

# Job Satisfaction, Stress and Teacher-child Relationship among Private Preschool Teachers in Johor Bahru

Anusha Raj Jayaraja

Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

Suziyani Mohamed

Assistant Dean, Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

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## Abstract

The teaching profession has now evolved to need high levels of adaptability in order to keep up with the fast paced change in agendas of the education system globally. Recent continuous changes and new implementations in education has been deeply affected the job of teachers. The Ministry of Education of Malaysia (MOE) through the National Dialogue program has outlined Quality of Teachers as one of three factors that are basis to the transformation of the Malaysian education system while reiterating that the success of education system relies heavily on the dedications and commitment of teachers. The main purpose of this study was to determine the levels of job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru. The results of this study is hoped to provide an understanding to teachers of the importance of fostering their well-being to avoid effects of stress as well as of the importance of their relationship with children to their overall job satisfaction. A total of 219 respondents participated in this cross sectional correlation study. Results show a moderate level of job satisfaction ( $M=2.81$ ,  $SD_0.325$ ), moderate stress level ( $M = 16.67$ ,  $SD = 4.846$ ) and a moderate teacher-child relationship ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 0.287$ ) among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru. Job satisfaction was found to have significant negative correlation with stress ( $r = 0.433$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and a significant positive correlation with teacher-child relationship ( $r = 0.185$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Findings of this study could fill a knowledge gap by providing an overview of job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship among private preschool teachers. Findings of this study also show the importance of further research in job satisfaction of teachers.

**Keywords:** Job Satisfaction, Stress, Teacher-child Relationship, Preschool, Preschool Teacher, Johor Bahru

**Introduction**

The teaching profession today is far different from what it has been in the past, from the role of a teacher, workload and up to the expectations from a teacher. Constant change is the new norm and teaching is one of the professions that undergo regular and constant changes in many terms based on the agenda and policies of current governments in every country. Thus, it is a must that individuals who embrace this profession are highly adaptable in order to keep pace with the rapid dynamics while also persevering their personal well being (Day et al., 2007). Job satisfaction is of paramount importance in ensuring the well being of teachers. The concept of job satisfaction has drawn the interest of researchers in every sector especially in the past few decades (Judge & Church, 2000). According to Mullins (2005), job satisfaction is an intricate concept with many sub domains that holds different significance to every individual. Job satisfaction is rooted within the every individual and is connected to their perceived sense of achievement. Along with changes to the agendas in education, constant changes in every aspect of the profession has been deeply affecting teachers satisfaction with their job (Day et al., 2007). This pattern is also observed in the education systems in South Asian countries including Malaysia recently, where repeated excessive revamps to education has dimmed the motivation of teachers. Besides robust changes, the responsibility to reform the Malaysian education system had been placed on the shoulders of teachers which have seemingly drained the teachers' energy (Hallinger, 2010). The Malaysian education system is now facing a tough challenge to deliver world class quality education (Subramaniam, 2022). Moving forward, the job of an Early Childhood Educator (ECE), also known as preschool teachers demands more time and energy for tasks like preparing lesson plans, teaching materials, implementing lesson plans and caring for young children. The load of working with and caring for young children requires the highest degree of patience and motivation as children are young curious minds that are influenced easily and require love and care besides education (Krogh & Slentz, 2001). Recent studies have been increasingly focused on preschool teachers and factors that affect their job such as job satisfaction since these have been shown to be directly connected to child outcomes (Ejimofofor, 2015).

Focusing on job satisfaction, it is usually studied and understood from three perspectives: emotional, cognitive and behavioral (George & Jones, 2011). Individuals with a low job satisfaction are more inclined to experience negative effects such as disappointment, anxiety, and stress (Asghar & Oino, 2017). Stress and teacher-child relationships are factors that are frequently studied in combination with job satisfaction of preschool teachers (Ejimofofor, 2015). The many challenges and responsibilities in the profession of teaching added with the ever changing demands and expectations had become a dilemma that causes stress to teachers (Zulhairi et al., 2016). Previous studies have established a significant relationship between stress and job satisfaction among teachers (Singh, Ameri & Sabbarwal, 2019; Bartram et al., 2004). According to Ji & Dobbs-Oates (2016), studies have shown that the quality of teacher – child relationship predispose the level of support that children receive from their teacher. It also has a big impact on various domains of overall child development. Moreover, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2012) has identified positive teacher-child relationship as one of the 10 standards for accreditation of Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs. Spilt, et al (2018) found that teacher-child relationship influences the well-being of teachers and is a source that affects emotions in the daily life of teachers. This is supported by the study of Hepfner (2017) that states dissatisfaction at work affects teacher-child relationship. The continued interest in the study

of job satisfaction among teachers is essential since job satisfaction is not a fixed value but is constantly changing based on emotions, current issues and changes in work aspects (Niklas & Dormann, 2005).

According to Singh et al (2019) there is a pressing need to study into the job satisfaction crisis faced by teachers as turnover rate in this field continues to skyrocket. This crisis needs to be given the importance it needs as it directly impacts education of young children and the mental health of teachers (Greenberg et al., 2016). As stated by Berryhill, Linney and Fromewick (2009), research into teachers' job satisfaction is needed in order to build strategies to improve working conditions for them. Specifically, the job satisfaction of preschool teachers is of paramount importance as ECE forms the base to education of any child and the industry needs to attract and retain good candidates for the job (OECD, 2014; Hepfner, 2017). Previous research have established that job satisfaction poses the biggest impact on the turnover rate of preschool teachers as compared to teachers from other levels of education (Kusma et al., 2012). Reseach is needed to gain further knowledge into the factors behind the job satisfaction of preschool teachers in order to support efforts to retain preschool teachers in their jobs (Hepfner, 2017). According to Veldman, Tartwijk, Brekelmans & Wubbels, 2013 in Ejimofor, 2015 the job satisfaction of teachers is a less studied subject eventhough it has been proven to directly affect the well-being of teachers and the performance of students. The job satisfaction of teachers changes and is affected every time changes are implemented in the education system, pushing the need to continuously study job satisfaction among this group (Yim & Moses, 2016). According to Zainab et al. (2020), the job satisfaction of the working sector in Malaysia is facing a downward trend and comprehensive research is needed to provide valuable insights for stakeholdres to act upon.

Moving on, stress had been dubbed the Health Epidemic of the 21-st Century by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Fink, 2009). Stress among teachers needs to be managed as it is capable of challenging the stability of the education system (Greenberg, Brown & Abenavoli, 2016). Stress among teachers has become so prevalent that teaching has become the most stressful profession (Greenberg et al., 2016). Stress is racing job satisfaction to become the topmost reason why teachers are now quit the profession prematurely and teachers leaving the job is costing stability in educational organisations as well as in education. More teachers leaving the job has forced organisations to continuously hire and train teachers, which significantly increases cost while compromising the quality of education provided (Silva et al., 2014). The ever increasing workload of teachers is causing them great stress which in turn affects their job satisfaction (Klassan & Chui, 2010). Stress among teachers has been shown to affect teacher-child relationship which has a profound effect on the social adjustment of young children (Hoglund et al., 2015). Teachers with low job satisfaction negatively influence the teacher-child relationship in terms of verbal stimulation and emotional development of the child, which complicates the learning process to the child (Thmason & LaPara, 2012). Nevertheless, negative teacher-child relationships has been found to adversely influence teachers job satisfaction. Previous research have indicated that negative experiences with teachers in preschool leads to poor adaptation abilities in primary school (Grammatikopoulos et al., 2012). Reseach is needed to establish the patterns of teacher-child relationships in ECE settings and its impact towards both teachers and children (Grammatikopoulos et al., 2012).

A 2013 survey by MetLife showed that only 60% of teachers were satisfied with their jobs, a drastic decline in comparison to the previous decade. A total of 35% of teachers who participated in the survey voiced their desire to leave the profession within the following 2 years citing work related stress as a main reason. Shifting the focus on Malaysia, a study by Othman and Sivasubramaniam (2019) reported that 32% of teachers in the Klang Valley area are experiencing stress with 7% of them displaying symptoms of severe stress. Statistics from Universiti Putra Malaysia have shown that 71.1% of teachers in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor are experiencing job related stress (Nadiyah et al., 2019). The high turnover rate and pity state of the teaching profession points to a desperate need to study and stem the teachers' job satisfaction crisis (Singh et al., 2019). This climaxing crisis needs to be taken seriously as it is deeply interconnected to the education of children, teachers' health and as it involves large sums in costs to ECE center operators (Greenberg et al., 2016). New studies have revealed that teachers in Malaysia are in dire need of stress management, and the first step towards betterment is to teachers understand and accept that they are in the midst of a crisis and need to make amendments. Research plays an important role in understanding the solutions to this situation and to subsequently move forward making improvements (Kaur et al., 2022). According to Spodek & Saracho (2006), ECE teachers play a complex role in the many facets of child development and their well-being is of great importance in order to maintain the ecosystem of teaching and learning in ECE centers. As such, there is a pressing need to study the factors that affect the well-being of ECE or preschool teachers (Yee et al., 2022).

A review of existing literature and an online search encompassing prominent electronic databases such as Google Scholar, Web of Science (WOS), Proquest and Science Direct showed that research on job satisfaction among preschool teachers in Malaysia, specifically in the city of Johor Bahru is scarce and limited. This study focused on preschool teachers working in privately owned ECE centers situated within the city of Johor Bahru. The main purpose of this study was to identify the levels of job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship among the private preschool teachers on Johor Bahru city. Based on the main purpose of this study, the objectives outlined are as follows:

- Determine the job satisfaction level among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru.
- Determine the stress level among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru.
- Determine the teacher-child relationship level among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru.
- Determine the relationship between job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru.

Subsequent sections are arranged as follows: Firstly a review and discussion of literature covering teacher-child relationship, stress and job satisfaction followed by a discussion of methods and data analyses. This is followed by the reporting and discussion of results. Finally, this article is concluded with implications, limitations and suggestions and directions for further research.

### **Literature Review**

Pianta (1999) defined Teacher-child relationship as an emotion based experience grounded in the interaction between the teacher and the child. Teacher-child relationship is the positive connection between the teacher and the child that is built on trust and respect

between the involved (daLuz, 2015). In the current study, teacher-child relationship was determined by the score on Student-Teacher Relationship Scale-Short Form (STRS-SF). A high score on the scale shows a positive teacher-child relationship while a low score shows a negative teacher-child relationship. Moving forward, Fink (2009) had stated that stress has different meanings to each individual in different situations. According to Selye (1976), in behavioral science settings, stress is defined as a perception of threat that involves stress, unrest, emotional strain and difficulty in adjustment. Stress is an overwhelming emotional stimulation that results in the imbalance between thought process and behavior which subsequently ends in a negative reaction (VandenBos, 2015 in Izzati et al., 2019). In this study, stress level refers to the score obtained on the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10). A high score shows a high stress level while a low score shows low stress level. Next, Locke (1976) defines job satisfaction as positive emotion and state of mind resulting from the experience at work as well as the positive behavior or emotional inclination that stems from one's job. As Sempene, Rieger and Roodt (2002) state, job satisfaction can be inferred as the perception and evaluation of an employee of their overall work environment. In this study, job satisfaction is determined by the score on the Job Satisfaction Scale (JSS). A high score shows a high job satisfaction while a low score shows a low job satisfaction.

According to Pianta (1999), teacher-child relationship is the positive relationship between teacher and children that is built upon the base of mutual trust and respect between teacher and children (daLuz, 2015). Past studies have shown that stress among teachers is one of the leading factors that impact teacher-child relationship in an ECE setting (Quinn et al., 2022). Teacher stress resulting from work overload is able to bring about negative effects upon the teacher-child relationship (Ota et al., 2012). A big part of the success of any ECE program is highly reliant on the teacher-child relationship (Brandt et al., 2014). Various studies have been conducted to show that the quality of teacher-child relationship has a profound effect on children (Quinn et al., 2022). Past studies have also shown that teacher-child relationship has a definitive impact on teachers as much as on children on multiple aspects (Li Grining et al., 2010; Schmidt & Lehl, 2018). Based on previous studies, it was established that the dimensions and elements in teacher-child relationship differ within each country. Every study reviewed such as O'shea (2021) has underlined the importance of further research on the diverse facets of teacher-child relationship among preschool teachers. Review of research articles from multiple countries revealed that the level of teacher-child relationship is distinct from one another and is impacted by a multitude of different factors.

A Sweden study by Finnmann et al (2023) aimed to investigate the factors that drive preschool teachers to encourage children participation in classroom activities. This study found interaction between teacher and children to have an influence on the teachers. Results showed teachers prioritize their commitment to building a positive teacher-child relationship even while being unhappy with their job. Teachers reported using different techniques to build a positive relationship with children. A U.S. study by O'Shea (2021) reviewed existing data to study the effects of gender, experience, education level and teacher-child relationship on teachers' job satisfaction. Results showed teacher-child relationship to be the strongest predictor of job satisfaction among teachers. Another U.S. study by Rivas et al (2023) compared the self-efficacy of teachers from urban and rural teachers after they attended the Teacher-Child Interaction Training-Universal (TCIT-U). This study found extrinsic factors and teacher factor doesn't influence self-efficacy as much as teacher-child relationship did.

Teachers from both areas who underwent the training showed an upswing in teacher-child relationship among other factors. This study also underlines the benefits teacher training can bring to the teacher, the children and the education system as a whole. Moving on, a study in China by Wang et al (2023) focused on teacher mindfulness and teacher-child relationship among preschool teachers. Results showed teacher mindfulness significantly impacted teacher-child relationship. Mindful teachers were able to view children misbehavior from an objective and non-critical point and showed acceptance towards such behavior. This factor found to be crucial to ensure a positive teacher-child relationship in this study. This research suggests that the factors that affect teacher mindfulness be further explored in order to strengthen teacher-child relationship in a preschool setting.

A review of previous studies showed the emergence of a theme of factors that were found to impact teacher-child relationship among preschool teachers, prominently job satisfaction Harrison & Wang (2023); O'Shea (2021) emotional well-being (Sumatic et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023) and stress (Finnmann et al., 2023; Chen & Philips, 2023). Among instruments most commonly used to measure job satisfaction among teachers was the JSS, which was also utilized in the current study (Sumatic et al., 2023; Smidt & Lehl, 2018; Wang et al., 2023). Moving forward, most research on teacher-child relationship was conducted to study its impact on children while only a few focused on the impacts of teacher-child relationship on teachers (Rivas et al., 2023; Chen & Philips, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). In conclusion the effect of teacher-child relationship on the teacher and factors that effect it are comparatively less researched (Finnmann et al., 2023; Rivas et al., 2023). It is less established that job satisfaction and stress among preschool teachers have an impact on the quality of relationship between teachers and young children (Whitaker, Dearth-Wesley & Gooze, 2015). Thus, this study is hoped to fill the research gap in understanding the relationship between job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship among preschool teachers.

According to Selye (1976), from the view point of behavioral science, stress is the perception of threat that results in anxiety, unease, difficulty in adjustment and tense emotions. Generally, stress is believed to be the result of an imbalance between the expectations towards an individual and the ability of the individual to manage the set expectations (Converso et al., 2015). In job context, expectations are present in the form of physical, psychological and/or social demands that exist within an organization. Job demands refer to physical or psychological (emotional and/or cognitive) efforts that are continuously expected from an employee (Kyriacou, 2001). Prolonged stress may develop to become serious dan result in acute conditions such as depression (Koolhaas et al., 2011). Stress among teachers is widely understood as the negative emotional experience appertaining to individual ability to face work related stressors (Kyriacou, 2001). Stress among teachers is linked to an array of negative effects such as health defects, a decline in teaching quality, fatigue and absenteeism (Greenberg et al., 2016). A big part of preschool teachers' stress lies in ensuring success, school readiness and a smooth transition for children into the formal education system (Sandilos et al., 2018). Based on the review of previous studies, it was concluded that the stress levels of teachers differ in every country. Several studies had also put forth an appeal to governments and preschool administrations to take steps to address stress among preschool teachers (Sandilos et al., 2018; Fletcher & Wisneski, 2020; Gardarsdottir, 2019).

A study in Australia by Carroll et al (2022) aimed to explore the role of teaching experience in handling of work related stress, effects of stress on teachers of different education sectors, and the influence of environment factors on stress among teachers. A staggering 55% of teachers reported high stress level, found to be most prevalent among preschool teachers. A total of 59% of teachers reported they were thinking of leaving the job due to dissatisfaction, lack of support and high workload. This study highlighted the importance of studying stress among preschool teachers. A U.S. study by Fletcher and Wisneski (2020) aimed to study the psychological stress among preschool teachers working for non-governmental organizations. Teachers reported a lack of respect at work, by parents and their community as a whole caused stress in them. This lack of respect decreased their motivation to strive for positive outcome in children. Stress was also shown to lower the socio-emotional capacity among teachers, which weighed heavily on teacher-child relationship. This study mentioned that the success of preschool education programs relies on the strength of teacher-child relationship, thus stress among teachers could indirectly cause the failure of preschool interventions or programs. A study in Nigeria by Okeke and Ogbeche (2022) focused on the relationship between work stress and job satisfaction as well as the role of gender in predicting stress and job satisfaction among preschool teachers. Results revealed the main factors behind teacher stress are work-related issues such as pay, lack of teaching materials provided, classroom management, racing to complete the curriculum and administrative tasks. Results also showed a negative correlation between stress and job satisfaction. Finally, this study revealed the presence of gender difference in job satisfaction among preschool teachers, where female preschool teachers reported higher job satisfaction in comparison to their male counterparts.

Stress experienced by teachers in some countries was at relatively a low level, some at medium levels while some countries recorded a high level. Stress levels in different countries were attributed to various factors, with burnout as the most common factor Ahmad et al (2022); Li et al (2020), followed by motivation Carroll et al (2022); Kim & Lee (2021) and tailed closely by job satisfaction (Byun et al., 2022; Okeke & Ogbeche, 2022; Farewell et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020). While being studied from multiple dimensions, it was observed that most studies investigated teacher stress in relation to work related factors (Byun et al., 2022; Quinn et al., 2022; Ahmad et al., 2022), pay Okeke & Ogbeche (2022), appreciation (Ahmad, Saffardin & Teoh, 2022; Fletcher & Wisneski, 2020; workload Carroll et al (2022); Gardarsdottir (2019) and children factor (Young & Leffler, 2022; Fletcher & Wisneski, 2020; Sandilos et al., 2018). Most studies that investigated preschool teachers stress levels had utilized the PSS-10 in a quantitative method, specifically in form of correlation studies (Carroll et al., 2022; Young & Leffler, 2022; Farewell et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020). Based on this observation, the current study also was built using the correlational study design. The suggestions and limitations addressed in previous studies were also taken into consideration and incorporated in designing methodology of the current study such as the sample size, data collection period and the demographic information collected.

As per Locke (1976), job satisfaction is interpreted as the positive emotion resulting from evaluation of one's job and job related experience. Research exploring job satisfaction can be traced back to the 1920's Hawthorne Studies series, a high impact research that focused on the social and psychological factors of workplace towards employees (Rafferty & Griffin, 2008). According to Ahmed (2022), job satisfaction is a broad concept with many

nuances that involves various aspects that bring differing meaning to every individual. The satisfaction or dissatisfaction towards one's job can be determined by observing the way he/she interprets work situations, relationships within work settings and the context of their job. Job satisfaction is explained as the work oriented attitude that is born from the mental evaluation or work related elements (Alparslan, 2016). Previous studies have established that job satisfaction is a state of emotion that results from a perception of fulfilled material, social and psychological needs of an employee (Azeez et al., 2016). Job satisfaction increases the commitment of an employee to the organization and subsequently fosters the overall performance of an organization (Mwesigwa et al., 2020). The Herzberg's Two Factor Theory denotes that factors such as responsibility, professional development, recognition and achievement promotes job satisfaction while factors such as organization policy, interest and relationship with coworkers can cause a dwindle in job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1968 dalam Abdulkhamidova, 2021).

A study in the U.S. by Sandstrom et al (2022) aimed to explore the perspective on program characteristics, preschool management, job satisfaction and thoughts on retaining their job among staffs holding different levels of job positions in preschools. Results revealed staffs working in bigger preschool organizations had higher job satisfactions in comparison to staffs working in a smaller preschool organization. Furthermore, a total of 43% of teachers planned to retain their job at least for the following 2 years. Another study by Çiçekler et al (2020) compared the job satisfaction and burnout among preschool teachers from 2 countries, namely Turkey and the U.S. This study showed teachers in Turkey had higher burnout levels owing to large teacher child ration as well as a lack of teachers. As for job satisfaction, teachers from both countries reported low job satisfaction. Lack of professional support, lack of teaching materials, program quality and implementation of changes in preschool education system emerged as main themes that contributed to low job satisfaction. As for the teachers studied in the U.S., teacher-child relationship was one of the main contributor to low job satisfaction owing to increasing behavior issues in children among the population of presechool children that is becoming increasingly heterogenous.

Based on the studies reviewed, it was concluded that job satisfaction is perceived differently in every sector and every other country. In essence, the level of job satisfaction among teachers in every country was observed to be different from one another. Every study reviewed had indicated the need for further study on the job satisfaction of preschool teachers. The most common factor that was found to impact teacher job satisfaction was motivation Carrasco (2019), pay Ahmed (2022); Jie (2019), employee welfare Holp (2022); Sandstrom et al (2022); Lee (2020); Jie (2020), tekanan (Ern, 2023; Cicekler et al., 2022; and teacher-child relationship (Lee, 2020). Most studies that delved into job satisfaction of preschool teachers has utilized a correlational study design (Ern, 2023; Cicekler et al., 2022; Holp, 2022; Lee, 2020; Jie, 2020). Thus, this study is hoped to fill the research gap in understanding the relationship between job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship among preschool teachers, especially in Malaysia where such study is scarce. Recent studies have also indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic did not have a notable impact in the job satisfaction levels of teachers (Holp, 2022; Jie, 2020). Hence, this study will not take into consideration the COVID-19 pandemic as a factor in measuring the job satisfaction of preschool teachers.



### Conceptual Framework

The main objective of this study was to determine the levels of job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru. The dependent variable (Y) of this study is the level of job satisfaction among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru. The independent variables (X) in this study are stress and teacher-child relationship. The conceptual framework of this study is presented in Figure 1 below.

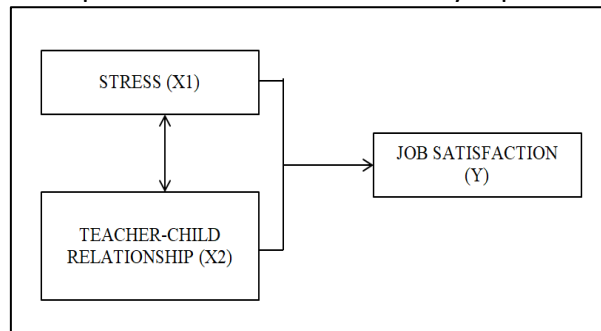


Figure 1. The conceptual framework for the study “Job Satisfaction, Stress and Teacher-child Relationship among Private Preschool Teachers in Johor Bahru”.

The conceptual framework for this study was built on the blocks of the PERMA model of well-being (Seligman, 2011). The PERMA™ model of well-being Seligman (2011) answers the questions regarding the development of human well-being and factors that affect it. Based on the results of his study, Seligman (2011) established that five elements are essential in order for a human being to achieve a state of well-being, satisfaction and meaning to their life. These five elements were later ingrained as the base aspects to his theory. The five blocks that enhance the state of well-being as identified by Seligman (2011) are Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment that form the acronym PERMA. In the current study, the variable job satisfaction is represented by well-being in the PERMA model. As for the independent variables, stress and teacher-child relationship are represented by positive emotions and relationships respectively. Previous studies Finkbeiner (2023); Kern et al (2014); Fredrickson (2001); Madeson (2021) have established that positive emotions contribute to well-being of individuals while negative emotions are detrimental to well-being, as represented in the PERMA model. Studies conducted in workplace settings Finkbeiner (2023); Kern et al (2014) showed positive relationships at workplace or people at workplace who give meaning to the job influence the well-being of employees as represented in the PERMA model of well-being. These studies also showed that the relationship between the elements of stress and teacher-child well-being have an effect on the well-being of employees at workplace, represented by job satisfaction in the current study.

The PERMA model connotes that the 5 elements are essential to well-being of humans. The first element of PERMA, positive emotions, is most closely tied to happiness and well-being although the term positive emotion is not limited to happiness (Hill, 2020). This element is represented by stress (X1) in the current study. Working adults nowadays experience somewhat less of positive emotions as a result of negative experiences and happenings around them (Madeson, 2021). When one incorporates positive emotions as a part of daily life, it may negate the effects of negative experiences and promotes resilience in them (Madeson, 2021). Following this in the current study, it is hypothesized that stress has a significant relationship with job satisfaction. The third element of PERMA is relationships as a

contributor to well-being. Relationships is an essential part being humans. Humans allow ourselves to experience the intimacy of a relationship and the emotional and physical connection to other human beings (Hill, 2020). This element is mirrored by teacher-child relationship in the present study. From the viewpoint of evolution, humans are social creatures and are innately driven to connect and have relationships with other humans as a way of continuity of life. The quality of relationships built with surrounding people is plays a fundamental role in ensuring one's well-being and positive experiences and emotions (Kern et al., 2014). Ergo it is imperative that individuals build relationships that will build themselves as it is crucial to the quality of their life (Hill, 2020). Hence, it is deduced that both positive emotions and relationships are significant contributors of well-being. Mirroring this in the current study, it is hypothesized that both stress and teacher-child relationship are significantly correlated with job satisfaction.

### **Methods**

This study employed the correlational research design with quantitative approach. This method was decided based on the review of previous studies as well as the problems discussed in the Introduction section. The target population for this study is private preschool teachers working with private preschools in Johor Bahru city. The study was carried out in private preschools situated within the limits of Johor Bahru city.

### **Sample**

The population size was determined based on data obtained from the Private Education Unit under the Johor State Education Department. The sample size was estimated using the Yamane (1967) formula for sample size. The sampling methods employed for this study was convenience sampling, under the category of non-probability sampling methods. Convenience sampling is a simpler method of obtaining readily available samples for a study (Taherdoost, 2016). According to Ackoff (1953), convenience sampling method is widely utilized by student researchers as it takes up lesser cost in comparison to other sampling methods. The inclusion criteria for samples in this study are individuals who hold a teaching role in any private preschool located within the limits of Johor Bahru city. Table 1 shows the demographic data of respondents. A total of 219 respondents participated in this study.

Table 1

*Demographic Data*

	Total	Percentage (%)
<b>Ethnic</b>		
Malay	72	32.9
Chinese	88	40.2
Indian	48	21.9
Others	11	5.0
<b>Age</b>		
< 20	15	6.8
21-30	72	32.9
31-40	81	37.0
41-50	34	15.5
> 50	17	7.8
<b>Teaching Experience</b>		
0-5 yrs	15	50.00
6-10 yrs	13	43.33
11-15 yrs	2	6.67
16-20 yrs	1	3.33

**Instruments**

Three instruments were selected for this study to measure the variables of job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship. Teacher-child relationship was measured using the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) while stress levels were measured using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10). Job satisfaction on the other hand was measured using the Job Satisfaction Scale (JSS). The Student-Teacher Relationship Scale was developed by Pianta (2001) to measure the relationship between teacher and children from the perspective of the teacher, for children between the ages of 3 and 8. As the STRS was frequently used by researchers, Pianta developed the second version which is Student Teacher Relationship – Short Form (STRS-SF) which was more flexible and time saving in comparison to the original version (Tsigilis & Gregoriadis, 2008). STRS-SF is a self-reporting measure with 15 items assessed using the 5 point Likert scale. All 15 items of STRS-SF were derived from the original 28 item scale of STRS. However, STRS consists of 3 subscales whereas STRS-SF consists of 2 subscales namely closeness and conflict (Yang et al., 2021). The two factor model consisting of closeness and conflict constructs of STRS-SF was found to be valid and reliable in different studies (Tsigilis & Gregoriadis, 2008; Sandhu et al., 2019). According to Settanni et al. (2015), the subscales have high correlation levels; closeness,  $r=.94$  and conflict,  $r=.98$ . As for the current study, the scale was adjusted from 5 aspects in order to better suit the needs of the study. Firstly, the 5 point Likert scale: (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly Agree; was adjusted to become 4 points (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Agree; (4) Strongly Agree based on the evaluation and suggestion

of ECE research experts. Secondly, singular words in the items were replaced with plural words to reflect on all children in a class rather than each individual child.

Next, PSS-10 was developed by Cohen et al (1983) to evaluate global perceptions towards stress by measuring emotions and thoughts experiences in the past 30 days. PSS-10 is also a self-report scale rated on a 5 point Likert Scale. A total of 6 items are negatively worded while 4 items (items 4, 5, 7 and 8) are positively phrased and are reverse scored to obtain the actual score. The total score of 10 items is the final PSS score, with a high score indicating high stress level and vice versa (Sandhu et al., 2015). This study had utilized the PSS-10 version that was translated to the Malay language by (Al-Dubai et al., 2012). The alpha Cronbach value of the PSS-10 Malay version is .82 for the first factor and .72 for the second factor (Sukhvinder et al., 2015). Finally the JSS Spector (1985) is the most frequently used instrument to measure job satisfaction (Spector, 2011). The JSS consists of 36 self-report items, under 9 subscales with 4 items each assessed using a 6-point Likert scale (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Slightly Disagree; (3) Disagree; (4) Agree; (5) Slightly Agree; (6) Strongly Agree. According to Chin-Siang et al (2014), a total of 9 job aspects are evaluated in this instrument, namely pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operating procedures, coworkers, nature of work and communication. Internal consistency test shower that all subscales are correlated from moderate to good level, with a .91 score for the overall instrument (Chin-Siang at al., 2014). The JSS has been translated to the Malay language by Tan (2010) and is widely used to measure job satisfaction of employees across various sectors, including the education sector (Narandaran, 2018).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

For data collection, a list of private preschools with their location and contact information was obtained from the Private Education Unit of Johor State Education Ministry. Based on the list, every preschool was contacted to assess their willingness to participate in the study and to learn protocols of each preschool regarding research data collection, if any. The required documents like student verification letter, research proposal and a copy of the research questionnaire was emailed to preschools that were willing to participate. Data collection was done as per each preschool protocol on given appointments. Data for this study was collected from October 2023 to December 2023. This time was selected as to give the time needed for a teacher-child relationship to build, at around the 8<sup>th</sup> month of the Malaysian school calendar. According to Grammatikopoulos et al (2012), teacher-child relationship was found be stable and well established after at least 6 months after the start of academic year. Data was collected using 2 methods which are paper and pencil method and also via GoogleForm application depending on the preschool. Respondents were briefed on data collection procedures and purposes of the demographic section, confidentiality statement and informed consent. Data collected was analyzed using IBM SPSS Version 28 was used to analyze the data collected. The data was first validated and edited to remove incomplete data before data coding. Next, data was analyzed using descriptive methods followed by Pearson correlation analysis to examine the relationship between variables.

### **Results**

#### *Reliability of Data*

The Cronbach alpha reliability scores for job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2

*Reliability of Data*

Variable	Cronbach Alpha	No of items
Job Satisfaction	0.874	36
Stress	0.778	10
Teacher-child Relationship	0.683	15

Table 2 above shows that the reliability score for job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationships are at 0.874 (36 items), 0.778 (10 items), dan 0.683 (15 items) respectively. Hence, it was deduced that the instruments utilized have good to moderate reliability.

## Job Satisfaction Level among Private Preschool Teachers

**Research Objective 1:** Determine the job satisfaction level among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru.

Table 3 shows overall job satisfaction levels among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru. Data analysis shows the overall job ( $M = 2.81$ ,  $SD = 0.325$ ) among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru is at a moderate level. In this study, job satisfaction was also measured from the 9 subscales of JSS (pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operating procedures, coworkers, nature of work and communication). Table 4 below shows the scores of each subscale. The score for pay ( $M = 2.24$ ,  $SD = 0.599$ ), promotion ( $M = 1.85$ ,  $SD = 0.601$ ), fringe benefits ( $min = 2.47$ ,  $SD = 0.503$ ), and operating procedures ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 0.506$ ) were found to be low. Following this, the scores for supervision ( $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = 0.576$ ), contingent rewards ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = 0.543$ ), coworkers ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 0.426$ ), and communication ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 0.530$ ) were moderate. Finally the subscale nature of work was found to have a high score ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 0.434$ ).

Table 3

*Overall Job Satisfaction Levels*

Score	Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.00 - 1.50	Very low	0	0.0
1.51 - 2.50	Low	37	16.9
2.51 - 3.50	Moderate	180	82.2
3.51 - 4.00	High	2	0.9
<b>Total</b>		<b>219</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4

*Mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of Job Satisfaction Subscales*

Dimension	M	SD	Level
Pay	2.24	.599	Low
Promotion	1.85	.601	Low
Supervision	3.25	.576	Moderate
Fringe benefits	2.47	.503	Low
Contingent rewards	2.79	.543	Moderate
Operating procedures	2.41	.506	Low
Coworkers	3.47	.426	Moderate
Nature of work	3.55	.434	High
Communications	3.22	.530	Moderate
<b>Overall Job Satisfaction</b>	<b>2.81</b>	<b>.325</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

(Levels: Very Low = 1.00 – 1.50, Low = 1.51 – 2.50, Moderate = 2.51 – 3.50, High = 3.51 – 4.00)

Stress Level among Private Preschool Teachers

**Research Objective 2:** Determine the stress level among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru.

Table 5 shows the frequency, percentage, mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for every item of PSS-10. There were 4 positively worded items that were reverse scored and recoded prior to analysis in order to achieve an accurate score. Based on the data collected, item 3 “*In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?*” recorded the highest score (M = 2.04, SD = 0.853), while item 10 “*In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?*” recorded the lowest score (M = 0.97, SD = 0.953). Moving on, table 4.5 shows the overall stress levels of private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru. Analysis found that a total of 60 respondents (27.4%) reported low stress levels, a total of 152 respondents (69.4%) reported moderate stress while a total of 7 respondents (3.2%) reported a high level of stress. In conclusion, analysis reports that the overall stress among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru is at a moderate (M = 16.67, SD = 4.846) level.

Table 5

*Overall Stress Levels*

Score	Level	Frequency	Percentage	M	SD
0 - 13	Low	60	27.4	16.68	4.846
14 - 26	Moderate	152	69.4		
27 - 40	High	7	3.2		
<b>Total</b>		<b>219</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

Teacher-child Relationship among Private Preschool Teachers

**Research objective 3:** Determine the teacher-child relationship level among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru.

In the present study, teacher-child relationship was measured from 2 dimensions according to STRS-SF which were closeness and conflict. Table 6 below showcases the score for conflict (M = 1.87, SD = 0.414) at a low level and the score for closeness (M = 3.74, SD = 0.256) is at a high level. Results also show that the overall teacher-child relationship among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru is at a moderate (M = 3.43, SD = 0.287) level (Table 7). The distribution of overall teacher-child relationship shows 2 respondents (0.9%) had

reported low level, 114 respondents (52.1%) had reported a moderate level and 103 respondents (47.0%) had reported a high level.

Table 6

*Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) of Teacher-child Relationship*

Dimension	M	SD	Level
Closeness	3.74	.256	High
Conflict	1.87	.414	Low
<b>Overall Teacher-child Relationship</b>	<b>3.43</b>	<b>.287</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

(Level: Very low = 1.00 – 1.50, Low = 1.51 – 2.50, Moderate = 2.51 – 3.50, High = 3.51 – 4.00)

Table 7

*Distribution of Teacher-child Relationship Scores according to Levels*

Score	Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.00 - 1.50	Very low	0	0.0
1.51 - 2.50	Low	2	0.9
2.51 - 3.50	Moderate	114	52.1
3.51 - 4.00	High	103	47.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>219</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Relationship between Job Satisfaction, Stress and Teacher-child Relationship

**Research objective 4:** Determine the relationship between job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru.

**H01:** There is no significant relationship between job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru.

Correlation analysis was used to test this hypothesis to determine the presence of a significant relationship among variables in this study. Table 8 shows the results of Pearson correlation analysis.

Table 8

*Relationship between Job Satisfaction, Stress and Teacher-child Relationship*

	Job Satisfaction	Stress	Teacher-child Relationship
Job Satisfaction	1	-.433**	.371**
Stress	-.433**	1	-.185**
Teacher-child Relationship	.371**	-.185**	1

\*\* p < 0.01

The results of Pearson analysis presented in table 8 shows that stress has a negative and significant relationship with job satisfaction ( $r = 0.433$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) as well as with teacher-child relationship ( $r = 0.185$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). A negative relationship shows the higher the job satisfaction, the lower the stress level and vice versa. Results also show that teacher-child relationship has a significant relationship with job satisfaction ( $r = 0.371$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In conclusion, results show there is a significant relationship among job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru. Hence H01 is rejected.

**Discussion**

The main purpose of this study was to determine the levels of job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru. The focus of this study are preschool teachers who work in a ECE centre located within the limits of Johor Bahru city. The relationship between teacher and children especially in ECE settings has piqued the interest of researchers recently owing to the profound effect this relationship has on both the parties (Ejimofofor, 2015). Based on the past studies reviewed, this study is one of the pioneers to research the job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru. The findings of this study is hoped to provide a comprehensive picture of the current job satisfaction of preschool teachers and the 2 factors that effect it. Results found all three factors studied have been reported to be at moderate levels. Moderate job satisfaction shows preschool teachers have an ambivalent feeling towards their job, which is neither positive nor negative. As for stress levels, results have shown that all preschool teachers studied are experiencing stress. However, most respondents reported a low to moderate level of stress in the past 30 days. Moreover, teacher-child relationships were found to be positive at a moderate level, with a high closeness and low conflict. Finally, correlation analysis show a significant relationship between job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship. Results show that the lower the stress level, the higher the job satisfaction and teacher-child relationship among private preschool teachers in Johor Bahru.

Job satisfaction is work oriented behavior that is born from the mental evaluation of job related elements (Alparslan, 2016). The results of the current study is in line with the findings of previous studies that focused on job satisfaction of preschool teachers. Ahmed (2022); Jie (2019); Ern (2023) that also found preschool teachers have moderate job satisfaction. Focusing on the aspects of job satisfaction studied, preschool teachers reported low satisfaction dimensions of pay, fringe benefits and operating procedures as mirrored by the findings of (Abdulkhaidova, 2021). Satisfaction in supervision and nature of work among preschool teachers were moderate and high respectively, in line with the study by (Sandstrom et al., 2022). In this study, the preschool teachers were found to have moderate stress levels. This finding is supported by previous studies Kim & Lee (2021); Sandilos et al (2018); Quinn et al (2022) which also found moderate stress levels among teachers. Various studies have been conducted to prove that teacher-child relationship has an influence on both children as well as teachers (Quinn et al., 2022). In this study, the teacher-child relationship was found to be moderate albeit in a positive direction with a higher closeness and lower conflict level. This findings are supported by the previous studies that obtained similar results (Šumatić et al., 2023; Finnmann et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023). According to the PERMA model which provided the theoretical base to this study, well-being is achieved when there is positive emotions and relationships. In this study, well-being, positive emotions and relationships were represented by job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship respectively. In line with previous studies built on the blocks of PERMA model of well-being PERMA Finkbeiner (2023); Kern et al (2014); Fredrickson (2001); Madeson (2021), the current study had also found job satisfaction is influenced by both stress and teacher-child relationship.

The job satisfaction of teachers is influenced by a number of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. In the present study, job satisfaction was measured from 9 extrinsic factors. Results



showed varying levels of satisfaction in different factors (high, moderate and low) as found in a study by Ern (2019) which also identified teachers have ambivalent feelings towards job related factors. Pay and promotion had low mean score, showing these 2 factors heavily impact the job satisfaction levels of teachers. This is in line with the findings of Jie (2019); Lee (2020); Ahmed (2022) where pay and promotion opportunities were cited as the top reasons why teachers were dissatisfied with work. The job of an ECE teacher requires more time and energy for tasks like lesson planning, preparation of teaching materials, the reaching and learning process along with providing childcare, all of which requires ultimate motivation and patience in comparison to teaching other age groups (Krogh & Slentz, 2001). The effect of the complex duties of an ECE teacher can be observed in the current study, where all teachers reported being stressed, although mostly in moderation. A study by Jie (2019) stated that teachers require the support of the organization in order to effectively manage their stress. This lack of organization support could be observed in the current results where teachers had reported being stressed along with low satisfaction in terms of organization conditions of their workplace. The teacher-child relationship was found to be in a moderate level, in a positive direction characterized by high closeness and low conflict. This is mirrored by the study of Finnmann et al (2023) that found despite facing difficulties in their job, teachers honor the commitment to build and maintain a positive relationship with children. Findings of current study shows a big difference in the level of closeness and conflict in teacher-child relationship. This is supported by the study of Yee et al (2023) that state children are innately not inclined to retain or hold negative emotions such as anger or grudge for a long time. Hence, any negative incidents or emotions is forgotten within a short period of time, leaving less space for conflict with teachers.

### **Implications and Limitations**

This study reiterates the importance of maintaining job satisfaction, managing stress and preserving the teacher-child relationship among preschool teachers. All three factors yielded moderate level outcome, hence proving the dire need of betterment in order to improve the situation for the sake of both teachers and children. The results are hoped to provide a comprehensive view of the current situation to preschool teachers themselves so they can take necessary steps to foster well-being and manage stress before it leads to serious outcomes. As for ECE center operators, it is hoped that the findings of this study could create an awareness of the importance and their role in ensuring the job satisfaction of their employees. The results could also help operators understand the effects of teacher job satisfaction to their establishments. According to Silva et al (2014) the inability to retain well trained teachers due to poor job satisfaction causes organisations to continuously hire and train new teachers, which incurs cost besides reducing the quality of education provided. This climaxing crisis needs to be taken seriously as it is deeply interconnected to the education of children, teachers' health and as it involves large sums in costs to ECE center operators (Greenberg et al., 2016). The results of this current study establishes the factors that influence job satisfaction, hence beneficial to ECE organizations in taking steps to improve the work environment of teachers.

The result of this study could also emphasize the importance of further research into job satisfaction of teachers. Negative experiences with teachers in preschool leads to poor adaptation abilities in primary school and steps should be taken to ensure positive teacher-child relationship (Grammatikopoulos et al., 2012). Results of the current study establishes

the patterns of teacher-child relationships in ECE settings as well as its relationship to preschool teacher job satisfaction. This can assist in identification of its impact towards teachers and children so necessary prevention steps could be taken. Besides, findings of current study hopefully is able to ignite a debate of the importance of ensuring preschool teachers are satisfied with their job aspects so they are able to contribute better towards the education of young children. Moreover, the results of this study could contribute data towards the planning and implementation of new policies that will support the needs of preschool teachers as well as to build necessary intervention plan to address the job satisfaction among preschool teachers in Malaysia. Finally, the findings of this study may fill a knowledge gap by providing a clear picture of the current situation of job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship among preschool teachers.

There are a few limitations identified in the course of this study. The first limitation would be the size of area selected for the study. This study was limited to preschools located within the city of Johor Bahru in order to keep the cost within limits as there was no research grant provided for this study. As such, the results of this study only portrays the job satisfaction of preschool teachers in Johor Bahru. Secondly, another limitation identified is the cross-sectional design of this study. A cross-sectional research would not be able to provide in-depth understanding of the changes in job satisfaction of preschool teachers under different circumstances over time. Finally, the third limitation to be addressed is the correlational design of this study. Correlational studies are able to identify the presence and direction of relationship between two variables. However, the cause and effect between the variables would not be accessible through a correlational study. Researchers in this study also assume every respondent had responded truthfully to questions asked and that the data accurately represents the situation of preschool teachers in Johor Bahru.

## **Conclusion**

The Malaysian education system is now facing a stiff challenge to present world class quality education for its citizens (Subramaniam, 2022). Concurrently, the reformation of education system is rested on the shoulders of teachers in addition to drastic overhaul of the system which has worn out teachers to the point of experiencing negative effects. Meanwhile, the job satisfaction level and teacher-child relationship continues to dwindle given the rising stress levels. In line with previous studies, this study has found that the job satisfaction, stress and teacher-child relationship are at moderate levels. The findings of this study is hoped to spark a debate on this issue and subsequently bring about changes in the education system in Malaysia to ensure it becomes teacher-friendly in the future.

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