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LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL PREDICTORS OF JOB SATISFACTION AMONG MALE PRESCHOOL TEACHERS IN MALAYSIA: AN SCCT-BASED SEM STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The underrepresentation of male teachers in early childhood education (ECE) persists globally and is particularly pronounced in Malaysia, where systemic gender norms, role ambiguity, and institutional barriers affect their professional engagement and well-being. Guided by Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), this study investigates the psychosocial determinants of job satisfaction among male preschool teachers, focusing on four key constructs: positive affect, self-efficacy, school support, and gender-related barriers. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 300 male preschool teachers using stratified and clustered sampling across five Malaysian regions. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was applied to test the hypothesized relationships among variables. The measurement model demonstrated robust construct validity (CFI = 0.974, TLI = 0.970, RMSEA = 0.044), and the structural model explained 68% of the variance in job satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.68$). Results revealed that positive affect ($\beta = 0.212$, $p < 0.001$), self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.531$, $p < 0.001$), and gender barriers ($\beta = -0.251$, $p < 0.001$) were significant predictors of job satisfaction, while school support was not ($\beta = 0.036$, $p = 0.430$). These findings affirm the theoretical applicability of SCCT in non-traditional educational contexts and highlight the importance of emotional resilience and psychological agency in sustaining male educators' career satisfaction. Implications are discussed for policy, practice, and future research aimed at fostering inclusive, gender-responsive educational environments.

Keywords: Male preschool teachers, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, gender-related barriers, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT).

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, Early childhood education (ECE) is considered an essential base for the cognitive, social, and emotional development of an individual. Concurrently, in line with the Strategic Plan for the Malaysian Ministry of Education (2024–2030), ECE is deemed an essential catalyst in the development of competitive human capital (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2023). This perspective is aligned with broader global agendas, which recognize the importance of access and quality of ECE services, including the well-being of the workforce (OECD, 2019). In the post-pandemic world, dominated by technology disruption and digital transformation, teacher well-being has become a key agenda. That is aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3 and SDG 4) with a focus on both personal well-being and inclusive access to quality education.

However, despite these innovative moves, some challenges associated with gender imbalance, especially the lack of male teachers in the preschool teaching profession, continue to exist (Rohrmann, 2019). The preponderance of females in early childhood education may also serve to reinforce societal beliefs that negatively impact male involvement in early childhood education (Arnold & Rahimi, 2024; Wilkinson et al., 2023). This is exacerbated by deeply entrenched systemic issues involving cultural beliefs and organisational structures that undermine male partner involvement in caring roles (McGrath et al., 2019). In addition, there is a growing body of empirical evidence suggesting that males who teach experience substantial social pressure, role ambiguity, as well as negative perceptions of physicality with children (Cruikshank et al., 2018, 2021). See, for example, Warin (2018) and Haines et al. (2024) call for institutional change and educational flexibility to realize more gender equity in the field.

Other interventions, like motivation enhancement training (Sak et al., 2023) and the reinforcement of self-efficacy (Sak, 2015), have demonstrated successful outcomes in enhancing confidence and job performance of male teachers. Furthermore, situational factors, for example, organizational rules and working environment aspects, are influential in the expansion of professional engagement specifically in emerging economies such as Malaysia (Sahito & Väisänen, 2019). Here, job satisfaction is frequently associated with an important measure of well-being at work, career sustainability. Spector's (1997) model of job satisfaction highlights the role of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors in personal job satisfaction. Furthermore, the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994, 2006) presents a model that maps how self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and systemic supports or barriers are enacted in career satisfaction and achievement.

While international discussion of young children and male teacher participation and well-being in ECE continues to grow, local empirical data is scarce. The aim of this study is to examine psychosocial factors that contribute to the job satisfaction of male preschool teachers in Malaysia, which include positive affect, self-efficacy, school support, and gender-related barriers. Based on a quantitative method and SEM technique, the study presents an empirical model based on SCCT to explore the relationship between these constructs. Results are anticipated to inform policy and practice through the encouragement of inclusive and gender-sensitive support of male educators working in early education settings. This study extends SCCT by testing how its key cognitive, affective, and contextual mechanisms operate within a gender-minority group—male preschool teachers in a female-dominated profession. By comparing the predictive strengths of self-efficacy, positive affect, school support, and gender-related barriers, the study identifies which SCCT processes remain robust and which may require refinement when applied to minority educators in early childhood education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and Job Satisfaction

The SCCT developed by Lent et al. (1994, 2006) offers a robust conceptual framework for understanding career selection, achievement, and satisfaction processes. Central to SCCT are three key constructs: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career goals, all of which are influenced by contextual factors (such as environmental supports



and barriers) and affective experiences.

In the context of job satisfaction, SCCT posits that the interplay between cognitive (e.g., self-efficacy), affective (e.g., positive emotional experiences), and contextual (e.g., social support or gender barriers) elements significantly predicts individuals' work-related satisfaction (Lent et al., 2006). Self-efficacy enhances individuals' confidence to perform tasks successfully, while outcome expectations and supportive environments sustain motivation and resilience. Conversely, contextual barriers such as institutional constraints or gender-related challenges may weaken these internal drivers.

However, despite SCCT's extensive use across educational settings, its assumptions have rarely been tested in gender-skewed professions, raising important questions about the stability and transferability of its mechanisms when applied to minority groups, which can hinder their career engagement and well-being (Cruickshank et al., 2018; Warin, 2018). Studies such as Inda et al. (2013) and Nerges et al. (2022) demonstrate how gender differences in self-efficacy and expectations significantly shape career outcomes in underrepresented groups. Similarly, Sevilla and Rangel (2024) emphasize that gendered career development pathways are mediated by variations in self-efficacy and outcome expectations, highlighting how SCCT constructs operate differently across gender lines in vocational training contexts.

In the Malaysian context, Mohd Rasdi and Ahrari's (2020) meta-analysis involving 7,967 university students further affirms SCCT's applicability, showing significant links between self-efficacy, environmental support, and affective factors in predicting life satisfaction and career achievements. These findings reinforce the theoretical relevance of SCCT in examining job satisfaction, particularly among minority gender groups in non-traditional professions such as early childhood education. Recent SCCT extensions emphasize the dynamic interaction of contextual barriers and identity-based experiences in shaping career satisfaction (Lent et al., 2017; Sheu & Bordon, 2017). This updated perspective is particularly relevant for male preschool teachers, whose career pathways are shaped not only by personal agency but also by gendered contextual constraints. Although SCCT is well established across educational and vocational settings, its application to gender-minority groups in care-oriented professions remains limited. While SCCT assumes that supportive environments enhance satisfaction, male ECE teachers may not experience such support in the same way because institutional practices often reflect norms of a predominantly female workforce. This raises a critical theoretical question regarding whether contextual supports function differently for minority groups and whether barriers may, in fact, exert greater influence than supports in shaping job satisfaction.

Gender Barriers and Job Satisfaction

Building on SCCT as outlined earlier, this section focuses specifically on how gender-related barriers function within the theory's contextual component. Rather than reiterating its core principles, the discussion here emphasises how identity-based challenges shape the psychological and environmental processes proposed in SCCT.

In terms of job satisfaction, SCCT argues that the combination of cognitive (e.g., self-efficacy), emotional (e.g., positive emotional experiences), and environmental (e.g., social support or gender barriers) influences set predictors of individuals' satisfaction with their work (Lent et al., 2006). Self-efficacy provides a sense of confidence in the individual's ability to execute tasks successfully, whereas outcome expectations and enabling environments ensure that motivation and resilience are maintained. On the other hand, situational barriers, e.g., organisational barriers, or difficulties related to gender, may double the influence of these internal drivers.

This framework is also relevant to the study of male ECEC teachers, a minority in a female sector who encounter social expectations, gender prejudice, and identity ambivalence that increase the likelihood of compromised career engagement and well-being (Cruickshank et al., 2018; Warin, 2018). Studies such as Inda et al. (2013) and Nerges et al. (2022) reveal how male students are more likely to believe in themselves and in their careers and that gender conditions much of the careers of underrepresented groups. Sevilla and Rangel (2024) also stress that gendered career pathways are influenced by differences in self-efficacy and outcome expectations, showing the differential



nature of applicability of SCCT constructs through gender in vocational training settings.

In the Malaysian setting, another meta-analysis by Mohd Rasdi and Ahrari (2020) of 7,967 university students corroborates the applicability of SCCT, demonstrating notable associations between self-efficacy, environmental support, affective variables and life satisfaction and career performance. These results support the applicability of SCCT to an analysis of job satisfaction, especially among minority gender groups working in non-traditional occupations. A significant contribution of these findings is that they add to emerging evidence about the relevance of SCCT in the investigation of job satisfaction among male and female workers who are employed in the non-traditional field of early childhood education. Gender-related barriers may function not only as contextual impediments as SCCT originally theorised but as identity threats that directly undermine professional belonging. This suggests that SCCT may require expanded conceptualisation for contexts in which barriers are identity-based rather than purely structural.

School Support and Job Satisfaction

School support is defined as teachers' perception of the extent to which the principals and the school stakeholders appreciate them, as well as look after their welfare. This is consistent with Eisenberger et al. (1986, 1997) perceived organizational support (POS) theory, such that employees who perceive their organization to value their efforts and to treat them justly should experience greater job satisfaction and commitment.

Within the SCCT framework institutional, support is defined as a positive contextual factor that can impact career outcomes. It boosts job satisfaction directly by increasing a sense of efficacy and strengthening positive outcome expectation (Lent et al., 2006). School support serves as a psychosocial cushion that protects male ECE teachers from the negative impact of gendered pressures and facilitates a sense of professional fit. Male teachers' self-esteem and their engagement in teaching careers are supported by supportive systems that are steady, accessible, gender mindful, and balanced; a lack of support leaves them feeling excluded and less well (Haines et al., 2024).

The empirical evidence also supplements the significance of organizational support on job satisfaction. Kim and Oh (2024) discovered a positive correlation between a supportive work environment and job satisfaction ($r = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$) for male nurses and that social support moderated the association between work environment and career well-being. Similarly, Maan et al. (2020) found that perceived organizational support significantly influenced job satisfaction directly ($\beta = 0.41$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < 0.01$), proving the relevance of recognition and fairness in the workplace policies.

In the Malaysian educational context, Bakar and Amat also discovered a high positive association of social support with job satisfaction in teachers ($r = 0.471$) as evidence of the strong supportive atmosphere of the school that contributes to well-being in the career. The visibility and responsiveness of institutional support could be a significant factor in job satisfaction and retention for male preschool teachers in female-dominated settings.

In sum, school support is not only a structural advantage but also a source of relational and motivational value that significantly contributes to moulding teacher dedication, job satisfaction and commitment, especially among gender-minority educators working within such an unfriendly institutional environment.

Self-efficacy and Job Satisfaction

Self-efficacy is a personal conviction in one's ability to plan, execute, and achieve a desired outcome or goal. Self-efficacy for teaching in schools refers to a teacher's belief that he or she can influence student learning and master pedagogical challenges (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The concept of self-efficacy has its genesis in Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory and is a fundamental construct of the SCCT that stipulates self-efficacy to undergird motivational processes, goal-setting behaviour, outcome expectations, and career satisfaction (Lent et al., 1994, 2006).



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In the SCCT perspective, self-efficacy operates as a key factor in how people set goals, estimate their capacities, and react to work-related challenges. High self-efficacy indicates more confidence, autonomy, and resilience; all these characteristics lead to higher job satisfaction. On the other hand, low self-efficacy correlates with emotional exhaustion, job stress, and the intention to leave the profession.

Consistent empirical evidence exists for the positive association between teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Klassen and Chiu (2010) reported that self-efficacy in classroom management and instructional strategies was significantly related to teacher job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$). Gordon et al. (2023), in their systematic review, also confirmed that high self-efficacy motivates and helps to improve psychological well-being in response to workload demands. Additionally, the meta-analysis conducted by Kasalak and Dağyar (2020), reporting a reliable average correlation ($r = 0.28$, 95% CI: 0.26–0.29) between self-efficacy and job satisfaction involving 102 studies with 426,515 teachers from 50 countries, is further support for such a relationship.

Within the group of male early childhood educators, self-efficacy has an important influence, especially for strengthening professional identity and minimizing negative feelings towards gender challenges. Males who have self-assurance in teaching and an ability to connect with the people in their care and respect them are likely to experience job satisfaction and have a strong commitment to the profession. Thus, self-efficacy is considered an important explanatory variable for the differences in job satisfaction of male preschool teachers in the present research according to SCCT.

Positive Affect and Job Satisfaction

Positive affect refers to an individual's propensity to experience pleasurable emotions such as enthusiasm, inspiration, enjoyment, and appreciation in the workplace. Rooted in affective theory (Watson et al., 1988), positive affect is distinguished from negative affect and represents a key dimension of emotional experience that energizes and sustains work engagement.

In the SCCT framework, positive affect is regarded as an affective input that reinforces self-efficacy and enhances outcome expectations. Sustained experiences of positive emotions can elevate intrinsic motivation, encourage deeper engagement in professional roles, and contribute significantly to job satisfaction. Conversely, the absence of positive affect or the predominance of negative emotional states can impair self-perception and reduce commitment to one's career.

Recent empirical studies affirm the significant role of positive affect in determining job satisfaction among educators. Zhang et al. (2024) found that high levels of positive affect among male early childhood educators were significantly correlated with greater job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.01$). Teachers who experience enthusiasm, appreciation, and a sense of meaningfulness in their professional interactions are more likely to demonstrate stronger engagement and lower levels of occupational stress.

These findings are echoed by a meta-analysis conducted by Mohd Rasdi and Ahrari (2020), which reported that affective factors are consistently linked to life satisfaction and career well-being, including among educators. Positive affect also serves a protective function, helping individuals manage the negative impacts of workplace stressors and environmental constraints. This is particularly relevant for male preschool teachers who work in female-dominated environments where they may experience isolation or role ambiguity.

In sum, positive affect not only reflects emotional well-being but also operates as a vital psychological mechanism contributing to job satisfaction. Accordingly, this study positions positive affect as a principal construct in explaining variance in male preschool teachers' job satisfaction, in line with SCCT predictions.



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

This study is guided by the SCCT developed by Lent et al. (1994, 2006), which posits that job satisfaction results from the dynamic interaction among personal, contextual, and affective factors. Within this framework, self-efficacy and outcome expectations are considered core drivers that shape how individuals respond to career-related challenges and opportunities, thereby influencing their commitment and satisfaction (Lent & Brown, 2006). Environmental factors such as organizational support and workplace barriers act as contextual contributors that directly affect career outcomes, including job satisfaction and professional well-being (Lent et al., 2017).

Based on SCCT, this study proposes a conceptual model comprising four independent constructs expected to directly influence the dependent variable, Job Satisfaction. These constructs are elaborated as follows in Table 1.

The dependent variable, Job Satisfaction, is conceptualized as an individual's perception of fulfilment derived from the congruence between career expectations and actual work experiences (Spector, 1997). The overall relationships among the variables are depicted in Figure 1, which presents the proposed conceptual model grounded in the SCCT framework.

In the present study, each construct is mapped directly to SCCT dimensions: self-efficacy (cognitive personal agency), positive affect (affective inputs), school support (contextual supports), and gender-related barriers (contextual barriers). This structure aligns explicitly with SCCT's satisfaction model, which proposes that the interaction of personal agency, emotional experience, and environmental conditions predicts career satisfaction. Thus, the conceptual framework operationalises SCCT in a manner consistent with its original formulation but adapted to account for the unique social identity of male preschool teachers.

Table 1

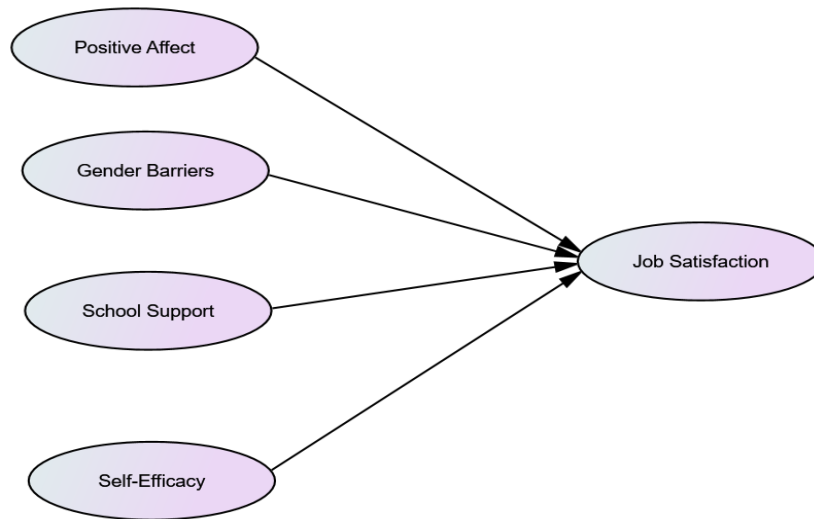
Operational Definitions of Constructs in the Conceptual Model Based on SCCT

Construct	Definition	Key References
Gender Barriers	Psychosocial and structural challenges encountered by male teachers in a female-dominated profession, including gender stereotypes, role ambiguity, and constraints in social interaction.	Cruickshank et al. (2018); Haines et al. (2024)
School Support	Teachers' perceptions of the emotional, professional, and institutional support received from their school, aligning with the concept of Perceived Organizational Support.	Eisenberger et al. (1997)
Self-efficacy	Teachers' beliefs in their capability to effectively perform instructional tasks and manage classroom challenges, influencing both pedagogical effectiveness and occupational well-being.	Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2001); Kasalak & Dağyar (2020); Klassen & Chiu (2010)
Positive Affect	The tendency to experience positive emotions such as enthusiasm, confidence, and a sense of appreciation in the workplace, which enhances motivation, engagement, and psychological resilience.	Watson et al. (1988); Zhang et al. (2024)



Figure 1

Conceptual Model Based on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)



Research Objectives and Hypotheses

Objective. To test a structural model assessing the relationships between positive affect, self-efficacy, school support, and gender barriers on job satisfaction among male preschool teachers using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

Hypotheses.

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between positive affect and job satisfaction among male preschool teachers.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and job satisfaction among male preschool teachers.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between school support and job satisfaction among male preschool teachers.

H4: There is a significant negative relationship between gender barriers and job satisfaction among male preschool teachers.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a non-experimental quantitative design using a cross-sectional survey approach. The primary objective was to test the hypothesized relationships among positive affect, self-efficacy, school support, and gender barriers to predict job satisfaction among male preschool teachers. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was utilized for model testing via AMOS version 24, consistent with methodological recommendations by Zainudin Awang (2023) for testing theoretical models involving latent constructs.

Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of 1,073 male preschool teachers employed under the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE). A stratified and clustered sampling strategy was adopted to ensure geographic representativeness across five major zones: Northern, Central, Eastern, Southern, and East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak). Guided by



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Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and Cohen et al. (2000), a minimum sample size of 284 was deemed sufficient. This study successfully collected and analysed data from 300 respondents, thereby meeting the sample size requirement for SEM as recommended by Hair et al. (2010) and Awang et al. (2018). Including participants across all five geographic zones and varying levels of teaching experience strengthens the representativeness of the sample. This stratified–clustered approach ensures coverage of diverse school environments, thereby increasing the methodological robustness and population relevance of the findings.

Research Instrument

The survey instrument was developed based on five key constructs derived from the SCCT framework: positive affect, self-efficacy, school support, gender barriers, and job satisfaction. Each construct was composed of items that were referred to from instruments for which the validity and reliability have been established; the items were customized to match the specific language applied to male preschool teachers in Malaysia.

Positive Affect was measured by 10 items from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) developed by Watson et al. (1988), based on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). Gender Barriers were assessed by 9 items taken from the Male Primary Teacher Gender Challenge Inventory (Cruickshank et al., 2018), using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree). School Support included eight items taken from the Perceived Organizational Support Scale (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and was also rated on a 7-point Likert scale. Self-efficacy was assessed by 12 items taken from the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), and Job Satisfaction was measured by 10 items based on the short version of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (Spector, 1997). Each construct employed a seven-point Likert scale, following the work by Vagias (2006). The use of both 5-point and 7-point Likert scales is theoretically justified because each construct was measured using its validated original instrument to preserve psychometric integrity. PANAS traditionally uses a 5-point frequency scale, whereas the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale, Gender Challenge Inventory, and Perceived Organizational Support Scale employ 7-point agreement anchors. Retaining these original formats avoids altering scale sensitivity and ensures comparability with prior studies (Vagias, 2006).

The Content Validity Index (CVI), with the participation of three experts in early childhood education and pedagogical psychology, was used to establish content validity. Every item was examined for relevance, clarity, and context. According to Davis (1992), all constructs had a CVI score of 0.8 or greater, suggesting the constructs were content and face valid for this study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD) and All State Education Departments (*Jabatan Pelajaran Negeri*). All respondents participated voluntarily and provided informed consent. Data were anonymised and stored securely to ensure confidentiality.

Respondent Demographic Profile

Table 2

Key Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 300)

Variable	Category	%
Age	≤ 30 years	17.0
	31–40 years	51.3
	≥ 41 years	31.7
School Location	Urban	24.0
	Rural	76.0
Teaching Experience	1–5 years	21.7
	6–10 years	32.7
	≥ 11 years	45.7



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The sample consisted mainly of teachers aged 31–40 years (51.3%), with most working in rural schools (76%). Teaching experience was well distributed, with 21.7% having 1–5 years of experience and 45.7% having more than 11 years, indicating good representation of both early-career and experienced male preschool teachers.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, we conducted the analysis of data through the use of Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modelling (CB-SEM) as recommended by Awang (2018). Descriptive statistics and data pre-processing were done by IBM SPSS version 26, and measurement model as well as structural model evaluations were performed with IBM AMOS version 24. The data analysis consisted of two stages of analysis: CFA for the validation of the measurement model and the structural model for testing the relationships of the hypothesized constructs. Before SEM analysis, data screening procedures were conducted. Missing data were examined and found to be minimal (<2%), and were handled using expectation–maximization as recommended for SEM (Hair et al., 2010). Outliers were screened using Mahalanobis distance ($p < .001$), and no extreme multivariate outliers were detected. Normality assessment indicated acceptable skewness and kurtosis values (within ± 2), supporting the use of CB-SEM with Maximum Likelihood estimation.

Pooled-CFA was used in the 1st stage, which was applied to all the pertaining constructs, allowing the efficient and valid measurement tests of the model. Convergent validity was tested using three criteria: factor loadings above 0.60, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeding 0.50, and Composite Reliability (CR) values at least 0.70. Discriminant validity was assessed through the Fornell-Larcker criterion (criterion: the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct should be greater than the correlation between the construct and other constructs, and none of the inter-construct correlations should be higher than .85). The measurement model was deemed to show adequate construct validity when fit indexes of the model reached or exceeded the minimum suggested cut-off. These cut-offs are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 3

Model Fit Indices and Recommended Thresholds for SEM

Fit Index	Symbol	Value	Reference
Chi-square divided by degrees of freedom	χ^2/df	< 3.00	Awang (2018)
Comparative Fit Index	CFI	≥ 0.90	Hair et al. (2010)
Tucker-Lewis Index	TLI	≥ 0.90	Hair et al. (2010)
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation	RMSEA	≤ 0.08	Awang (2018)
Goodness of Fit Index	GFI	≥ 0.90	Awang (2018)

In the second step, after confirmation of the measurement model, the structural model was built to test the relationships driven by the hypothesized independent variables (positive affect, self-efficacy, school support, gender barriers) with the dependent variable (job satisfaction). Standardized path coefficients (β), C.R., and P values were used to estimate these effects, for which a $p < 0.05$ was considered the threshold of significance. R-square was further computed for the dependent variable to see how much the independent constructs contribute to variance in job satisfaction. In general, formulation of the measurement model (MCFA) allowed for a strong testing of data-based concordance of the model with empirical results, and testing of proposed relationships among the constructs. To address potential common method bias, Harman's single-factor test was conducted. The unrotated factor solution showed that the first factor accounted for 28.4% of the variance, which is below the 50% threshold, indicating that common method bias was not a serious concern in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Measurement Model Validation

A pooled Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to evaluate the construct validity and reliability of the five core variables investigated in this study, namely, positive affect, self-efficacy, school support, gender-related



barriers, and job satisfaction, as illustrated in Figure 2. The results of the analysis demonstrated that all constructs satisfied the requirements for convergent validity. Specifically, all factor loadings exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.60, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were greater than 0.50, and Composite Reliability (CR) values surpassed 0.70, in accordance with the benchmarks established by Awang et al. (2023). These findings indicate that the measurement model possesses acceptable construct validity and internal consistency, thereby justifying its use for subsequent structural model evaluation.

Figure 2

Measurement Relationships between Positive Affect, Self-efficacy, School Support, and Gender Barriers on Job Satisfaction

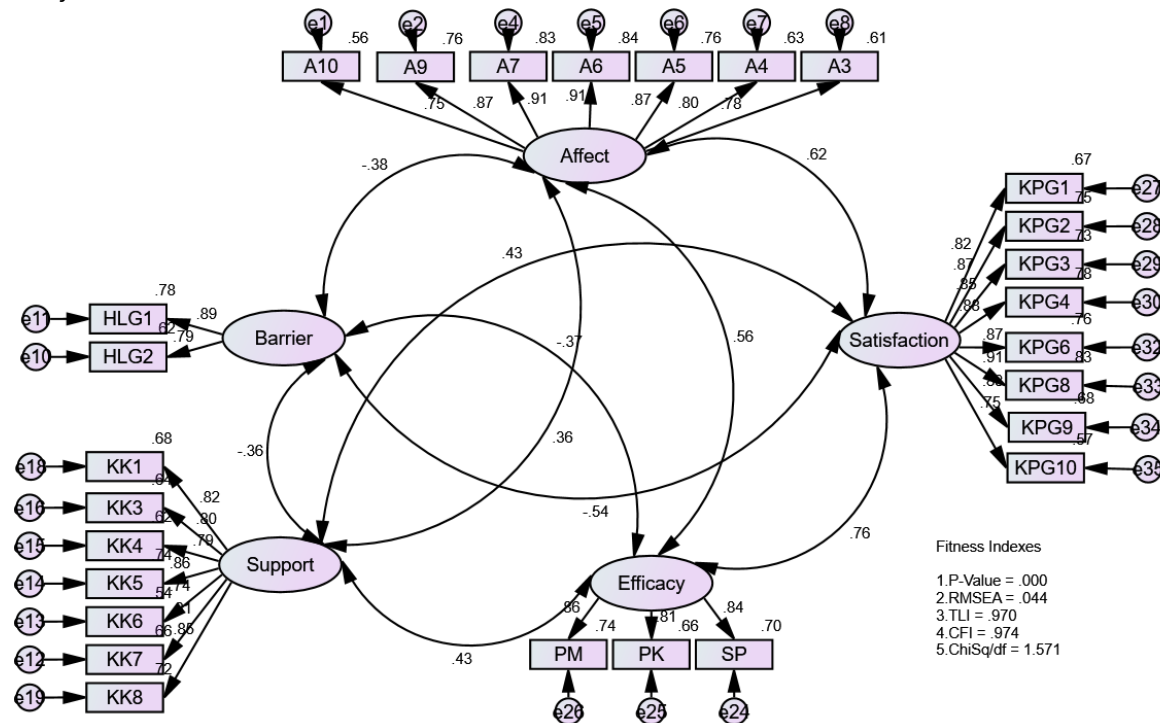


Table 4

Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Items Retained	Loading Range	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha
Positive Affect	7	0.76 – 0.91	0.713	0.945	0.924
Gender Barriers	6	0.72 – 0.89	0.706	0.950	0.885
School Support	7	0.73 – 0.89	0.667	0.947	0.921
Teacher Self-Efficacy	11	0.74 – 0.88	0.702	0.934	0.942
Job Satisfaction	8	0.75 – 0.91	0.718	0.953	0.939

Table 4 presents the results of the measurement model assessment. All constructs demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties. Factor loadings ranged from 0.72 to 0.91, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.60. The AVE values ranged from 0.667 to 0.718, indicating adequate convergent validity. Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.934 to 0.953, while Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranged from 0.885 to 0.942, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. These findings confirm that all constructs achieved acceptable levels of convergent validity and internal consistency reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019).



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Additionally, discriminant validity was confirmed by the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The square roots of the AVE values for each construct were greater than their correlations with other constructs, and no inter-construct correlation exceeded the threshold of 0.85. This indicates that all constructs are conceptually distinct and free from multicollinearity concerns. A summary of the discriminant validity indices is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary of Discriminant Validity Indices

Construct	Positive Affect	Gender Barriers	School Support	Self-efficacy	Job Satisfaction
Positive Affect	0.83				
Gender Barriers	-0.38	0.84			
School Support	0.43	-0.36	0.82		
Self-efficacy	0.56	-0.38	0.43	0.79	
Job Satisfaction	0.62	-0.54	0.43	0.76	0.78

Note. Bold values along the diagonal indicate the square roots of AVE for each construct. Off-diagonal values represent the correlations between the constructs.

The measurement model also demonstrated good fit to the data, as indicated by the following model fit indices: RMSEA = 0.044, CFI = 0.974, TLI = 0.970, and $\chi^2/df = 1.571$. These results align with the guidelines proposed by Awang et al. (2023), emphasizing the importance of construct validity and acceptable model fit before proceeding to the structural model analysis. Collectively, these findings confirm that the measurement model is psychometrically sound and appropriate for subsequent SEM evaluation.

Structural Model Results

The structural model created to evaluate the proposed relationships among the four independent constructs, positive affect, self-efficacy, school support, and gender barriers, and the dependent construct, job satisfaction, demonstrated a good overall model fit. This is evidenced by the following fit indices: Chi-square/df = 1.571, RMSEA = 0.044, CFI = 0.974, and TLI = 0.970.

The structural path analysis revealed that three of the four hypothesized relationships were statistically significant. Positive affect ($\beta = 0.212$, $p < 0.001$), self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.531$, $p < 0.001$), and gender barriers ($\beta = -0.251$, $p < 0.001$) were all significantly associated with job satisfaction. However, school support did not show a significant effect on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.036$, $p = 0.430$). These findings suggest that emotional and psychological variables, along with contextual barriers, have a stronger impact on job satisfaction than perceived institutional support within this population.

The final model explained 68% of the variance in job satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.68$), indicating substantial predictive power of the proposed constructs, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Table 6

Hypothesis Testing Results for the Structural Model

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	β	SE	C.R.	p	95% BC CI
H1	Positive Affect → Job Satisfaction	0.212	0.054	4.137	< .001	[0.096, 0.311]
H2	Self-Efficacy → Job Satisfaction	0.531	0.055	8.743	< .001	[0.420, 0.631]
H3	School Support → Job Satisfaction	0.036	0.058	0.789	.528	[-0.083, 0.147]

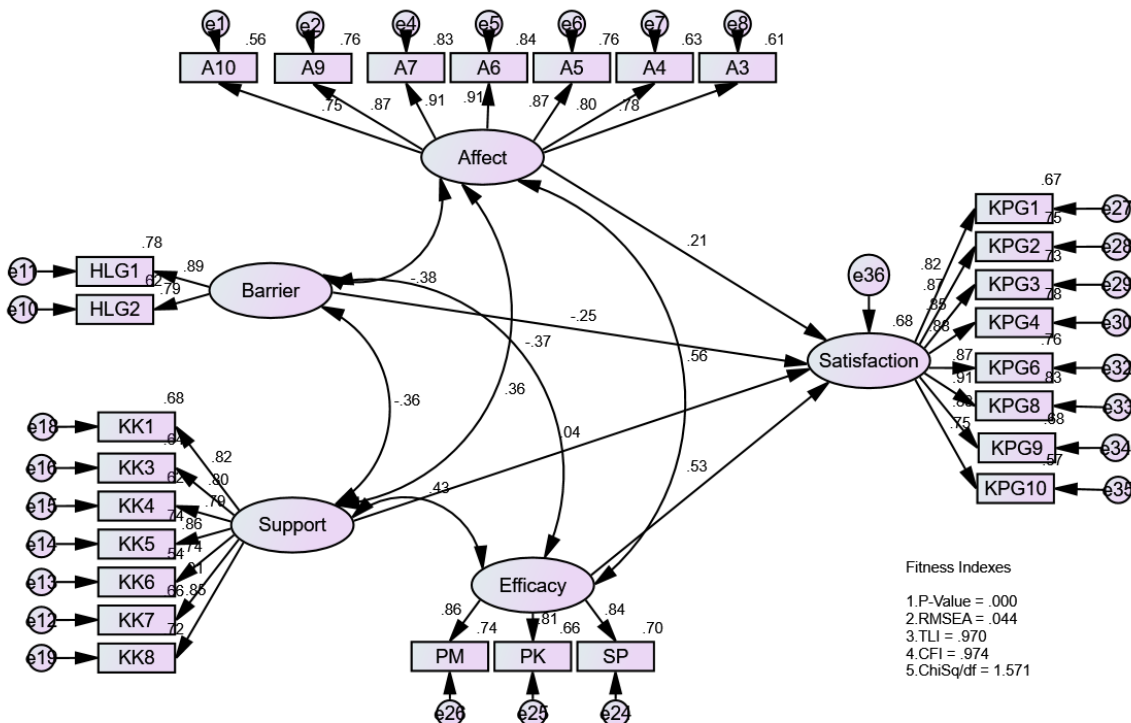


Hypothesis	Path Relationship	β	SE	C.R.	p	95% BC CI
H4	Gender Barriers → Job Satisfaction	-0.251	0.057	-5.058	< .001	[-0.362, -0.141]

Note. β = standardized path coefficient; SE = bootstrap standard error; CI = bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval (95%).

Figure 3

Structural Equation Model of the Relationships between Positive Affect, Self-efficacy, School Support, and Gender Barriers on Job Satisfaction



DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that three out of the four independent constructs, positive affect, self-efficacy, and gender barriers, exhibited significant relationships with job satisfaction among male preschool teachers. These results support the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) framework (Lent et al., 2006), which emphasizes the dynamic interaction of affective, cognitive, and contextual factors in shaping career outcomes.

Self-efficacy emerged as the strongest predictor in this study, consistent with prior research by Klassen and Chiu (2010) and Kasalak and Dağyar (2020), which highlighted the role of professional self-belief in enhancing job satisfaction. This finding affirms that male teachers who are confident in their pedagogical abilities are more likely to experience job satisfaction and remain committed to the profession.

Positive affect also contributed significantly to job satisfaction. In line with Zhang et al. (2024), positive emotions such as enthusiasm and a sense of appreciation foster greater work engagement and reduce psychological stress. These findings underscore the importance of emotional well-being as a determinant of job satisfaction, particularly for minority educators.



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Conversely, gender barriers showed a significant negative relationship with job satisfaction, corroborating the findings of Cruickshank et al. (2018) and Brendel et al. (2023). Perceived stereotypes, role ambiguity, and social restrictions were found to diminish satisfaction with one's professional role. This further supports the theoretical position that negative contextual factors can impair motivation and occupational well-being.

Interestingly, school support did not significantly predict job satisfaction, contrary to earlier studies by Kim and Oh (2024) and Maan et al. (2020). However, this finding should be interpreted with caution and should not be taken as evidence that institutional support is unimportant for male preschool teachers. Several alternative explanations may account for the non-significant relationship. First, respondents may have reported relatively similar levels of perceived school support, resulting in restricted variance and limiting its predictive influence. Second, the support measured in this study may reflect general organisational support rather than forms of support specifically addressing the unique professional experiences of male preschool teachers. Third, perceived support may differ from the actual availability or effectiveness of support mechanisms within schools. It is also possible that existing support structures do not adequately address the challenges associated with being a gender minority in a female-dominated profession. Therefore, while school support was not a significant predictor in the present model, its broader contribution to teacher well-being and professional experiences should not be discounted. Further research is needed to examine how different forms of support influence the job satisfaction of male preschool teachers across diverse educational contexts.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study provide further support for the applicability of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) in understanding job satisfaction among male preschool teachers in Malaysia. The study extends the application of SCCT to an underexplored educational context involving a numerical minority within the early childhood education workforce and highlights the importance of psychosocial and affective factors in shaping professional well-being and job satisfaction. The findings provide additional support for the applicability of SCCT in understanding job satisfaction among male preschool teachers. Consistent with SCCT, self-efficacy and positive affect emerged as significant predictors of job satisfaction, while gender barriers negatively influenced satisfaction. However, the non-significant effect of school support suggests that contextual factors may not operate uniformly across all professional settings. Rather than indicating a need to recalibrate SCCT, the findings point to potential boundary conditions in the application of the theory among gender-minority educators working in female-dominated professions. The results highlight the importance of considering occupational gender composition and sociocultural context when interpreting the role of supports and barriers within the SCCT framework. Further studies across different educational and cultural settings are needed before broader theoretical conclusions can be drawn.

Practical Implications

The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to support male preschool teachers within female-dominated educational environments. Given the significant roles of self-efficacy, positive affect, and gender barriers in predicting job satisfaction, educational institutions should implement structured support mechanisms that strengthen professional confidence and promote workplace inclusion.

Schools and educational authorities may consider establishing male teacher mentoring and peer-support programmes, whereby experienced male educators provide guidance and professional support to newly appointed teachers. Gender-sensitive induction and orientation programmes may also assist male preschool teachers in navigating workplace expectations and reducing feelings of isolation. In addition, professional learning networks specifically designed for male preschool teachers could provide opportunities for collaboration, experience sharing, and professional growth. At the school leadership level, principals and administrators should be provided with training on gender inclusivity and diversity management to ensure that organisational practices are responsive to the needs of educators from underrepresented groups. Schools should also adopt policies and practices that actively



challenge gender stereotypes associated with early childhood education and promote a more inclusive professional culture.

Policy Implications

At the policy level, the Ministry of Education and related agencies should strengthen efforts to attract, support, and retain male teachers within the early childhood education sector. This may include targeted recruitment campaigns that promote teaching as a gender-inclusive profession, as well as retention initiatives aimed at addressing barriers commonly experienced by male educators. Furthermore, policymakers should consider developing guidelines and support frameworks that encourage inclusive workplace environments and equal professional opportunities regardless of gender. Such initiatives may reduce gender imbalance in the profession while enhancing workforce sustainability, teacher well-being, and the overall quality of early childhood education services.

CONCLUSION

Guided by the SCCT, this study explores the influence of positive affect, self-efficacy, school support, and gender barriers on job satisfaction of male PSC teachers. The study results indicate that positive affect, self-efficacy, and gender barriers significantly contribute to job satisfaction, and school support was not found to be a significant predictor of job satisfaction in the present study.

This study's overall relevance to the Malaysian literature is in providing holistic empirical evidence towards the psychosocial impact on professional well-being among male teachers in early childhood settings. The research findings may be utilized as a reference to create a platform for more dynamic, gender-inclusive institutional interventions and support policies toward the national education development objectives and comprehensive reform of the teaching profession.

In order to further investigate possible mechanisms through which these variables are linked, future research may wish to examine mediators such as work engagement, organizational commitment, or occupational stress (i.e., indirect paths), all of which have been established as predictors of job satisfaction.

Furthermore, future studies could widen their perspectives by involving preschool teachers who are working in a variety of institutions; for example, government, private, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community-based educational settings, leading to more generalizable results. Utilisation of mixed methods in this area of research may offer a more comprehensive understanding of the subjective experiences of male teachers who negotiate gendered workplaces.

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