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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# How Does Psychosocial Safety Climate Affect Burnout Among Malaysian Educators During the COVID-19 Pandemic?

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**Abstract:** Nowadays, the COVID-19 pandemic has led Malaysian educators to experience more significant burnout due to job demands. This paper is an effort to examine the reasons that caused burnout among Malaysian educators. A total of 413 Malaysian educators participated in the study. This study's findings revealed that PSC has a significant negative relationship with hindrance demands and burnout, whereas both challenge and hindrance demands have insignificant positive relationships with burnout. Furthermore, the study showed that two variables—challenge demands and hindrance demands—played significant mediators in the relationship between PSC and burnout. As a result, it is concluded that PSC can reduce the unfavorable characteristics of hindrance demands and burnout among Malaysian educators. This paper's findings are valuable to academics and experts who wish to minimize the burnout pervasiveness among Malaysian educators.

**Keywords:** psychosocial safety climate, PSC, burnout, job demands, challenge demands, hindrance demands, Malaysian educators, education, Malaysia, Covid-19

The Malaysian education system is the same as in most of the world. Students are admitted to school from the age of 7 years in primary school. After completing the 11 years of compulsory primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, they reach post-secondary education. Educators at all the different levels feel stress under the pandemic (Chen et al., 2014). Today, an educator's role involves demanding teaching quality and administrative work. They may also be responsible for disciplining and counseling the students. On the other hand, there are additional responsibilities for academics

from tertiary education, such as conducting remarkable research and commercializing their research products. As a result, the prevalence of occupational stress among Malaysian educators is escalating due to the exhausting job demands.

COVID-19 left its mark on the Malaysian educators' as well. The first case of COVID-19 was reported in early 2020, and within a few months, the World Health Organization (WHO) had officially announced the pandemic status of COVID-19. On March 18, 2020, the Malaysian government also

took precautionary measures by implementing the movement control order (MCO). Later, the Malaysian government kept revising the initial MCO as the situation was building and developing. The most recent recovery movement control order (RMCO), enforced on June 10, 2020, is still in place.

Due to this restricted movement, Malaysia's whole education sector moved to distance learning (Arumugam, 2020). Life under the MCO has blurred the line between all the educators' personal and professional life. They find the balance between intellect and emotional responsibilities—both as a teacher and as a human. Both educators and students are learning to cope with a new norm of the education environment. According to Bernama (2020), an English teacher had stated that he has been struggling with the current online teaching method as it is very challenging for him to teach in non-urban areas. Besides, he mentioned that the most significant impediment is that students have a poor internet connection. Another teacher stated that online teaching could be challenging as the teachers need to make sure that they are interested, motivated, and engaged during the online classes (Unsworth, 2020). These new education challenges have indirectly increased educators' job demands because they are also learning how to navigate the online environment by adapting to the new online teaching method. Additionally, when educators' workload levels increase, their burnout levels rise accordingly (Teoh & Kee, 2020).

Because of addressing the burnout issue among Malaysian educators during the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the psychosocial safety climate (PSC) is proposed in this paper as a leading indicator to provide manageable job demands for Malaysian educators. Idris et al. (2014) reported that an organization with a high PSC implementation level might remove unnecessary opposing job demands for its employees. Moreover, Teoh and Kee (2020) recommended that PSC be used to mitigate the burnout levels among employees directly and indirectly. Consequently, this paper investigates how PSC can minimize job demands' negative characteristics so that Malaysian educators' workloads become feasible while the burnout levels can be decreased. Furthermore, it is also interesting to determine how PSC can reduce Malaysian educators' burnout levels through manageable job demands. As a result, the objectives of the present study are to determine the predictors

(PSC and job demands) of burnout among Malaysian educators, as well as to examine the mediating roles of job demands between PSC and burnout among Malaysian educators.

The present study presents its novelty by identifying the predictors of burnout among Malaysian educators, while this enriches the limited literature of burnout among the Malaysian education industry (Henny et al., 2014; Watts & Robertson, 2011). Furthermore, this paper takes the call from Yulita et al. (2014) to test different job demands with PSC and burnout, respectively. The study also builds on the research by Idris et al. (2011), which urged future researchers to consider the promising mediators on the relationship between PSC and burnout. Hence, we used challenge demands and hindrance demands to replace the general job demands to test the direct connections between PSC and burnout and the promising mediators on the relationship between PSC and burnout. On top of that, PSC is new in Malaysia, and it is yet to be implemented in the education industry throughout the world. Therefore, this study makes a case that PSC is applied in various Malaysian education institutions' work settings. This can help to enlighten future researchers about Malaysian educators' well-being through the benefits of PSC.

The present study is divided into six parts. The first part exposes the readers to the background of the study, problem statements, objectives, and novelty of the study. Literature relating to the study variables is reviewed in the second part of the present study. Besides, the underlying theory and hypotheses are also included in the second part of the study. Meanwhile, the third part of the present study presents the methodology employed in the study, which consists of research design and research setting, survey data, as well as research instruments. The fourth part exhibits the results and findings of the study. The fifth part of the present study discusses the findings of this study. Lastly, the sixth part concludes the findings, implications of the study, limitations in this study, and suggestions for future directions.

## Literature Review

### *Burnout*

Burnout is the outcome of long working hours or dealing with situations beyond the control of oneself

over a more extended period (Harrison, 1999). On the one hand, the organizations lose the employees' productivity, and on the other hand, burnout can cause mental and physical health challenges for the employees (Brittle, 2020). Harrison (1999) said that burnout could be explained as a state of fatigue in terms of physical, mental, and emotional due to enduring involvement in work-related conditions that are extravagantly challenging. On the other hand, burnout can be defined as resulting from incessant workforce stress, which is yet to be administered effectively (WHO, 2019). Maslach and Jackson (1981) went on to say that when a person loses hope and is exhausted while at work (emotional), feeling incapable of completing the task and numb about the assigned task (depersonalization), and start neglecting the work (loss of productivity), all these are signs of burnout. Emotional exhaustion is when individuals feel tired and overused even right after they wake up due to their physical and emotional resources being fully consumed (Wright & Bonnet, 1997).

On the other hand, depersonalization is a negative, indifferent, and disconnected attitude toward customers, colleagues, and the organization (Maslach et al., 2001). Lastly, loss of personal accomplishment is described as a feeling of incompetence and inadequacy while coping with job demands (Togia, 2005). However, burnout is a long-suffering state of being out of energy and perpetually overwhelmed and exhausted, lacking the passion and enthusiasm for the job that was antecedently presented, as well as reduced motivation and professional efficacy (Henny et al., 2014). Hence, burnout is developed within an individual through different stages from time to time (Juliana et al., 2021; Ahmad, Saffardin & Teoh, 2020).

### ***Job Demands***

In the perspective of job demands (JD), the prior studies had suggested differentiating JDs as a challenge and hindrance demands (Cavanaugh et al., 2000, Yulita et al., 2014). The demand's effect relies upon how stress appears either by promoting or impeding personal development and attainment. Challenge demands allow employees to boost personal accomplishment at work. For example, more accountability, task complexity, job scope, working for long hours, and short deadline may increase stress levels, but eventually, these promote personal development, creativity, and innovative attainment (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). Meanwhile,

hindrance demands, such as role ambiguity, red tape, role conflict, job insecurity, and organizational politics (Cavanaugh et al., 2000), may decrease personal advancement and increase negative consequences, such as anxiety, anger, and counterproductive style, as well as turnover and disengagement behaviors (Ooi & Teoh, 2021). An employee tends to confuse their fundamental role and lower their performance due to hindrance stressors. As a result, we follow the suggestions by Cavanaugh et al. (2000) and Yulita et al. (2014) to use challenge demands and hindrance demands in replacing the general job demands.

### ***Psychosocial Safety Climate***

PSC is perceived as a common understanding among employees about the policies, routines, and processes related to employees' psychological health and well-being (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). PSC suggests that the priorities and values upheld by the management determine the type of organizational climate encountered by employees. Senior management and organizational structures play a critical part in the constructs depicted in the job Demands-Resources pathways. There are four areas to categorize the level to which the senior management and organization expedite and advocate an emphasis on psychosocial well-being and development (Hall et al., 2010). Therefore, PSC can precede job conditions because the management is mainly responsible for how job design is made. There are four areas to categorize the levels to which the senior management and organization expedite and advocate psychosocial well-being and development. These four areas include a priority for psychosocial health and safety, top administration, and promise to reduce all those activities, increasing the stress, and the organization's participation and communication to exert strategies to obtain well-being.

### ***Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory***

This paper focuses on the COR theory by Hobfoll (1989) because it explains how individuals are likely to be affected by the stressful conditions, what those stressful conditions are, and how individuals respond to accumulate and protect their available resources. Hence, the COR theory can contribute to the understanding of burnout scenarios among Malaysian educators. As per the COR theory, employees endeavor to construct, safeguard, and uphold personal characteristics, conditions, and energies that help them deal with

job demands. However, as individuals fail to do so when coping with the significance of job demands, reducing their resources may expedite stress or burnout (Hobfoll, 1989). Consequently, individuals tend to assure their physical and psychological well-being by focusing on other resources that serve as essential components of their burnout counteraction armory. In conjunction with that, PSC is employed as an organizational resource to affect individuals with lesser resources (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). Based on the COR theory, PSC acts as a passageway of the resource caravan, where resources are channeled, funneled, and supplied through this mechanism.

Additionally, this resource caravan is protected and preserved by boosting and reimbursing low resources at the job level. Therefore, individuals are assured with adequate resources at work, which improves their coping capacity that increases the features of challenge demands, and reduces the implications of hindrance demands. Besides, through the resource caravans, individuals are supplied with a competent number of resources at work, thus protecting them from burnout due to the absence of resource reduction. With that, it is explained through the COR theory that a high level of PSC can promote the positive features of challenge demands but reduce the negative characteristics of hindrance demands and the levels of burnout among individuals. Furthermore, this has also alerted that both challenge demands and hindrance demands could be the possible mediators between PSC and burnout. As a result, the following hypotheses are postulated:

- H1: PSC is negatively associated with burnout.
- H2: Challenge demands are positively associated with burnout.
- H3: Hindrance demands are positively associated with burnout.
- H4: PSC is positively associated with challenging demands.
- H5: PSC is negatively associate with hindrance demands.
- H6: There is an indirect association between psychological safety climate and burnout via challenge demands.

- H7: There is an indirect association between psychological safety climate and burnout via hindrance demands.

## Methods

### *Research Design and Research Setting*

This is an empirical study, where all primary data were collected from preschools, primary schools, secondary schools, and tertiary institutions in Malaysia. A purposive sampling method is adopted in this study because the sample was selected with three criteria. Firstly, respondents were working with their existing institutions for at least 12 months. Secondly, participants should be working as full-time employees. Lastly, respondents were currently working in preschools, primary schools, secondary schools, tertiary institutions located in Malaysia. The reason for selecting a respondent employed for more than one year is to obtain a more precise and fair evaluation of the research outcomes. We also set the criteria for their respondents to be full-time educators because it is believed that full-time educators are more committed to their work compared to part-time educators. This is reinforced by Conway and Briner (2002) that there is two type of employees: full time and part-time, which have different attitudes. This is understandable because of their work status and psychological contracts.

### *Survey Data*

A survey of the education industry in Malaysia is conducted to collect quantitative data. We contacted preschools, primary schools, secondary schools, and tertiary institutions and informed them about the current study's purpose. Administrators permit us to do the research. The questionnaires were then placed in an envelope to distribute among the educators with their administrators' help. A printed questionnaire was distributed to a total of 686 persons. We received 415 filled questionnaires—representing a response rate of 60.5%. About two-thirds of the respondents were female (66.1%). Over one-fifth of them were between the age of 31 to 35 years old (23.7%). Among the respondents, 66.8% were Malay. Around three-fourth of the respondents were married (76.8%), and it is comparable in the number of respondents in terms of their current working institutions; 29.1% had worked

for their institutions for not more than five years. Table 1 shows a summary of the profiles of respondents.

### **Research Instruments**

#### ***Psychosocial Safety Climate***

A 12-item scale adapted from Hall et al. (2010) was employed in this study to assess psychosocial safety climate. An example of the items includes, “There are a participation and consultation in psychological health and safety among employees, unions and health and safety representatives in my workplace.” A 5-point Likert scale was used to collect the responses, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

#### ***Challenge Demands and Hindrance Demands***

A 5-item scale for each challenge demands and hindrance demands was adopted from Cavanaugh et al. (2000) and LePine et al. (2004) to assess job demands. Respondents participated using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a very great extent). An example of challenge demands is, “The volume of work that must be accomplished in the allotted time.” In contrast, an instance of hindrance demands is, “The degree to which office politics rather than performance affects organizational decisions.”

**Table 1**

*Profiles of Respondents*

<b>Demographic Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Sex	Male	140	33.9
	Female	273	66.1
Age	25-30	9	2.2
	31-35	98	23.7
	36-40	91	22.0
	41-45	86	20.8
	46-50	63	15.3
	51-55	33	8.0
	56-60	26	6.3
	61 and above	7	1.7
Ethnicity	Malay	276	66.8
	Chinese	96	23.2
	Indian	24	5.8
	Others	17	4.1
Marital Status	Single	80	19.4
	Married	317	76.8
	Divorced	14	3.4
	Widowed	2	0.5
Institutions	Preschool	102	24.7
	Primary school	103	24.9
	Secondary school	104	25.2
	Tertiary institution	104	25.2
Tenure with the Organization	1-5 years	120	29.1
	6-10 years	102	24.7
	11-15 years	81	19.6
	16-20 years	50	12.1
	21 years and above	60	14.5



### ***Burnout***

Respondents were requested to assess the 8-item scale for burnout, adopted from Demerouti et al. (2003). A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) is employed. The item includes, “After work, I tend to need more time than in the past to relax and feel better.”

## **Results**

The SmartPLS version 3.2.8 was used for PLS modeling because it does not need the assumption of normality, whereas the distribution of social research is used to be not normal (Chin et al., 2003). First of all, the full collinearity was tested to address common method variance because the data collection was done through a single source (Kock & Lynn, 2012). In this approach,

bias is claimed to emerge from the single-source data when a value of VIF is at most 3.3. As shown in Table 4, it is observed that the VIF values are all lower than 3.3, and this implies that the single source bias is not a severe issue with the data collected.

### ***Measurement Model***

According to Anderson and Gerbing’s (1988) suggestions, the model developed is tested with a 2-step approach. Firstly, the model was assessed using the protocols of Hair et al. (2019) to examine the validity and reliability of the instruments used. Next, the structural model was run to evaluate the hypotheses constructed.

For the measurement model, we evaluated the loadings (at least 0.5), average variance extracted (AVE; at least 0.5), and the composite reliability (CR; at least 0.7). Based on Table 2, all the figures of AVEs

**Table 2**

#### *Measurement Model*

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Loadings</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>CR</b>
Psychosocial Safety Climate	PSC1	0.852	0.710	0.967
	PSC2	0.788		
	PSC3	0.870		
	PSC4	0.859		
	PSC5	0.880		
	PSC6	0.882		
	PSC7	0.888		
	PSC8	0.825		
	PSC9	0.772		
	PSC10	0.789		
	PSC11	0.820		
	PSC12	0.875		
Challenge Demands	CD1	0.822	0.770	0.944
	CD2	0.868		
	CD3	0.910		
	CD4	0.903		
	CD5	0.881		
Hindrance Demands	HD1	0.807	0.629	0.871
	HD2	0.796		
	HD3	0.835		
	HD5	0.730		
Burnout	B1	0.829	0.667	0.863
	B2	0.819		
	B4	0.820		

Note: HD4, B3, B5, B6, B7, and B8 were deleted due to low loadings

are larger than 0.5, and the CRs are more extensive than 0.7. Furthermore, the loadings were satisfactory, where merely one loading of hindrance demands and five burnout loadings were lesser than 0.708 (Hair et al., 2019).

After that, the HTMT criterion was used to assess discriminant validity. As exhibited in Table 3, the HTMT values were all lower than the more stringent criterion of  $\leq 0.85$ . Hence, it is concluded that respondents apprehended that the four constructs were distinctly different. As a result, these validity tests indicated that the measurement models are both valid and reliable.

**Structural Model**

Following the suggestions by Hair et al. (2017) and Cain et al. (2017), the multivariate skewness and kurtosis were evaluated. In the evaluation, multivariate skewness of Mardia ( $\beta = 0.988, p < 0.01$ ) and multivariate kurtosis of Mardia ( $\beta = 24.519, p > 0.05$ ) demonstrated that the distribution of data was not multivariate normal. Next, the path coefficients, the standard errors, t-values, and p-values for the structural

model using a 5,000-sample resample bootstrapping procedure was presented (Ramayah et al., 2018). Moreover, it was criticized that p-values were no longer a good benchmark to test the significance of hypotheses but to use a combination of criteria, that are p-values, confidence intervals, and effect sizes (Hahn & Ang, 2017). Table 4 demonstrates a summary of the criteria we used to evaluate the hypotheses developed.

First, we assessed the effect of the three predictors on burnout. The  $R^2$  was 0.383 ( $Q^2 = 0.250$ ), which shows that all three predictors explained 38.3% of the variance in burnout. PSC ( $\beta = -0.136, p < 0.05$ ) was negatively related to burnout, whereas challenge demands ( $\beta = 0.336, p < 0.05$ ) and hindrance demands ( $\beta = 0.319, p < 0.05$ ) were both positively related to burnout. Thus, H1, H2, and H3 were all supported. Next, we tested the effect on challenge demands, with an  $R^2$  of 0.062 ( $Q^2 = 0.046$ ), which indicates that PSC explains 6.2% of the variance in challenge demands. Nonetheless, PSC ( $\beta = -0.249, p < 0.05$ ) was significantly related to challenging demands and was in the opposite direction as hypothesized. Therefore, this implies that H4 was not supported. On the other hand,

**Table 3**

*Discriminant Validity (HTMT)*

	1	2	3	4
1. Burnout				
2. Challenge Demands	0.596			
3. Hindrance Demands	0.654	0.481		
4. Psychosocial Safety Climate	0.412	0.263	0.480	

**Table 4**

*Hypothesis Testing Direct Effects*

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std Beta	Std Error	t-values	p-values	BCI LL	BCI UL	f <sup>2</sup>	VIF
H1	PSC → Burnout	-0.136	0.048	2.816	0.002	-0.214	-0.056	0.024	1.232
H2	CD → Burnout	0.336	0.046	7.303	0.000	0.258	0.409	0.150	1.217
H3	HD → Burnout	0.319	0.047	6.731	0.000	0.238	0.393	0.119	1.394
H4	PSC → CD	-0.249	0.048	5.126	0.000	-0.323	-0.165	0.066	1.000
H5	PSC → HD	-0.426	0.042	10.151	0.000	-0.491	-0.351	0.222	1.000

Note: 95% confidence interval with a bootstrapping of 5,000 is used



**Table 5***Hypothesis Testing Indirect Effects*

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std Beta	Std Error	t-values	p-values	BCI LL	BCI UL
H6	PSC → CD → Burnout	-0.111	0.025	4.464	0.000	-0.160	-0.064
H7	PSC → HD → Burnout	-0.191	0.028	6.898	0.000	-0.248	-0.139

Note: 95% confidence interval with a bootstrapping of 5,000 is used

**Table 6***PLS-Predict*

Item	PLS RMSE	LM RMSE	PLS-LM	Q <sup>2</sup> _predict
B1	1.054	1.068	-0.014	0.084
B2	1.018	1.033	-0.015	0.060
B4	1.003	1.009	-0.006	0.095

we assessed the effect on hindrance demands, with an  $R^2$  of 0.182 ( $Q^2 = 0.112$ ), which denotes that PSC explains 18.2% of the variance in hindrance demands. Similarly, H5 was supported because PSC ( $\beta = -0.426$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) was negatively related to hindrance demands.

We consider Preacher and Hayes' (2004; 2008) recommendations to evaluate the mediation hypotheses by bootstrapping the indirect effect. It is concluded that the mediation is significant when the confidence interval does not straddle a 0. As shown in Table 5, PSC → CD → Burnout ( $\beta = -0.111$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) was significant because its confidence interval bias-corrected 95% did not straddle a 0, which gives rise to H6 being supported. On the other hand, PSC → HD → Burnout ( $\beta = -0.191$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) was shown to be significant because its confidence interval bias-corrected 95% did not straddle a 0, and this indicates that H7 was supported.

Following Shmueli et al.'s (2019) suggestions, PLS predict was used to inspect for predictive relevance in the study. They claimed that if all the item differences (PLS-LM) were lesser than predictive significance, then there is strong predictive power; if all are higher than predictive significance, then the predictive power is not confirmed; if the majority is lower than predictive relevance, then there is moderate predictive power; if the minority is lower than predictive significance, then there is low predictive power. Based on Table 6, all of

the PLS model errors were lesser than the LM model errors; thus, we can conclude that our model has high predictive power.

## Discussion

This study aims to determine the implications of PSC, challenge demands, and hindrance demands on burnout. The present study also examines the mediating roles of challenge demands and hindrance demands on the relationship between PSC and burnout. Hypothesis 1 was supported because the survey realized that PSC has a significant negative relationship with burnout. The meaningful negative relationship between PSC and burnout shows that Malaysian education institutions with high PSC levels can lower burnout among educators. This finding is consistent with the prior studies that a high level of PSC decreases the burnout levels among employees (Heffernan et al., 2018; Huyghebaert et al., 2018; Mansour & Tremblay, 2019; Teoh & Kee, 2018, 2019). A low PSC level increases burnout among employees (Idris et al., 2011; Idris & Dollard, 2011; Law et al., 2011).

On the other hand, this relationship can be understood via the COR theory's perspective (Hobfoll, 1989) that Malaysian educators experience burnout due to resource depletion. Consequently, PSC can

be employed as an organizational resource to affect individuals with a lower level of resources (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). The present paper suggests that PSC can facilitate appropriate resource allocation and job control within the workplace, minimizing educators' burnout levels. The paper argues, therefore, that greater levels of PSC reduce the burnout levels among educators.

The relationship between challenge demands and burnout was positively significant in the study, and thus H2 was supported. These many relationships imply that high levels of challenge demands can trigger higher burnout levels among Malaysian educators. This finding concurs with the previous studies that challenge demands, such as time constraints, workload, and increased job responsibility, tend to elevate employee burnout levels even though this lead to personal achievement, creativity, and ingenious attainment (Abbas & Raja, 2019; Han et al., 2019; LePine et al., 2004; Van den Broeck et al., 2010; Yulita et al., 2014). This scenario can be explained by employing the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001) that challenge demands are still the demands at work, which cause the depletion of energy within employees. Consequently, a greater level of challenge demands predicts a higher level of burnout among Malaysian educators.

Meanwhile, the relationship between hindrance demands and burnout was also positively significant in the study, which denotes that H3 was supported. Malaysian educators had experienced a greater level of burnout when they faced a higher level of hindrance demands. This finding is in line with the past studies that the elements of hindrance demands, such as role conflict and office politics, lead to the occurrence of burnout (Abbas & Raja, 2019; Idris et al., 2011; Pien et al., 2019; Riedl & Thomas, 2019). According to the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), Malaysian educators strive to build, protect, and maintain the resources that facilitate them to deal with job demands. Nevertheless, when one fails to cope with the significant hindrance demands, reducing their resources may promote stress or burnout (Hobfoll, 1989). As a result, failing to manage hindrance demands among Malaysian educators could lead them to experience burnout.

The present study did not support Hypothesis 4. Though PSC was hypothesized to have a positive relationship with challenge demands, the present study found that PSC is significantly and negatively related

to challenging demands. Hence, this present finding projects discrepancies with the prior studies, which unveiled that the benefits of PSC are perceived as a mechanism to cultivate a better working environment and operationalized to possess a positive relationship with challenging job demands (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; LePine et al., 2005). These inconsistencies can be delineated through the basic features of challenge demands that are considered job demands. It is further supported by previous research that discovered that challenge demands could lead to emotional exhaustion among employees (Yulita et al., 2014). Similarly, the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001) indicates that challenge demands are one of the demands that lead to energy depletion because resources are still being lost to cope with challenge demands (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001). As a result, PSC could reduce the characteristics of challenge demands because its roles are to decrease workplace barriers that could place employees under stress (Yulita et al., 2014).

On the other hand, PSC was negatively and significantly related to hindrance demands in the study, where H5 was supported. This result implies that a high PSC level in Malaysian education institutions can decrease the adverse effects of hindrance demands. This finding corroborates the prior studies that the implementation of PSC at the team level could reduce the extents of hindrance demands (Yulita et al., 2014), mitigate the unfavorable work outcomes (Idris et al., 2012), and prioritize the well-being of employees (Idris et al., 2015). Likewise, it can be perceived through the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) that PSC in the Malaysian education industry, which acts as a resource caravan passageway, serves as another type of job resource that enhances the coping capacity of Malaysian educators towards their work. On the other hand, Malaysian educators assured with adequate resources at work due to PSC's benefits could also improve their coping capacity, reducing the unfavorable implications of hindrance demands. As a consequence, the education industry with PSC applications can reduce the unnecessary features of hindrance demands.

For the mediators in the study, the result demonstrated that challenge demands are a significant mediator on the relationship between PSC and burnout, and hence, H6 was supported. This meaningful indirect relationship highlights that a high PSC level in Malaysian education institutions could reduce the essential characteristics of challenging job demands.

The unfavorable effects of job demands are avoided, and a better working environment is promoted. The COR theory also proposes that individuals tend to experience psychological stress when there is a vigorous loss in resources due to unmanageable job demands. Hence, PSC can be used as an alternative resource to provide feasible job demands at work to avoid resource loss, ultimately reducing the burnout level among employees (Yulita et al., 2014). Consequently, the job resources used to deal with job demands can be preserved, and Malaysian educators are less likely to be exposed to burnout. Hence, challenge demands act as a negative mediator between PSC and burnout.

Moreover, the study's finding also exhibited that the indirect relationship between PSC and burnout is significant via hindrance demands, which denotes the support of H7. This finding suggests that an excellent PSC level in Malaysian education institutions can drive the education ministry to decrease the features of hindrance demands. The loss of resources due to unfavorable demands can be avoided. This is consistent with the study by Yulita et al. (2014), who claimed that PSC is a specific climate upheld by management initiative to protect employees' well-being, providing motivation that supports the needs of employees as well as the removal of any hindrance that may obstruct employees in achieving their tasks goals. For instance, role ambiguity, role conflict, organizational politics, hassles, and red tape (which occur within Malaysian educators' job demands) are reduced through the implementation of PSC at Malaysian education institutions. As a result, Malaysian educators are not likely to experience a certain level of burnout because their resources to perform their work are maintained and preserved. Thus, hindrance demands serve as a negative mediator between PSC and burnout.

## Conclusion

This paper investigates the predictors of burnout among Malaysian educators due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The potential mediating role of job demands on the relationship between PSC and burnout is also examined. The results show that PSC is significantly and negatively related to challenging demands, hindrance demands, and burnout. Meanwhile, both challenge demands and hindrance demands were

significantly and positively associated with burnout. Moreover, both challenge demands and hindrance demands were shown as a significant mediator between PSC and burnout. Therefore, this signifies that PSC, which acts as a resource caravan, can channel the resources to Malaysian educators to possess adequate resources to cope with the increased demands during the Covid-19 pandemic. With that, the unnecessary job demands are handled while no additional loss of resources is expected, leading to the least experience of burnout among Malaysian educators. In a nutshell, this paper concludes that the Malaysian education industry with PSC implementation is expected to provide manageable job demands for their educators, which minimizes the burnout levels among educators despite the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic still exist. In conjunction with that, the management from all levels of the Malaysian education industry is proposed to implement PSC in the institutions because PSC helps to supply feasible job demands, which could decrease the burnout levels among educators from preschool to tertiary education level.

## *Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions*

The present study has contributed empirical support to the employment of the COR theory. Westman et al. (2005) appealed to the researchers to enrich the COR theory by exploiting different variables. Hence, as a response to the calls of Westman et al. (2005), the present study enhanced the COR theory by investigating different variables in a comprehensive research framework to examine the stressor-strain relationship. The present study develops on the work of Hall et al. (2010) by inspecting PSC within the context of the COR theory. It is shown that PSC, which acts as the organizational resource, serves as a significant antecedent of challenge demands, hindrance demands, and burnout. This study demonstrates that PSC can reduce the fundamental features of both challenge and hindrance demands, which subsequently lead to a lower level of burnout. Furthermore, PSC was exhibited to have a significant indirect relationship with burnout via challenge demands and hindrance demands as the mediators. As a result, it extends our apprehension on the employment of the COR theory in the Malaysian education industry.

This study is practically substantial to the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). The study will provide insights on

how PSC in the Malaysian education industry, which serves as a resource caravan, can promote a better working environment during the COVID-19 pandemic through manageable job demands, which in turn lead to a minimum level of burnout among Malaysian educators. As a result, through PSC implementation in the Malaysian education industry, management's commitment to prioritize the educators' psychosocial health and safety in each education institution can be increased. In contrast, the educators' stress prevention during the COVID-19 pandemic can be established via the communication and commitment of all educators' levels.

In this study, there are a few limitations. One of the limitations is the limited data of COVID-19 issues related to the education systems in Malaysia. Only a little information could be found regarding how the COVID-19 pandemic has increased Malaysian educators' job demands, leading them to experience burnout. Besides, this study's results could not be used for generalization purposes because only a small sample of educators was examined in this study. Furthermore, this study is done upon single-source data collection, where the issue of common method variance could be formed in the present study. On top of that, the present study did not address the demographic differences within the sample, such as gender and age. Therefore, the findings in the present study could be more informative with the interpretations of demographic factors.

For future research, more COVID-19 data related to educational settings can be collected so that a better understanding is developed of how the COVID-19 pandemic affects the Malaysian education industry. Moreover, a larger and more representative sample of educators from each state in Malaysia can be included. Also, a longitudinal study on burnout of Malaysian educators during the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic is developed so that the causality between the variables adopted in this study is sufficiently presented. Last but not least, demographic differences among Malaysian educators can be considered to explore further how each demographic variable is related to burnout, whereas a better mechanism can be proposed to address the issues of burnout due to the demographic differences.

### **Declaration of ownership:**

This report is our original work.

### **Conflict of interest:**

None.

### **Ethical clearance:**

This study was approved by our institution.

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