

Key Factors Shaping Academic Job Performance in Malaysian Higher Education

Kok Ban Teoh¹, Cherian Mohan², Yeok Han Wong², Jia Yang Wu², Yi Han Wu²,
Yun Han Wu², Daisy Mui Hung Kee²,

¹National Higher Education Research Institute, Universiti Sains Malaysia,
11900 Bayan Lepas, Penang, Malaysia.

²Universiti Sains Malaysia, Jalan Sg Dua, 11800 Minden, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

Corresponding Email: yeokhan2875@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1531-1310>¹

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This study investigates the factors that influence academic job performance among lecturers in Malaysian higher education institutions (HEIs). According to the theories from organizational psychology and higher education research, the study examined four key predictors, which are personality traits (conscientiousness and openness), motivation, lecturer professional autonomy, and transformational leadership. The study used the quantitative research design by using an online questionnaire, and a total of 150 valid responses were collected from lecturers across Malaysian HEIs. The data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics and correlational analysis to determine the relationships between variables. The findings are expected to provide insights on how individual dispositions, internal motivation, workplace autonomy, and leadership practices collectively shape lecturer's performance. To provide a useful implication for institutional policies, lecturer development, and leadership practices, this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of performance determinants in the Malaysian higher education context.

Keywords: Academic Job Performance; Personality Traits, Motivation; Lecturer Professional Autonomy; Transformational Leadership

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, global academic institutions are changing quickly, thus leading to increased demands and performance standards on lecturers. The performance of university lecturers today not only demands that they are effective in teaching, but they are also required to excel in research production and administrative work. Hence, these expanded responsibilities have increased the work pressure of the lecturer and reshaped the nature of academic work, especially in public higher education institutions (Altbach et al., 2019).

In Malaysia, government-driven initiatives to boost public universities' global competitiveness and international rankings further intensify these challenges, making academic job performance a critical indicator of institutional effectiveness and educational quality (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2021).

Lecturers in Malaysian public universities face a variety of challenges, which is including excessive workload, increasing administrative responsibilities, reduced professional autonomy, declining motivation, and inconsistent leadership supervision. These issues will affect lecturer's performance and negatively affect their well-being, teaching quality, research output, and the long-term sustainability of higher education institutions. Previous studies have extensively examined determinants of job performance in higher education, with personality traits and work motivation identified as significant predictors of employee behavior and performance at the individual level.

The leadership styles and job autonomy at the organizational level affect work engagement, satisfaction, and productivity. While existing literature has explored these determinants independently, focusing rather on single-variable relationships at the expense of possible interaction effects, empirical studies dealing with Malaysian public universities amidst institutional reforms have remained limited.

Transformational leadership has received growing attention in organizational research, yet its influence on academic job performance in Malaysian public higher education institutions remains underexplored; professional autonomy varying considerably across faculties and institutional contexts has not been sufficiently examined as a key determinant of lecturers' job performance, with the lack of integrated multi-level investigations limiting the understanding of how leadership practices and professional autonomy jointly shape academic job performance in this context.

The present study addresses these gaps by empirically investigating the combined effects of transformational leadership and professional autonomy on academic job performance among lecturers in Malaysian public universities using quantitative survey data; it adopts a multi-level analytical perspective to contribute to existing literature by offering a more comprehensive understanding of how organizational and job-related factors interact to influence academic performance (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020).

This study's findings are expected to provide valuable implications for university administrators and policymakers by identifying actionable strategies to enhance lecturer productivity, strengthen leadership practices, promote professional autonomy and foster a more supportive academic work environment; the research ultimately seeks to contribute to the improvement of educational quality and the sustainable development of Malaysia's public higher education sector (OECD, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The interaction between individual characteristics, motivational factors, professional autonomy, and leadership styles has attracted growing attention in higher education research for its relevance to academic job performance, as prior studies indicate lecturer's effectiveness is shaped by personal attributes as well as organizational and contextual factors influencing the execution of academic work, and this section reviews the theoretical and empirical foundations connecting these factors to lecturers' academic job performance based on established theories, including the Five-Factor Model of personality Self-Determination Theory, self-efficacy theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory (Bashir et al., 2020; Xia et al., 2025).

Personality Traits and Academic Job Performance

Personality traits especially conscientiousness and openness to experience, have been consistently identified as significant predictors of work behavior and performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Othman et al., 2021; Ahmad & Ghazali, 2022) with conscientiousness defined by diligence, responsibility, and goal orientation, showing a strong positive link with task performance across occupational settings and in academic contexts lecturers high in conscientiousness tend to prepare courses carefully adhere to academic standards and maintain sustained research effort thus boosting both teaching effectiveness and scholarly output; openness to experience reflecting curiosity creativity and a willingness to engage with novel ideas is particularly relevant in higher education where pedagogy innovation and interdisciplinary research are increasingly emphasized and empirical evidence indicates academically open individuals adapt more readily to new teaching technologies and research methodologies driving higher levels of academic productivity and based on trait theory and prior empirical findings the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Conscientiousness and openness are positively associated with lecturers' academic job performance.

Motivation and Academic Job Performance

Motivation plays a central role in shaping lecturers' effort, persistence, and achievement, with Self-Determination Theory indicating intrinsic motivation (engaging in work for inherent satisfaction) fosters higher engagement, creativity, and psychological well-being, and in academic settings, intrinsically motivated lecturers tend to exhibit teaching passion, research commitment, and resilience amid work-related challenges. Extrinsic motivation, such as recognition, promotion opportunities, and financial incentives, also contributes to performance, particularly in outcome-oriented activities like publishing and grant acquisition. Prior studies indicate that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation significantly predict lecturers' teaching effectiveness, research output, and overall job satisfaction (Sutanto et al., 2022; Khairul et al., 2024) Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Motivation is positively associated with lecturers' academic job performance.

Professional Autonomy and Academic Job Performance

Professional autonomy, referring to the degree of control lecturers possess over their instructional methods, research agendas, and work-related decisions, enhances individual's perceptions of competence and responsibility based on self-efficacy theory, thus encouraging initiative and innovative behavior. And in higher education institutions, lecturers with greater autonomy tend to engage in creative curriculum design, pedagogical experimentation, and independent research activities.

Empirical research further suggests autonomy reduces role stress, strengthens psychological empowerment, and increases commitment to institutional objectives, and such environments foster intellectual exploration and academic risk-taking essential for high-quality teaching and impactful research and the following hypothesis is proposed (Abdullah et al., 2021; Noor & Ismail, 2023).

H3: Lecturer professional autonomy is positively associated with lecturers' academic job performance.

Transformational Leadership and Academic Job Performance

Transformational leadership is characterized by the articulation of a compelling vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation, sees leaders adopting this style in academic contexts to create supportive yet challenging environments, encouraging lecturers to exceed conventional performance expectations.

Empirical studies have shown that transformational leadership enhances lecturers' research productivity, promotes innovative teaching practices, and strengthens organizational citizenship behaviors. By aligning individual academic goals with institutional objectives and providing both emotional and instrumental support, transformational leaders contribute significantly to improved academic job performance. Therefore, this study proposes that:

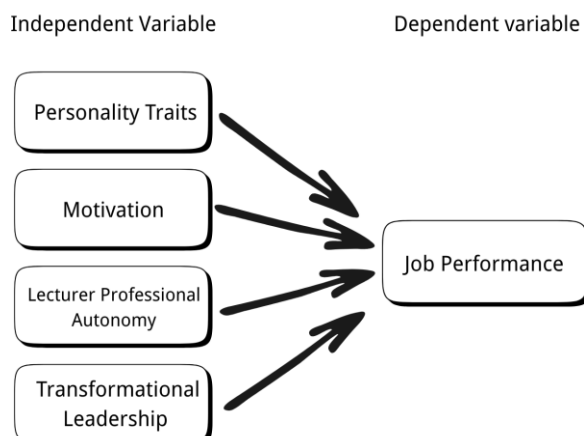
H4: Transformational leadership is positively associated with lecturers' academic job performance.

Transformational leadership has four core qualities: communicating a clear vision, sparking intellectual curiosity, offering personalized support, and boosting motivation through inspiration. Academic department leaders adopting this style create supportive yet challenging environments encourage lecturers to go beyond their own goals nurture a teamwork-focused culture centered on ongoing learning and shared objectives lifting both individual and group performance and studies show transformational leadership boosts faculty research output, encourages creative teaching methods, and strengthens organizational citizenship behaviors and by aligning lecturers' personal goals with the institution's vision and providing practical support these leaders help educators reach higher levels of academic achievement and a positive link between transformational leadership and lecturers' job performance is therefore proposed (Sutanto et al., 2022; Hassan et al., 2023).

Conceptual Framework

The study framework model is depicted in [Figure 1](#).

Figure 1. Research Framework



The conceptual framework of this study consists of four independent variables, which are personality traits (conscientiousness and openness), motivation, lecturer professional autonomy, and transformational leadership. In addition, these four independent variables have a direct influence on the dependent variable, which is academic job performance. Personality traits are expected to shape lecturer's work behaviors, consistency, and openness to new academic challenges (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Besides, motivation represents the internal drive that encourages the lecturers to perform teaching, research, and institutional responsibilities effectively. Lecturer professional autonomy reflects the extent to which lecturers can independently make decisions, manage their academic tasks, and regulate their professional development, this autonomy is believed to lead lecturers to higher work satisfaction and improved performance (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Transformational leadership involves supervisors who inspire, support, and guide their staff, which can positively enhance lecturers' engagement and job performance. Based on existing literature, these four variables collectively contribute to explaining variations in academic job performance among lecturers in Malaysian higher education institutions (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Pulumbarit, 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study used a quantitative research design, which is a cross-sectional survey to examine the factors influencing academic job performance among lecturers in Malaysian higher education institutions (HEIs). This design will allow to collect the data at a single point in time and be able to investigate the relationships between the independent variables, which are personality traits specifically conscientiousness and openness, motivation, lecturer professional autonomy, and transformational leadership and the dependent variable which is academic job performance (Bryman, 2016).

Population and Sample

The study's target population consists of full-time and part-time lecturers working in Malaysian HEIs who are involved in teaching, research, or both actively (Cohen et al., 2018).

Sampling Technique

The study used the purposive sampling method, where lecturers are contacted through official emails or through their institutions. This method ensures that respondents meet the inclusion criteria and can provide the relevant insights into the variables under the study (Etikan et al., 2016).

Sample Size

The study will collect a total of 150 responses to ensure reliable statistical results. Based on the guideline of at least 10–15 respondents per predictor variable for multiple regression analysis, this sample size is considered sufficient (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Instrumentation

The study used a structured online questionnaire to collect the data, and the online questionnaire has included five sections, which are section B until section F and it is measuring:

Personality traits (conscientiousness and openness)

Motivation

Lecturer professional autonomy

Transformational leadership

Academic job performance

Each item is evaluated by using a 5-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree). The minor adjustment of the questionnaire is to allow the respondents who are not involved in research or teaching, with “Not Applicable” options provided where needed.

Data Collection Procedure

All the participants were invited through the email, which contained a link to the online questionnaire. Besides, informed consent was obtained before participation, and the responses were kept confidential and anonymous (Creswell, 2014).

Data Analysis

This study will use descriptive statistics to analyze the collected data, correlational analysis, and multiple regression analysis to determine the relationships between independent variables and academic job performance (Pallant, 2020).

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the ethical guidelines and the ethical guidelines included protecting participant rights, all responses were anonymous, and the participation was voluntary (Bryman, 2016).

RESULTS

Table 1. Frequency Description

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	91	60.7	60.7	60.7
	Female	59	39.3	39.3	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	
Age	25 or below	40	26.7	26.7	26.7
	26-35	49	32.7	32.7	59.3
	36-45	10	6.7	6.7	66.0
	46-55	26	17.3	17.3	83.3
			3	3	

	56 or above	25	16. 7	16. 7	100. 0
	Total	150	100 .0	100 .0	
Which type of university are you currently working in?	Public University	68	45. 3	45. 3	45.3
	Private University	82	54. 7	54. 7	100. 0
	Total	150	100 .0	100 .0	
How many years of teaching experience do you have?	Less than 1 year	20	13. 3	13. 3	13.3
	1-3 years	56	37. 3	37. 3	50.7
	4-6 years	22	14. 7	14. 7	65.3
	7-10 years	24	16. 0	16. 0	81.3
	More than 10 years	28	18. 7	18. 7	100. 0
	Total	150	100 .0	100 .0	
What is your current academic position?	Tutor/Teaching Assistant	28	18. 7	18. 7	18.7
	Lecturer	41	27. 3	27. 3	46.0
	Senior Lecturer	22	14. 7	14. 7	60.7
	Associate Professor	27	18. 0	18. 0	78.7
	Professor	28	18. 7	18. 7	97.3
	Other	4	2.7	2.7	100. 0
	Total	150	100 .0	100 .0	
Which faculty or field of study are you from?	Faculty of Business/Management /Economics	24	16. 0	16. 0	16.0
	Faculty of Education	22	14. 7	14. 7	30.7
	Faculty of Social Sciences/Humanities	22	14. 7	14. 7	45.3
	Faculty of Science / Technology /Engineering	20	13. 3	13. 3	58.7
	Faculty of Medicine /Health Sciences	28	18. 7	18. 7	77.3
	Faculty of Computer Science/Information Technology	18	12. 0	12. 0	89.3
	Faculty of Arts and Design	16	10. 7	10. 7	100. 0

Total	150	100	100
		.0	.0

Demographic description

Gender: Males constituted the greater proportion (60.7%), while the female proportion was 39.3%.

Age: There were relatively a greater number of young to middle-aged adults, with a proportion of 26–35 in the age groups, followed by ages of 25 years and below. The number of people aged 36–45 years was relatively less, while those aged 46 years and above together constituted 34.0% of the respondents.

Type of University: Slightly more respondents worked in private universities (54.7%) compared to public universities (45.3%).

Teaching Experience: experience was gathered mainly by 1–3 years (37.3%) and less than 10 years overall (61.3%), which together gave an experience of 10 or fewer years. This says that 1 and 3 years of experience were limited to the junior mid-career faculty, and only 18.7% had greater than 10 years of teaching experience.

Academic rank: The ranks appeared to be relatively proportional. Lecturers were the greatest number, followed by professors and tutors or teaching assistants with a proportion, respectively. Associate professors had 18.0%; senior lecturers had 14.7%, and they had 2.7% of the chosen.

Faculty or Field: Medicine/Health Sciences constituted a greater proportion of the faculty, followed by Business/Management/Economics, Education, and Social Sciences/Humanities. Sciences/Technology/Engineering, Computer Science/Information Technology, and Arts & Design took a relatively lesser proportion. Overall, the respondents appeared to be chiefly male, younger-mid-career, working in private universities with relatively lesser teaching experience, and working mainly as lecturers/teaching assistants and in academia, they represented different aspects of medicine and business-focused academic backgrounds.

Reliability Statistics

	N	of	Cronbach's	Overall	Cronbach's
	Items		Alpha	Alpha	
Personality Traits		5	.835		.891
Motivation		4	.746		
Lecturer Professional Autonomy		4	.830		
Transformational Leadership		4	.795		
Academic Job Performance		4	.825		

The overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is 0.891, suggesting that the entire scale demonstrates good internal consistency and very high reliability, and all items work well together to measure the same underlying construct. Inefficient subscales of Cronbach's Alpha have values of at least 0.7, confirming that the measurement tool has good internal consistency and stability and can be applied to the relevant empirical research. Inefficient subscales of Cronbach's alpha values have values of at least 0.7. It means that this measurement tool has good internal consistency and stability and can be applied to the relevant empirical studies.

KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.			.850
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square		1337.014
	df		210
	Sig.		.000

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy of 0.850 is above the generally used 0.80 threshold, indicating sample data are very conducive to factor analysis according to the Kaiser criterion (KMO > 0.8 is "meritorious").

Chi-square value of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is 1337.014 (df = 210), and the level of significance is $p < 0.001$. According to the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue > 1), the first five principal components' initial eigenvalues are all larger than 1—i.e., 6.657, 2.153, 1.818, 1.4375, and 1.309—totaling .63.758% of the total variance, indicating extracting five common factors is realistic because common factors are explaining over 63% of the variance of original variables, representing them well. confirming that different variables are significantly related. we can reject the null hypothesis that variables are independent from each other, hence meeting the precondition of the factor analysis.

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6.657	31.699	31.699	6.657	31.699	31.699	3.152	15.009	15.009
2	2.153	10.251	41.950	2.153	10.251	41.950	2.708	12.893	27.902
3	1.818	8.675	50.626	1.818	8.675	50.626	2.643	12.587	40.490
4	1.4375	6.900	57.525	1.4375	6.900	57.525	2.571	12.244	52.733
5	1.309	6.233	63.758	1.309	6.233	63.758	2.315	11.025	63.758
6	.935	4.453	68.211						
7	.747	3.555	71.767						
8	.709	3.378	75.145						
9	.666	3.173	78.319						
10	.603	2.869	81.188						
11	.512	2.438	83.626						
12	.507	2.413	86.039						
13	.448	2.133	88.172						
14	.416	1.980	90.152						

15	.37 2	1.770	91.922
16	.36 4	1.734	93.656
17	.34 1	1.622	95.278
18	.29 0	1.380	96.658
19	.27 7	1.317	97.975
20	.25 0	1.191	99.166
21	.17 5	.834	100.00 0

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Chi-square value of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is 1337.014 (df=210), and the level of significance ($p < 0.001$). According to the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue > 1), the first five principal components' initial eigenvalues are all larger than 1—i.e., 6.657, 2.153, 1.811, 1.4375, and 1.309—totaling 63.758% of the total variance, indicating extracting five common factors is realistic because common factors are explaining over 63% of the variance of the original ones, representing them well. confirming that different variables are significantly related. We can reject the null hypothesis that variables are independent from each other, hence meeting the precondition of the factor analysis.

Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	Extraction
B1	.757					.617
B2	.662					.501
B3	.665					.544
B4	.706					.593
B5	.915					.858
C1					.589	.507
C2					.685	.580
C3					.781	.656
C4					.758	.657
D1		.721				.631
D2		.709				.613
D3		.786				.687
D4		.773				.735
E1				.751		.646
E2				.699		.579
E3				.775		.686
E4				.719		.622
F1			.810			.723
F2			.792			.679
F3			.730			.650
F4			.692			.626

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

The items on the scale load on each factor at a loading of at least 0.589, and they give no substantial cross-loading—even worse, every item's loading on each factor is quite high, indicating the presence of a factor structure and a good discriminant validity. The resulting factor structure completely matches the five dimensions that are given as an outcome of the reliability analysis done above, suggesting harmony between the hypotheses made and what was observed. Most communalities are above 0.5, and some of them exceed 0.7, implying that the common factors do indeed cover a good proportion of the variance on the observed items. Overall, a scale of this type has good construct validity, and the five-factor model was highly fitting the data, making it suitable to proceed to other empirical studies or path analyses.

Correlations

		Person ality Traits	Motivat ion	Lecturer Professi onal Autonom y	Transformat ional Leadership	Academi c Job Performa nce
Personality Traits	Pearso n Correlat ion Sig (2- tailed) N	1 150				
Motivation	Pearso n Correlat ion Sig (2- tailed) N	.36 8**	1 150			
Lecturer Professional Autonomy	Pearso n Correlat ion Sig (2- tailed) N	.36 1**	.42 7**	1 150		
Transformat ional Leadership	Pearso n Correlat ion	.37 7**	.27 9**	.439 **	1	

		Sig (2- tailed)	.00 0	.00 1	.000	
	N		150	15 0	150	150
Academic Job Performanc e	Pearso n Correlat ion		.31 0**	.42 2**	.470 **	.395** 1
		Sig (2- tailed)	.00 0	.00 0	.000	.000
	N		150	15 0	150	150 150

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Personal characteristics had a moderate positive correlation with motivation, lecturer professional autonomy, transformational leadership, and academic job performance, showing that positive personality characteristics could improve lecturer's motivation, professional autonomy, leadership behaviors, and job performance.

Motivation has the most highly associated relationship with lecturer professional autonomy and academic job performance, although its correlation with transformational leadership was a bit less; it remained statistically significant, indicating that greater personal or extrinsic motivation is linked to greater professional autonomy and higher job performance among faculty. Lecturer Professional Autonomy was most strongly correlated with academic job performance, and it was also most highly correlated with transformational leadership, meaning that greater autonomy granted to lecturer in the teaching and academic decision-making will lead to enhanced leadership behaviors and job outcomes

Transformational leadership was significantly and positively associated with academic job performance. This indicated that faculty who lead in the visionary style have a greater degree of inspirational leadership behaviors and are therefore likely to demonstrate a high degree of academic performance. Academic job performance is strongly and positively correlated with all four remaining constructs, while it is the most sharply associated with lecturer's professional autonomy.

All pairwise associations made between the variables emerged to be statistically significant at the $p < 0.01$ level, with the strongest relationship existing between lecturer professional autonomy and academic job performance.

Coefficients ^a							
Model	Unstandardi zed Coefficients		Standardi zed Coefficien ts		Collinearity Statistics		
	B	Std. Erro	Beta	t	S ig.	Toleran ce	V IF
1 (Constant)	.648	.466		1.3 91	.166		

Personality Traits	.066	.093	.056	.710	.479	.766	1.305
Motivation	.286	.096	.234	2.982	.003	.763	1.311
Lecturer Professional Autonomy	.289	.090	.266	3.220	.002	.692	1.445
Transformational Leadership	.201	.083	.193	2.434	.016	.751	1.332

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Job Performance

ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	19.596	4	4.899	16.844	.000b
Residual	42.172	145	.291		
Total	61.768	149			

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Job Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Transformational Leadership, Motivation, Personality Traits, Lecturer Professional Autonomy

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df 1	df 2	Sig. F Change	
1	.563a	.317	.298	.53930	.317	16.844	4	145	.000	1.880

a. Predictors: (Constant), Transformational Leadership, Motivation, Personality Traits, Lecturer Professional Autonomy

b. Dependent Variable: Academic Job Performance

The model's overall significance ($R^2 = 0.317$, $p < 0.001$) across the researchers' expectations was found in the regression analysis. The Durbin-Watson value 1.80, near 2, implied that no significant autocorrelation exists among residuals (during-Watson value equals 2) and that the required assumption of independence was adhered to. The residuality ($VIF < 1.5$) and tolerance levels (> 0.69) were all within acceptable limits regarding the absence of multicollinearity. Among all predictors, the strongest positive predictor of performance was professor professional autonomy ($\beta = 0.266$, $p = 0.002$), followed by motivation ($\beta = 0.234$, $p = 0.003$) and transformational leadership ($\beta = 0.193$, $p = 0.016$), all significant contributors to academic job performance. The personality traits did not meet significance while being compared against other variables ($p = 0.479$).

These results imply that higher-degree institutions should increase emphasis on cultivating mentors' professional autonomy, fostering greater intrinsic motivation, and developing transformational leadership competencies to properly enhance teachers' academic performance. transformational leadership capabilities as key strategies to effectively improve academic performance

DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to explore the determinants of academic job performance among lecturers in Malaysian higher education providers, specifically personality characteristics, motivation, lecturer professional autonomy, and transformational leadership. The discussions below would be considered in the context of both research hypotheses and literature. (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Personalities and Academic Job Performance

Surprisingly, the direct effects of personality characteristics (conscientiousness and openness) did not exhibit significant effects in the regression analysis, despite a positive link. This anomaly suggests that, while positive personality traits may play indirect roles for lecturers' working attitudes, they may be inadequate to account for academic job performance when organizational and motivational dimensions are controlled (Wilmot & Ones, 2019; Kipuru et al., 2024).

This outcome is somewhat disagreement with earlier findings that documented hefty impacts of conscientiousness and openness on job performance. In addition, the apparent reason lies in the fact that academic performance within the Malaysian HEIs is highly structured and institutionally regulated. Such a system may restrict the degree to which it permits professors' individual personality traits to convert to actual performance levels. Hence, the effect of personal characteristics might play more supportive or background roles, as opposed to central ones, in predicting lecturers' job performance (Zhang & Chen, 2021; Che Cob et al., 2024).

Motivation and Academic Job Performance

Based on the result, motivation positively influenced academic job performance. In addition, motivation has been shown to be moderately related to the lecturer's professional autonomy and transformational leadership. It will indicate its pivotal significance in an academic working environment. These have upheld the principles of Self-Determination Theory, which asserts that individuals who are motivated are more predisposed to display higher levels of engagement and perseverance, as well as performance (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

This conclusion resonates with earlier research that has also recognized the impact of motivated lecturers in terms of effort investment in teaching and research activities, as well as in institutional responsibilities (Zhao et al., 2025; Kumari et al., 2021). In Malaysian higher education, lecturers are facing the problem of heavy workloads and higher performance expectations. Furthermore, in this context, motivation has been identified as significant in assisting the lecturers in managing their workload. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are significant in improving individual job performance in academia (Che Cob et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2025). Overall, motivation is a key factor that influences academic job performance in Malaysian HEIs.

Professional autonomy and academic job performance

Professional autonomy emerges as the most consequential predictor of academic job performance within this research. It is because the higher the autonomy at work, the better the job performance in academia and the greater the association of job performance in academia with transformational leadership, as indicated by the study results.

Similar empirical findings have showcased the ability of autonomous lecturers to practice their professional judgment in both teaching and research domains, thereby resulting in more effective outcomes (Wang & Dai, 2024; Dara, 2023). Within Malaysian HEI

contexts where institutional reforms and performance evaluation processes are at the forefront, professional autonomy can empower lecturers to navigate between institutional requirements and academic innovation, thus optimizing performance. Hence, promoting professional autonomy can significantly enhance lecturers' academic effectiveness (Xia et al., 2025).

Transformational leadership and academic job performance

Another notable and important finding is related to transformational leadership. This showed robust and positive influences on job performance in academics. This finding resonates well with the theory of transformational leadership. This theory states that those leaders who can inspire and challenge subordinates intellectually can bring about results in terms of higher levels of motivation and higher performance.

This positive correlation confirmed in this research is in sync with earlier results revealing the positive impact of transformational leaders in creating an academic working atmosphere that facilitates collaboration, innovation, and professional growth (Shaari et al., 2022). In higher education, such leadership behaviors play a vital role in aligning lecturer's personal aspirations to institutional goals, thus potentially aiding in the betterment of academic performance (Sutanto et al., 2022).

Overall, the results indicate that the independent variables, especially the lecturer professional autonomy, motivation, and transformational leadership, have a more significant impact on academic job performance than the personal traits (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Wang & Dai, 2024). This is a clear advocacy of the need to create an institutional culture of lecturer empowerment and autonomy rather than focusing on personal properties.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the role of the personality traits, motivation, lecturer professional autonomy, and transformational leadership in affecting academic job performance among the lecturers in Malaysian higher education institutions. The findings show that motivation, lecturer professional autonomy, and transformative leadership impact academic job performance positively, while personality traits were found not to be significantly affected after considering the other independent variables. Among all the independent variables, lecturer professional autonomy is positively related to academic job performance. That means lecturers should be given more freedom in academic decisions. Motivation and leadership also help improve lecturer's involvement and performance. These results suggest that lecturer's performance can be improved through good leadership, more autonomy, and motivation (Zhao et al., 2025).

With practical applications, it is important for university management and policymakers to emphasize leadership skills, work environments that are motivational and supportive, and policies that promote work autonomy for lecturers (Atatsi et al., 2022; Shaari et al., 2022). Third, this study academically contributes, with empirical evidence from the Malaysian context, that organizational variables are far more influential than personal variables in determining student performance and outcomes.

In the future, other studies can be conducted using long surveys to know the factors in detail. Other studies can also employ other methodologies, such as interviews, to know the factors in detail. Analyzing other factors: More understanding regarding the factors influencing the performance of academics in their jobs can be attained (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors have declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning the study, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

1st Author

Ts. Dr. Teoh Kok Ban is a Senior Lecturer at the National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN), Universiti Sains Malaysia. His work centers on higher education, human development, and organizational wellbeing, integrating research, counseling, and professional training to generate meaningful impact in education and society. He holds a PhD in Organizational Behavior and Development, along with Master's degrees in Statistics and Counseling, enabling him to combine quantitative expertise with human-centered approaches. A Professional Technologist (Ts.) registered with the Malaysian Board of Technologists and a Registered Counselor with the Malaysian Board of Counselors, he bridges technical and psychological perspectives in his work. As an HRD Corp Accredited Trainer, he leads capacity-building initiatives and academic collaborations, while actively contributing to research and professional service. Email: kbteoh@usm.my

2nd Author

Wong Yeok Han is a second-year undergraduate student in the School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia, pursuing a degree in Management. Her ORCID ID is <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1531-1310>, and she can be contacted via email at yeokhan2875@student.usm.my

3rd Author

Wu Yun Han is a second-year undergraduate student in the School of Management, University Sains Malaysia, pursuing a degree in Management. Her ORCID ID is <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-7158-6268>, and she can be contacted via email at wuyunhan@student.usm.my

4th Author

Wu Jiayang is a first-year undergraduate student in the School of Management, University Sains Malaysia, pursuing a degree in Management. Her ORCID ID is <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1714-3008>, and she can be contacted via email at wujiayang12138@student.usm.my

5th Author

Wu Yihan is a second-year undergraduate student in the School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia, pursuing a degree in Management. He can be contacted via email at wuyihan@student.usm.my

6th Author

Dr. Daisy Mui Hung Kee is an Associate Professor at the School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). She earned her Ph.D. from the University of South Australia and an MBA from USM. She has authored 90 Web of Science-indexed publications. Dr. Kee serves as the Country Director for the Association of International Business and Professional Management (AIBPM) and the STAR Scholars Network. Email: daisy@usm.my
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7748-8230