and supervisory support into one measure, so the distinct contributions of the institution and the immediate supervisor remain unclear (Table 4). Second, WFC has been examined as an outcome of support but not as the mechanism through which support is translated into

WLB among Malaysian academicians. Third, the Malaysian evidence on support is inconsistent, with several studies reporting non-significant effects (Noor et al., 2019; Rahim et al., 2020; Kumarasamy et al., 2022; Abdullah, 2026; Mohd Fauzi et al., 2026), which calls for a framework that specifies the pathways precisely enough to be tested and that can help explain why effects differ. The framework below addresses these gaps.

Proposed Conceptual Framework and Propositions

Figure 2 presents the proposed conceptual framework, which is deliberately parsimonious. Perceived organizational support (POS) and perceived supervisor support (PSS) are the independent variables, work-family conflict (WFC) is the mediating variable, and work-life balance (WLB) is the dependent variable. The framework proposes that both forms of support strengthen WLB directly, and also indirectly by reducing the conflict that arises when work demands spill over into family and personal life, with a separate indirect pathway for each form of support.

Figure 2: Proposed Conceptual Framework



Source: Developed by the authors.

Perceived Organizational Support, Perceived Supervisor Support and Work-Life Balance

Social exchange theory suggests that when academicians feel valued and cared for, they are both better able and more motivated to manage their work and non-work roles (Blau, 1964). At the institutional level, policies such as flexible scheduling, fair workload allocation and family-related leave give academicians greater control over their time (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). At the departmental level, the head of department decides whether these policies can be used in practice, for example by approving a change to a teaching timetable or by protecting staff from evening meetings (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Hammer et al., 2009). In Malaysian public universities, a lack of managerial support has been identified as a key concern even where institutional support is perceived as adequate (Mohamed et al., 2026). Among UK academics, institutional support was associated with better work-life balance (Kinman & Jones, 2008). In Asian academic samples, POS was related to WLB among academics in Malaysia and China (Tan et al., 2024) and among faculty in India (Kishore & Prakashraj, 2026), and supervisor support was positively related to WLB among Indonesian lecturers (Effendi et al., 2025).

Proposition 1: POS is positively related to WLB among Malaysian academicians.

Proposition 2: PSS is positively related to WLB among Malaysian academicians.

Support and Work-Family Conflict

Conservation of resources theory holds that people strive to protect valued resources such as time and energy, and that conflict arises when these resources are depleted (Hobfoll, 1989). POS and PSS act as job resources that replenish what academic work consumes. Meta-analytic evidence shows that both organizational and supervisor support are associated with lower WFC, with support that is specific to work-family needs showing the strongest relationships (Kossek et al., 2011). In Malaysia, however, this relationship has not always been observed, particularly for supervisor support (Noor et al., 2019; Abdullah, 2026), which makes Propositions 3 and 4 especially important to test with measures of work-family-specific support.

Proposition 3: POS is negatively related to WFC among Malaysian academicians.

Proposition 4: PSS is negatively related to WFC among Malaysian academicians.

Work-Family Conflict and Work-Life Balance

When the demands of work and family are incompatible, participation in one role makes participation in the other more difficult (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). For academicians, whose teaching, research and administrative loads often extend into evenings and weekends, such conflict directly undermines the sense of balance between professional and personal life (Kinman & Jones, 2008; Khairunneezam et al., 2017). Malaysian academicians themselves describe balance as the ability to meet professional duties without sacrificing self-care and family time (Ramachandaran et al., 2025). Among Czech faculty, WFC was the strongest predictor of burnout (Zábrodská et al., 2018).

Proposition 5: WFC is negatively related to WLB among Malaysian academicians.

The Mediating Role of Work-Family Conflict

Taken together, these arguments suggest that support improves balance partly because it reduces conflict. The evidence for this mediating role comes mainly from outside Malaysian academia. Among nurses in Bangladesh, WFC mediated the effects of POS and PSS on turnover intention (Siddiqi et al., 2024), and among Czech faculty WFC mediated the effect of workload on burnout (Zábrodská et al., 2018). In Malaysia, WLB mediated the effects of ability- and motivation-enhancing human resource practices on the well-being of academicians at a private university (Saad et al., 2026), which suggests that institutional provisions can work through the balance between work and family, although that study did not measure WFC and was rated low in quality. Because institutional and supervisory support operate through different channels, the framework specifies a separate indirect pathway for each. Organizational support is expected to reduce conflict mainly through formal provisions, such as flexible scheduling, fair workload allocation and family-related leave, that give academicians more control over their time. Supervisor support is expected to reduce conflict mainly through day-to-day decisions, such as adjusting timetables, approving leave and protecting staff from out-of-hours meetings. Given the mixed Malaysian evidence on supervisor support (Noor et al., 2019; Abdullah, 2026), the two pathways may differ in strength, which is why they are proposed, and should be tested, separately.

Proposition 6: WFC mediates the relationship between POS and WLB among Malaysian academicians, such that POS reduces WFC, which in turn enhances WLB.

Proposition 7: WFC mediates the relationship between PSS and WLB among Malaysian academicians, such that PSS reduces WFC, which in turn enhances WLB.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The review suggests that the WLB of Malaysian academicians depends not only on whether their university has supportive policies but also on whether their immediate supervisor makes those policies usable. The gap between perceived support and satisfaction with WLB programs reported among Malaysian public university

staff (Mohamed et al., 2026) is consistent with this view: formal provisions signal care, but the head of department decides whether a lecturer can actually shift a class, decline an evening meeting or take family leave without penalty.

Theoretical Implications

First, the framework separates POS and PSS, showing that support from the institution and support from the immediate supervisor are distinct resources that each contribute to balance. As the comparison in Table 4 shows, closely related Malaysian studies have examined a single form of support, combined the two, or treated support as a moderator. Second, by placing WFC between support and balance and specifying a separate indirect pathway for each form of support, the framework explains how support works and not only whether it works. Third, it integrates four theoretical perspectives by assigning each a distinct role: boundary theory explains academicians' exposure to conflict, conservation of resources theory and the job demands-resources model explain the indirect pathways, and social exchange theory explains the direct pathways. Finally, it applies to Malaysian academicians a mediation pattern that has so far been tested mainly in other occupations and countries (Siddiqi et al., 2024; Zábrodská et al., 2018), while recognizing that the local evidence on support is mixed.

Practical Implications

The proposed framework carries several practical implications for university leaders and human resource departments. The first concerns the role of heads of department. Because supervisor support is proposed to strengthen work-life balance both directly and by reducing work-family conflict, universities should invest in developing family-supportive supervision among those who manage academic staff. Training programs based on family-supportive supervisor behaviors, which cover emotional support, practical help with scheduling and the role modelling of balance, can equip heads of department to act as effective channels of support (Hammer et al., 2009). Such training could be incorporated into existing leadership development programs for newly appointed heads of department and deans.

At the institutional level, universities should ensure that their work-life policies are not only available but also usable in practice. The gap between perceived support and satisfaction with work-life programs reported among Malaysian academics (Mohamed et al., 2026) suggests that formal provisions such as flexible working, family-related leave and childcare support may be underused. Universities could therefore review how far these provisions are taken up and remove informal penalties, such as doubts about an academician's commitment, that discourage staff from using them. In addition, transparent workload models that account for teaching, supervision, research, administration and community engagement can reduce time-based conflict and strengthen the perception that the institution treats its staff fairly.

Universities should also take deliberate steps to protect the non-work time of academicians, since work-family conflict is proposed as the main mechanism through which support affects balance. Clear guidelines on meeting hours and on the use of email and messaging applications outside working hours can help restore the boundaries between work and personal life that have been weakened by digital work.

Finally, support should be directed to those who need it most. Academicians caring for young children or elderly dependents, as well as single parents, are likely to benefit most from flexible timetabling and caregiving support, and directing resources to these groups may therefore yield the greatest improvement in work-life balance.

Policy Implications

At the national level, performance frameworks for universities and academicians could recognize sustainable workloads alongside research and teaching output. Including WLB and staff well-being indicators in institutional assessment would encourage universities to treat support for academicians as part of quality assurance rather than as an optional benefit. Such measures are consistent with the broader goal of decent work in the higher education sector.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As a conceptual review, this paper has limitations. Its propositions are derived from existing literature and have not been tested. Although the search followed a documented protocol, the review was integrative rather than systematic and did not pool effect sizes, and relevant studies may have been missed. The search relied on one primary database, Scopus, with Google Scholar as a supplement, and it was limited to articles with authors affiliated in Asia, so studies published in Malay, in journals not indexed in Scopus, or outside Asia may be underrepresented.

A substantial share of the included sources was identified through citation searching and targeted searches rather than through the database search, which makes this part of the selection less reproducible. In addition, the 144 relevant records that were not selected for in-depth analysis were not synthesized, so the review may not reflect every relevant finding. Several of the key relationships, notably the mediating role of WFC, are supported mainly by evidence from other occupations and countries, and the Malaysian evidence on organizational and supervisor support is mixed. The propositions should therefore be read as testable claims rather than established relationships.

Future research can address these limitations in several ways. Quantitative studies using structural equation modelling could test Propositions 1 to 7 with samples drawn from both public and private Malaysian universities, using established measures of POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986), PSS (Eisenberger et al., 2002), family-supportive supervisor behaviors (Hammer et al., 2009) and WFC. The indirect pathways in Propositions 6 and 7 should be estimated separately, for example with bootstrapped indirect effects, so that the relative strength of institutional and supervisory support can be compared.

Once the core model is tested, it could be extended by adding work-family enrichment as a second mediator, by including job demands as an antecedent of WFC, by testing whether support also buffers the effect of WFC on strain (Su & Jiang, 2023), and by using multi-group analysis to examine whether the relationships differ by gender, caregiving load and institutional type. Longitudinal or diary designs would help establish the direction of effects, and multilevel designs could separate department-level supervisory climate from individual perceptions. Qualitative studies could explore how heads of department interpret and apply WLB policies in practice.

CONCLUSION

Malaysian academicians face rising teaching, research and administrative demands that threaten their work-life balance, and organizational support is widely seen as part of the solution. This paper has argued that support should be understood at two levels: the institution, which sets policies and signals care, and the immediate supervisor, who determines whether those policies work in daily practice.

Drawing on social exchange, conservation of resources, job demands-resources and boundary theories, the proposed framework explains how POS and PSS strengthen WLB both directly and by reducing work-family conflict. Seven propositions, including separate indirect pathways for organizational and supervisor support, are offered for empirical testing. For universities seeking to retain committed and productive academic staff, investing in supportive supervisors may be as important as writing supportive policies.

Ethical Considerations and Conflict of Interest

This paper is a conceptual review of published literature and did not involve human participants, so ethical approval was not required. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

No new data were created or analyzed in this study. All sources reviewed are cited in the reference list, and the search strategy and quality appraisal are reported in Table 1, Figure 1 and Appendix Table A1.

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APPENDIX

Appendix Table A1: Quality Appraisal of the Studies Selected for In-Depth Analysis Using the Criteria of Hawker et al. (2002)

Study	Design	Sample and country	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total	Quality
Badri & Panatik (2020)	Survey, SEM	307 academics, Malaysia	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	26	Medium
Effendi et al. (2025)	Survey, SEM	736 lecturers, Indonesia	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	29	Medium
Ismail et al. (2013)	Survey, PLS	93 academic staff, Malaysia	3	4	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	23	Low
Khan et al. (2022)	Survey, PLS-SEM	407 academics, Malaysia	3	4	2	2	2	1	2	2	3	21	Low
Kishore & Prakashraj (2026)	Survey, SEM	150 faculty, India	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	28	Medium
Kumarasamy et al. (2022)	Survey, regression	132 lecturers, Malaysia	3	4	2	2	2	1	2	2	3	21	Low
Rahim et al. (2020)	Survey, PLS	94 university staff, Malaysia	4	4	3	2	3	2	2	2	3	25	Medium
Ramachandaran et al. (2024)	Qualitative interviews	6 academicians, Malaysia	3	4	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	26	Medium
Saad et al.	Survey, PLS-	90 academician	3	3	2	2	2	1	2	2	3	20	Low

(2026)	SEM	s, Malaysia											
Selim & Kee (2023)	Survey, PLS-SEM	504 academicians, Egypt	3	3	3	3	3	2	4	3	3	27	Medium
Tan et al. (2024)	Survey, PLS-SEM	467 academics, Malaysia and China	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	3	3	32	High

Note. Criteria: 1 = abstract and title; 2 = introduction and aims; 3 = method and data; 4 = sampling; 5 = data analysis; 6 = ethics and bias; 7 = results; 8 = transferability; 9 = implications and usefulness. Each criterion is rated 4 (good), 3 (fair), 2 (poor) or 1 (very poor), giving a total between 9 and 36. Quality: high = 30–36, medium = 24–29, low = 9–23. Scores were drafted with the help of an AI tool from the full text of each study and checked by the authors.