

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND JOB PERFORMANCE OF WOMEN ACADEMICS IN SELECTED UNIVERSITIES

Hazel MUBANGO 

Women's University in Africa, Harare, Zimbabwe
hmubango@wua.ac.zw

Hlanganipai NGIRANDE 

University of Venda, Thohoyandou, South Africa
hlanganipai.ngirande@univen.ac.za

Kathutshelo KHASHANE 

University of Venda, Thohoyandou, South Africa
Khathutshelo.Khashane@univen.ac.za

Abstract

The emergence of the Coronavirus 19 (COVID-19) pandemic disturbed socio-economic activities in both formal and non-formal education globally. Working from home was unavoidable and it affected academics' work-life balance, thereby compromising academic performance. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between work-life balance and the job performance of women academics post-COVID-19 pandemic in selected universities. The study utilised the positivist philosophy, the quantitative research approach, and the correlational research design. A sample size of 148 participants was determined using the Raosoft sample size calculator from a population of 231 women academics from selected universities. Stratified and purposive sampling were used to select the participants. To collect data, an online self-administered questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale was utilised. The data were analysed using regression analysis with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28.0. The study findings showed that there is a significant relationship between work-life balance and job performance. The study recommends an employee-centric approach to the development of work-life balance policies and initiatives that not only accommodate academic staff, but also recognise and address the unique challenges faced by all women in managing their dual responsibilities.

Keywords: Job performance, Women academics, Work-life balance, Post-COVID-19, University.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted socio-economic activity, affecting formal and informal education worldwide. This has impacted individuals' work-life balance, necessitating a struggle between domestic responsibilities and professional duties that ultimately diminished their job performance. Work-life balance (WLB) denotes the equilibrium between professional responsibilities, familial commitments, and individual interests (Kerdpitak & Jernsittiparsert, 2020). Employee job performance refers to the capacity to fulfil one's duties in a manner that promotes the organisation's goals (Moonsri, 2018). The relational matrix of these concepts was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is, therefore, essential to examine these aspects within the context of women academics in higher education.

Previous studies corroborated that the COVID-19 pandemic posed problems for female academics in terms of balancing the demands of university teaching roles, adapting to online instruction, student research supervision, and academic writing (Alon, et al., 2020). Burki (2020) opines that the COVID-19 induced lockdown had diverse implications that impacted men and women differently, hence exacerbating the gender disparities. Women professionals encountered numerous challenges while working from home, including poor health (De Vos, 2020), loneliness, anxiety, diminished social interactions, social isolation (Leal Filho et al., 2021), and heightened workloads (Chang & Fang, 2020). Global surveys on academic perspectives regarding work-life balance revealed that numerous academics reported feeling stressed and under-compensated, and that their productivity compromised their careers (Bothwell 2018; McDonald, & Hatcher, 2023). A study conducted in the United States, Germany, and Singapore by Reichelt et al. (2021) also indicated that the pandemic increased obligations of home and childcare stemming from school closures. Research on scholastic performance during the pandemic indicated that women's productivity was more negatively impacted than men's because of the numerous duties and obligations they bear (Cui et al., 2020; Deryugina et al., 2021; Feng & Savani, 2020; Squazzoni et al., 2020).

A national survey conducted in South Africa by Walters et al. (2021) revealed that 2,000 women academics from the nation's 26 public universities reported that the growing demands of academic work, encompassing teaching and research administration, coupled with rising domestic responsibilities, placed them in a precarious and overwhelming situation. This position adversely impacted their productivity. The studies from South Africa's Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) underscore ongoing gender discrepancies in academia, indicating that female academics encounter distinct problems in their workplaces (DHET, 2022).

Meanwhile, Gatsi et al. (2021) conducted a study that revealed that women in Zimbabwe expressed satisfaction with remote work during the pandemic, citing it as a means to enhance their family time. However, these women also highlighted the difficulties of separating their work hours from personal time,

leading to challenges in managing their schedules. As a result, they often found themselves working late into the night to fulfil both their professional tasks and household responsibilities. Moreover, the full impact of the pandemic on female academics in Zimbabwe, particularly regarding job losses and performance, remains uncertain and subject to speculation (Chingono, 2020; Manungo & Rukuni, 2021). Another Zimbabwean study by Muzaeni et al. (2020) indicated that the presence of work-life balance policies and practices positively affected employee performance, suggesting that the absence of these policies and practices adversely impacts organisational and employee outcomes. Meanwhile, the National Development Strategy of Zimbabwe (NDS1: 2021–2025) and the policy briefs from the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education (MHTE) highlight the structural obstacles encountered by female academics in attaining work-life balance, which directly affect job performance. The balance between work and personal life is crucial for achieving psychological, emotional, and cognitive stability of employees that enhances organisational efficiency. An effective work-life balance diminishes stress and enhances loyalty, performance, and motivation (Lekchiri & Eversole, 2021).

Although a growing corpus of studies has looked at work-life balance among academics in general (Ren & Caudle, 2016) and the continued existence of long hours worked in academic professions (Bothwell, 2018), with more recent studies compiled in specialized volumes like McDonald and Hatcher (2023), another area of studies has investigated gender inequalities in academic career advancement and workplace culture, including the precarious situation of women in liberal institutions of higher learning (O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019) and the larger "labyrinth" of leadership obstacles that women encounter (Eagly & Carli, 2018). Three gaps are still visible, though.

First, despite research showing that women academics face unique role struggles influenced by caregiver duties and expectations from institutions not intended for dual-role reality (Lekchiri & Eversole, 2021), much of the broader work-life balance research fails to break down by gender. This conflict is further supported by research focusing on the "impossible expectations" faced by parents trying to balance competency at work and within the home (Ladge & Humberd, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic placed extra "academic guilt" on women juggling enforced lockdown conditions (Walters et al., 2021), changed the psychological contract of women in academia more generally (Ronnie et al., 2022), and significantly interfered with the work routines and research output of women academics (Cui et al., 2020; Deryugina et al., 2021).

Second, rather than experimentally examining their direct relationship, previous research has mostly examined work-life balance and job success as distinct entities. When this relationship has been examined, it has mostly been in non-academic, commercial, or industrial contexts. For instance, among workers in Nigerian commercial banks (Obiageli et al., 2015), and workers in the healthcare industries (Zhang et al., 2025). Rather than focusing on female academics in particular, and especially not in Sub-

Saharan African higher education settings, where research is still limited to discrete elements like the impact of working from home on women in Zimbabwe (Gatsi et al., 2021) rather than the overall association between work-life balance and performance.

Third, there are still few comparative studies examining how institutional type affects this association. The question of whether institutional culture, resources, and gender-centered mandates influence women academics' experiences varies across universities, yet this remains unanswered because current work-life balance research in higher education typically focuses on university-specific or single-country settings (Subramaniam et al., 2020). By empirically investigating the relationship between work-life balance and job performance among female academics at two contextually and structurally different institutions-the University of Venda in South Africa and the Women's University in Africa in Zimbabwe-this study fills in these gaps by providing comparative, gender-focused data that is largely missing from the body of current studies. Based on the above assertions and arguments, the present study sought to examine the relationship between work-life balance, and job performance among women academics in South Africa and Zimbabwe post COVID-19 pandemic.

1.1 Research objective

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of work-life balance on the job performance of women academics at the University of Venda and Women's University in Africa post-COVID-19 pandemic.

1.2 Research hypothesis

The study is informed by the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant relationship between work-life balance and job performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section explores the theoretical framework and the literature related to the study variables of work-life balance and job performance.

2.1 Theoretical framework

This research is guided by the Social Exchange Theory (SET), advocated by sociologist George Homans (1958), who identified SET as the exchange of rewarding or costly activities between individuals. According to Mauss (1954), exchange is organised around three primary obligations: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to reciprocate. Within reciprocal relationships, individuals feel

obliged to reciprocate a transaction with something of equal value. To initiate, maintain, and conclude a transaction, both the employer and employee must offer something of value (Frieder, 2018). For instance, employers can implement family-friendly policies, such as paternity leave, to allow employees to have some time with their families to achieve a healthy work-life balance. To reciprocate, employees dedicate their effort and time in line with the organisation's goals. The exchange is not limited to physical or tangible things (Blau, 1964).

2.2 The concept of work-life balance

The work-life balance (WLB) concept pertains to the ability to engage in either work or non-work activities without experiencing substantial conflict between them (Shah et al., 2025; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Competition, global pandemics, globalisation, and technological advancements have brought many challenges for individuals in their personal and professional lives. Presently, the predicament of juggling work responsibilities and familial obligations has become a ubiquitous reality for most professionals (Chimote & Srivastava, 2013). It is important to note that individuals manage multiple roles, which can be broadly categorised as work and non-work roles (Shah et al., 2025; Kalliath et al., 2020). Essentially, individuals who experience work-life balance can effectively allocate their time and effort between their work and non-work responsibilities, enabling them to accomplish various tasks (Kalliath et al., 2020). The implementation of work-life balance techniques like compressed weeks, flexible working practices and employee welfare policies has been known to effectively reduce work-life conflict and address the contributing factors to employee productivity (Lero & Bardoel, 2017).

2.2.1 Dimensions of work-life balance

The following is an outline of the three dimensions that best explains its concept of work life balance.

Work interference with personal life (WIPL) signifies the extent to which work demands encroach upon personal life, leading to stress and diminished satisfaction (Shabir et al., 2022). Karani et al. (2022) found that increased WIPL levels are associated with greater psychological distress in employees. COVID-19 epidemic has exacerbated these challenges, as many employees find it difficult to maintain a separation between work and home life when working from home (Kumar, 2019).

Personal life interference with work (PLIW) is defined as the influence of personal life obligations on job performance (Shabir et al., 2022). This facet highlights how personal responsibilities, like childcare, health concerns, or social obligations may hinder an individual's ability to effectively fulfil professional commitments. Demerouti et al. (2019) say that organisations acknowledging the significance of PLIW and offering tools such as employee help initiatives or flexible working hours can improve workforce loyalty, performance and retention.

Work-personal life enhancement (WPLE) denotes a beneficial aspect of the work-life balance, focusing on how experiences in one area can favourably impact the other. This component emphasises the capacity of occupational positions to enhance personal life, and the ability of personal experiences to improve job performance. Research by Greenhaus and Powell (2000) indicates that when employees view their work as rewarding and supportive, they are more inclined to have positive spillover effects in their personal lives, such as enhanced happiness and better interpersonal relationships.

2.3 Work-life balance and women in academia

The emergence of the knowledge economy has facilitated increased opportunities for women in the workforce. The accessibility of the working environment has posed a significant challenge for contemporary women in the workforce, as they now face the same conditions as their male counterparts (Subramaniam et al., 2020). Increasing research highlights the differential positions of men and women within academic settings (Woods et al., 2022; O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019). For example, a study conducted in South Africa by Kriger et al. (2022) revealed that 81% of female participants reported greater challenges in completing academic work from home compared with their male counterparts. Also, Ren and Caudle's (2016) study on British and Chinese academics indicates that women in academia often need to make compromises to achieve a healthy work-life balance, frequently sacrificing career advancement in favour of family and personal responsibilities. Consequently, women in academia striving to manage both responsibilities may be perceived as lacking competence, being emotionally distant, or exhibiting both traits (Eagly & Carli, 2018).

Overall, women in academia face numerous responsibilities stemming from their professional and personal lives, including fulfilling their academic duties, maintaining their roles as spouses and mothers, and nurturing their personal relationships as friends. However, studies do not take into account institutional variables, such as regulations that support academics in balancing their personal and professional lives. The unique obstacles, such as the prevalence of women in academia who must navigate the delicate balance between a thriving profession and parenting, provide additional motivation for conducting the present research.

2.4 The concept of job performance

Employee job performance pertains to an employee's proficiency in executing their responsibilities in a manner that facilitates the company's attainment of its objectives (Moonsri, 2018). Job performance is determined by the employee's ability, which is then compounded by the level of assistance and effort put. If one factor is reduced or does not exist, it results in a decline in performance (Pawirosumarto et al.,

2017). Job performance is directly linked to the evaluation and reduction of behaviours that, in turn, enhance an individual's productivity and contribute to the attainment of the organisation's objectives. When employees successfully carry out their designated obligations, duties, and tasks, they demonstrate their in-role performance (Zhang et al., 2025). Job performance has three dimensions as outlined below.

2.4.1 Dimensions of job performance

Koopman et al. (2015) identified three primary characteristics of job performance, task performance, and counterproductive work behaviour.

The first dimension is contextual performance which refers to voluntary or extra-role behaviours that involve assisting others in solving challenging tasks and following agreed guidelines and procedures and supporting organisational choices to bring about positive change (Yoo & Kim, 2021). Contextual activities encompass several behaviours such as cooperating, volunteering, helping, and adhering to regulations (Borman & Motowidlo, 2014). This attitude fosters the development of a dynamic culture and environment within the organisation, which enhances individual productivity and overall effectiveness of the organisation.

Task performance, the second-dimension falls under the purview of the organisation, with individuals being responsible for carrying out assigned duties. Borman and Motowidlo (1993) define task performance as the extent to which individuals effectively fulfil their assigned responsibilities, thereby contributing to the achievement of organisational objectives, and yielding appropriate rewards for both the organisation and the individual. Organisations seek individuals who exhibit exceptional performance to accomplish their company mission, vision, and objectives, and gain competitive advantage (Thevanes & Mangaleswaran, 2018).

The third factor pertains to unproductive work behaviours, which are actions that are contrary to the goals and objectives of companies. Counterproductive Work Behaviour (CWB) refers to deliberate actions by an employee deemed by the company to be against its legitimate interests (Jacobs et al., 2020). Instances of counterproductive conduct can include actions such as theft, withdrawal, harassment (Spector, 2021), insulting colleagues, taking extended breaks, absenteeism, performing tasks with imperfections, and being consistently late among other behaviours (Koopman et al., 2015). This behaviour has a detrimental impact on the academic's job performance and can impede the institution's ability to achieve its objectives.

2.5 Relationship between work-life balance and job performance

Work-life balance significantly influences employee productivity and effectiveness. A study by Hasugian et al. (2023) identified a substantial positive correlation between work-life balance and employee performance. Their research, centred on employees at PT. Hasugian et al., (2023) revealed that those who reported

enhanced work-life balance exhibited superior job performance indicators. Meanwhile, Soomro et al.'s (2018) study indicates that effective management of job and family responsibilities results in highly productive employees. This is due to the enhancement of productivity and efficiency that comes with maintaining a WLB. Prior investigations support the assertion that WLB strongly correlates with individual well-being and organisational and job success (Allen et al., 2020; Haar & Brougham, 2022). Ladge and Humbert (2022) suggest that employees who effectively fulfil their familial roles and commitments demonstrate exceptional workplace performance. Bender et al. (2018) observe that WLB has proven to be a significant feature of various organisational outcomes, such as employee retention and productivity.

In contrast, a study by Putranti et al. (2020) offered a more nuanced perspective, indicating that although work-life balance is often advantageous, its effect on job performance may differ depending on personal factors and organisational culture. This study revealed that individuals who felt compelled to achieve an ideal work-life balance occasionally encountered stress, adversely impacting their job performance. In addition, Lendák-Kabók (2022) revealed that where there is a lack of structural institutional remedies, women academics develop their own coping mechanisms shaped by gender to cope with work-life balance. This effectively absorbs the organisational inadequacies at an individual level.

A systematic review conducted by Rasheed et al. (2022) identified various obstacles to attaining a favourable work-life balance, including organisational pressures and insufficient assistance. This review indicated that excessive demands on employees may result in burnout, consequently impairing job effectiveness. When individuals perceive a balance between their work and family obligations, they become more effective and productive in both domains. The research above highlights that the presence of work-life balance ensures employee job performance, and conversely, the absence of WLB can negatively affect job performance. Therefore, this study hypothesised that H1: there is a significant relationship between work-life balance and job performance.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the positivist research paradigm. Creswell (2021) states that positivists should discover and evaluate factors that influence results. The paradigm aligns with the primary aim of this study, which is to investigate the influence of work-life balance on the job performance of women academics post-COVID-19 pandemic at the University of Venda (UNIVEN) and the Women's University in Africa (WUA). The study deemed the quantitative research approach appropriate due to its ability to minimise speculation by testing the research hypotheses (Satardien et al., 2019).

3.1 Population and sample

The study had a population of 231 female academics: 185 from the University of Venda (University of Venda HR Records, 2023) and 46 from the Women's University in Africa (Women's University in Africa HR Audit, 2023). The two universities were selected due to their distinct features. UNIVEN is a public university situated in South Africa and is a government funded institution whilst WUA is a private institution in Zimbabwe whose mandate is to promote the empowerment of women academically and professionally. The contrast between these two institutions permits the study to explore whether institutional type affects the relationship between work life balance and job performance. Both universities are situated in Southern Africa and they do share widely comparable socio-cultural expectations around family and gender roles (Lekchiri & Eversole, 2021). This strengthens comparability at the same time permitting institutional differences to develop as a major point of contrast.

This study utilised the stratified sampling strategy due to the heterogeneity of the sample. The two strata were the University of Venda and Women's University in Africa. The sample size was sampled from each stratum using a simple random sample. An online Raosoft sample size calculator was utilised to determine the sample size of 148 from the entire population of 235 permanently employed female academics from UNIVEN and WUA.

The sample size included only full-time women academics involved in teaching, community and research; those who work in administrative roles were excluded. Excluded participants were male academics since the study zeroed in on the specific work-life balance and role conflicts experienced by women academics (Leckchiri & Eversole, 2021). Academics employed on a part-time basis, visiting scholars or on sabbatical leave were also excluded because their workload structures and institutional integration vary significantly from full-time employed women academics, which may cause a potentially confounding comparison which is a concern exposed in findings by O'Keefe and Courtois (2019) that precarious academic employment is a separate determinant of work-family strain.

3.2 Data collection

The study collected its data from full-time women academics at the University of Venda and Women's University in Africa using a standardised online questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed online via a link created on Google Docs. Data were collected between March and September 2025. The questionnaire had 3 sections which were the demographic section, the work-life balance section and the job performance section. The questionnaire utilised a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 "strongly agree" to 5 "strongly disagree" to collect data on work-life balance and job performance. Hayman's (2005) 15-item scale measured the work-life balance construct. The scale encompassed three dimensions: work

interference with personal life (WIPL), personal life interference with work (PLIW), and work-personal life enhancement (WPLE). Hayman (2005) found that the three aspects of the WLB scale had Cronbach's Alpha values of .93 for WIPL, .85 for PLIW, and .69 for WPLE. These values indicate satisfactory reliability coefficients (Pallant, 2020). Participants responded to statements such as: 'My personal life is balanced and gives me the energy to do my job' and 'My personal life drains me of energy for my lectures'. The job performance scale developed by Farooq (2016), consisting of 11 items, was utilised to assess job performance factors of task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behaviour components. The Cronbach's Alpha of the scale varied between .72 satisfactory and .82 good, higher than the necessary degree of reliability for the instrument (Farooq, 2016).

3.3 Data analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 28.0) was utilised to test the hypotheses. Subsequently, the data were cleaned by detecting and rectifying any instances of missing entries. During the data analysis step, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the scale's accuracy. Descriptive statistics were used to extract meaning from the fundamental discernible characteristics of the data gathered (Creswell, 2021). This study employed regression analysis to test the statistical relationship between work-life balance and job performance. The researcher carefully considered the ethical issues associated with the research process. The study observed ethical issues as outlined by Saunders et al. (2019), which are obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, and mitigating the risk of harm to respondents.

4. RESULTS

The following are the findings of the study.

4.1 Demographic profiles of study respondents

Section A of the questionnaire captured the demographics of the study respondents. These demographics included age, marital status, highest level of educational qualifications and affiliation. These demographics are explored in the next section, and Table 1 provides a summary of these demographics.

4.1.1 Age distribution

The study had 148 respondents. Table 1 depicts the age distribution of respondents. The most dominant age group was 36-45 years constituting 55 respondents (37.2%), this was followed by 29% who belonged

to the 46-55 age group (n=43), followed by 21.6% who belonged to the 25-35 age group (n=32). The last group which made up 12.2% of the respondents consisted of people aged 56 and above (n=18). According to Llorens et al. (2021), the age range of 35-45 years is when most women academics reach mid-career stages. This finding also reflects the presence of age diversity in these two universities.

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Age	Frequency	Percentage
25-35 years	32	21.6
36-45 years	55	37.2
46-55 years	43	29.0
56 years and above	18	12.2
Total	148	100
Marital Status		
Single	12	8.1
Married	123	83.1
Divorced	1	0.7
Widowed	12	8.1
Total	148	100
Highest Qualifications		
Masters' Degree	85	57.4
Doctorate Degree	63	42.6
Total	148	100
Affiliation		
University of Venda	105	70.9
Women' University of Africa	43	29.1
Total	148	100

Source: Primary data (2024)

4.1.2 Marital status

A large number of respondents were married, and this constituted 83.1% (n=123). This was followed by respondents who were single, who made up 8.1% (n=12). Widowed respondents also made up 8.1% (n=12). On the other hand, divorced participants constituted 0.7% (n=1). The sample mainly consists of married women who probably juggle spousal, parental and family obligations along with academic responsibilities. This offers theoretical relevance to the application of work-family conflict frameworks to the study findings, given that married academics are significantly subjected to the conflicting responsibilities that work-life balance studies are ideally focused on (Greenhaus & Powell, 2000). This is in line with meta-analytic evidence that family structure and marital obligations constitute the most consistent indicators of work-family conflict in various cultural settings (Allen et al., 2020).

4.1.3 Educational level

The dominant group had a master's degree. This made up 57.4% (n=85) and other respondents had doctorates making up 42.6% (n=63). In tandem, Alemiga & Kibukamusoke (2019) in their study found that

most academics in higher education possess a Master's degree, which is a prerequisite for entry-level academic posts, whilst a doctoral qualification was essential for progressing to senior academic levels. Despite women having multiple responsibilities at home and work, some managed to self-develop, which is a requisite in academia.

4.1.4 Affiliation with an institution

The sample is predominantly associated with the University of Venda (UNIVEN) institution, representing 70.9% of the respondents (n=105), and 29.1% are associated with Women's University in Africa (WUA) (n=43). This finding highlights that UNIVEN is a bigger institution than WUA.

4.2 Reliability statistics results

The two measurement scales were tested for their reliability and their results are highlighted below.

TABLE 2. RELIABILITY STATISTICS FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND JOB PERFORMANCE SCALES

Scale	No of items	Value α	Interpretation
Work-life balance	11	0.917	Excellent
Job performance	11	0.881	Good

Source: Primary data (2024)

The initial reliability test for the work-life balance scale had 14 items, the three-work-personal life enhancement scale items were bad. These had an item correlation below the standard of 0.3 according to Pallant (2020). Therefore, they had to be removed, and the researcher performed a second run of the item correlations. The second test of reliability test was performed after removing WPLE1, WPLE2, and WPLE3. The work-life balance scale had an excellent Cronbach α of 0.917 on its eleven items in this study (Pallant, 2020). No problematic items were indicated since all component values for the corrected-item total score were greater than = 0.70. Furthermore, all items scored an item-total correlation greater than the standard score of 0.3. The eleven items on this scale were kept for additional evaluation. From the research findings, the measuring instrument was reliable and can be adopted in future studies in the South African and Zimbabwean contexts (Smeltzer et al., 2016). These results are summarised in Table 2 above. All work-life balance items were kept for further analysis.

The reliability of the BL scale, as assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, is outstanding. The Cronbach's alpha value of 0.881 and the alpha based on standardised items, also 0.887, indicate a satisfactory reliability level based on eleven items. This high level of reliability should instil confidence in the scale's users, reinforcing the scale's suitability for robust and reliable studies according to Pallant (2020). Therefore, all items for job performance were retained for further analysis.

4.3 Research constructs descriptive statistics

This section presents the results of descriptive statistics. Mean (μ) was used to determine the extent to which respondents agreed with the item. Standard deviation was used to evaluate the extent to which respondents converged in responding to the items in the questionnaires.

TABLE 3. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR RESEARCH VARIABLES

	Mean	Std. deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
WLB	4.136	2.791	2.029	3.160
JP	4.172	2.456	1.432	1.672

Note: WLB=Work life balance; JP=Job performance

Source: Primary data (2024)

The descriptive statistics for the research variables, measured on a 5-point Likert scale, indicate generally positive perceptions among respondents regarding their experiences. Work-life balance shows a mean of 4.136(μ) with a high standard deviation of 2.791(SD), indicating that while respondents lean towards agreeing that they maintain a suitable work-life balance, the substantial variability in responses suggests that experiences may differ greatly among individuals. The positive skewness of 2.029 supports the notion that a notable proportion of respondents strongly agree with their work-life balance. Yet, the pronounced kurtosis implies some outliers have either extremely high or low perceptions. Job performance reflects a mean of 4.172 (μ) with a high standard deviation of 2.456(SD), reinforcing that the respondents generally agree on their performance levels.

4.4 Hypotheses testing: regression analysis

Simple linear regression analysis was done to establish the statistically significant relationship between work-life balance and job performance. The standard significance level for regression is 0.05, and the level of confidence was 99% (Pallant, 2020). Therefore, for any p-value greater than 0.01, the hypothesis is rejected, and for a p-value less than 0.01, the hypothesis is accepted.

4.4.1 Work-life balance and job performance

The effect of work-life balance on job performance among women academics is demonstrated by the regression results in Table 4. These results show a statistically significant relationship (regression = 0.863) between work-life balance and job performance, and the coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.744 indicates that work-life balance accounts for 74% of the variation in job performance amongst women academics, with the remaining 26% being attributable to factors not included in the model.

Work-life balance and job performance were found to be positively related ($r = 0.973$, $p < 0.01$). This finding suggests that academics at the University of Venda and the Women's University in Africa reported that work-life balance enhanced job performance. On the other hand, the regression analysis confirmed

this significant positive relationship ($r = 0.887$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that, while other parameters remain constant, a one-unit increase in work-life balance leads to an increase in job performance for women academics in both institutions by 0.980 units.

TABLE 4. REGRESSION ANALYSIS WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND JOB PERFORMANCE

Model summary						
Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate		
1	.863 ^a	.744	.743	1.416		
a. Predictors: (Constant), WLB						
ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	852.300	1	852.300	425.130	<.001
	Residual	292.700	146	2.005		
	Total	1145.000	147			
a. Dependent variable: JP						
b. Predictors: (Constant), WLB						
Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.523	2.184		.239	<.001
	WLB	.980	.048	.863	20.619	<.001
a. Dependent Variable: JP						

Source: Primary data (2024)

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between work-life balance and job performance, suggesting that academics at UNIVEN and WUA who experienced work-life balance reported enhanced job performance. To corroborate, studies have been done in a different occupational context, such as bank workers (Obiageli et al., 2015). This result comports with the understanding that work-life balance reflects an individual's subjective appraisal of adequately fulfilling the demands of both work and non-work domains (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). The moderate dispersion around the mean suggests that, while the overarching trend is positive, individual experiences exhibit variability, a pattern consistent with empirical evidence indicating that work-life balance experiences diverge significantly based on factors such as marital status, caregiving responsibilities, and institutional support structures (Lekchiri & Eversole, 2021; Kalliath et al., 2020).

According to Rashmi and Kataria (2022) and Sirgy and Lee (2018), the strength of the connection found in this study supports the idea that work-life balance serves as a tool that allows people to fulfil job expectations in multiple domains without exhaustion, freeing up cognitive and emotional resources for higher task and contextual performance. Additionally, it supports interpretations of the work-life balance-performance relationship, as determined by job satisfaction and engagement, whereby individuals who

experience greater balance report higher engagement and enhanced performance (Putranti et al., 2020). Also, in support of this finding, Carreri et al. (2022) and Kossek (2018) investigated the relationship between work-life balance and job performance, and their results indicated that work-life balance positively influences employees' job performance. Furthermore, a South African study by Ronnie et al. (2022) on women academics and the shifting psychological contract during the COVID-19 lockdown indicated that the flexibility provided by blended learning enabled women academics to manage their professional and personal responsibilities effectively. Together, these results suggest an overarching trend of positive perceptions within the workplace, where individuals who report superior work-life balance tend to also report elevated levels of job performance (Soomro et al., 2018; Thevanes & Mangaleswaran, 2018). These findings thus support the conclusion of the current study.

From a theoretical perspective, this result may also be understood via the social exchange theory lens (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958). The theory holds that if organizations offer conditions that allow workers to balance work and personal needs, such as supportive cultures or flexible policies, workers respond with increased performance and effort as a form of exchange (Frieder, 2018; Koopman et al., 2015). According to this study, female academics who believe that their institutions support a healthy work-life balance may return the favour by being more dedicated to their research, teaching, and community service. This is in line with research showing that organizational support for work-life balance is associated with positive performance results at the institution and employee levels across industries (Cegarra-Leiva et al., 2012; Odriozola & Baraibar-Diez, 2018; Pawirosumarto et al., 2017).

However, findings by Wood (2016) present a contrasting perspective; the study concluded that work-life balance does not promote job performance and may even be counterproductive. Supporting findings by Rasheed et al. (2022), who identified organisational pressures and insufficient assistance as obstacles to attaining a favourable work-life balance. Lendák-Kabók (2022) further argues that where there is a lack of structural institutional remedies, women academics develop their own coping mechanisms shaped by gender to cope with work-life balance. This effectively absorbs the organisational inadequacies at an individual level. Furthermore, research by Carreri et al. (2022) indicated that although work-life balance favourably influences work performance, it is frequently regulated by additional factors such as salary and employee engagement. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Wood's (2016) study revealed that organisations have made significant improvements in their work-life balance practices.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Theoretical contributions

From a theoretical orientation, this study contributes to the literature on how work-life balance influences academics' job performance in a number of ways. Firstly, it applies social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958) to the little-studied situation of female academics in Southern African higher education, showing that if academic institutions are perceived to assist workers in striking a balance between work and personal life, academics seem to return the favour by performing better. This provides additional empirical support for the practicality of exchange-driven models outside the business, and Western environments where they have mainly been explored.

Secondly, by contrasting two distinctly structurally different institutions, a privately-owned university and a public university, this study offers comparison-based theoretical insights into how organizational culture and institutional type may influence the effectiveness of the work-life balance and job performance relationship, an area that prior research has seldom directly addressed. By emphasizing institutional context as a pertinent boundary condition rather than just individual traits, this aids in improving work-life balance theoretical frameworks.

Thirdly, by empirically evaluating instead of theorizing the unique role dynamics that women academics encounter within an African higher learning environment, which continues to be marginalized in the larger work-life balance literature in comparison to Western and other developed contexts, the study adds to the expanding corpus of gender-focused academic literature.

6.2 Practical contributions

The significant positive correlation between work-life balance and job performance indicates that investments by institutions in work-life balance support systems are not only an employee wellbeing factor but also a performance-enhancing approach for university administration and policymakers. Given evidence showing flexible work arrangements are linked to better employee outcomes, universities should think about formalizing flexible working arrangements, such as flexible teaching schedules or remote work choices where practical.

The results highlight the importance of family-responsive policies for human resources and institutional leadership, such as sufficient parental (maternal and paternal) leave requirements, mentorship programs and child care assistance designed for female academics juggling their careers and caregiving responsibilities. Institutions should pay special attention to how policies satisfy the demands of academics juggling teaching and research loads with spousal and family commitments, as married respondents predominate in this sample.

The results highlight the usefulness of individual approaches which have been demonstrated to assist academics in coping with conflicting needs, such as methods for time management, establishing boundaries between the work and home domains, and utilizing accessible institutional assistance.

In addition, Zimbabwe's National Development Strategy goals on gender equality (NDS1, 2021–2025) and South Africa's DHET gender-equity monitoring frameworks (DHET Annual Reports, 2021–2023; NSFAS Gender Review, 2022) are two examples of educational institution reform and gender equality priorities that could be enhanced by explicitly integrating work-life balance factors into academic staff well-being and employment retention policies.

Lastly, the results provide a foundation for considering how founding mandates regarding empowerment of women are converted into concrete workplace support systems and the extent to which these frameworks offer quantifiable advantages over traditional university settings in supporting women's work-life balance for the Women's University in Africa and similarly gender-focused institutions.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study have valuable implications for academic institutions seeking to enhance job performance through the promotion of work-life balance. The strong positive relationship between work-life balance and job performance suggests that fostering a supportive environment that prioritises work-life balance can lead to significant improvements in employee productivity. This is particularly relevant for institutions like the University of Venda and the Women's University in Africa, where the data indicates that women academics can enhance their job performance through effective work-life management. Policymakers and educational leaders should consider investing in programs and initiatives that support work-life balance, such as flexible scheduling, mental health resources, and family-friendly policies. This employee-centric approach can lead to the development of policies that accommodate academic staff and recognise and address the unique challenges faced by women in managing their dual responsibilities. By prioritising work-life balance, institutions can create a more conducive environment for academic staff, ultimately leading to increased job satisfaction and performance.

Furthermore, research underscores the evolving landscape of work-life balance within the context of changing organisational practices. While some studies, like Wood (2016), argue against the benefits of work-life balance for job performance, the current findings, aligned with more recent literature, indicate that organisations have made considerable advancements in their support strategies. These developments are particularly salient in light of challenges posed by events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted the importance of flexibility and adaptability for women academics managing dual responsibilities. Institutions must remain proactive in developing and promoting work-life balance initiatives

that not only improve job performance, but also adapt to the diverse needs of their employees. This can lead to a more equitable and productive workplace where all academic members can thrive in both their professional and personal endeavours. The research findings form the basis for South African and Zimbabwean universities to develop adequate human resources management strategies and policies that enable the achievement of work-life balance. This promotes job performance and an enhanced employer-employee reciprocal relationship. This study also contributes to Sustainable Development Goal Number 5 on gender equality and Number 8 on decent work and economic development, where institutions of higher learning are encouraged to develop enhanced employee support mechanisms that foster better working conditions for women academics and gender equality. Future research studies may consider using interpretivism to get further insights into this phenomenon and experimental techniques to further confirm these results. The study focused on women academics only, and it is recommended that further research consider including male participants to get a balanced view of both genders.

8. LIMITATIONS

The study had several limitations. Firstly, the restricted institutional and geographic coverage, as it only focused on the University of Venda in South Africa and the Women's University in Africa in Zimbabwe. Secondly, the study utilised women academics exclusively. Hence, the study is unable to provide a direct, statistically controlled comparison of the potential differences in the association between work-life balance and job performance between male and female academics. Thirdly, it was a cross-sectional study which did not allow inferences regarding the direction of the relationship between job performance and work-life balance. Fourthly, the distribution of the sample's marital status was significantly skewed towards married respondents; this restricted the generalizability of the findings to women academics with varied familial patterns, whose work-life balancing issues and coping mechanisms might vary significantly. Lastly, the exclusion of structural and contextual elements such as educational rank, the number of family members, household earnings, or the availability of domestic support was not specifically controlled in this study.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The authors declare that they have not used any Generative AI and/or AI-Assisted technologies during the preparation of this work.

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