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The Effects of HPWS on Teachers' Thriving at Work with Psychological Meaningfulness as the Mediating Variable

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Abstract
This study aims to bridge the gap in existing literature by investigating the potential effect of High-Performance-Work-System (HPWS) implementation at a school organization in the Indonesian Context, particularly its impact on teachers' psychological meaningfulness and thriving at work. While few studies have explored the positive impact of HPWS in education, it is unclear whether the implementation of HPWS in school organizations may have a positive or negative impact on teachers' work behaviour. By using the survey data of 225 teachers in Central Java, Indonesia, this study found that the implementation of HPWS can effectively and significantly increase teachers' psychological meaningfulness and thriving at work. This study adds to the empirical support of HPWS literature in the Indonesian context. Practically, this study presents the empirical evidence of the importance of teachers' training programs on the improvement of teachers' performance in the Indonesian education sector.
Keywords: HPWS, Psychological Meaningfulness, Thriving at work, teacher work behavior.

Introduction

The education system has been regarded as the foundation of the social development and economic growth of a nation (Nguni et al., 2006). To achieve this goal, the implementation of a high-performance work system (HPWS) to manage the human capital in educational institutions could be one of the essential stepping stones. HPWS is the package of human resource management (HRM) practices by enhancing the ability, motivation, and opportunity of the employees (Fan et al., 2014; Sheehan & Garavan, 2022; Van Esch et al., 2018). HPWS in a profit organization has been a fundamental HRM practice to meet the objective of the organization. There has been a strong growing literature to justify the benefit of implementing HPWS in profit organizations (Bhardwaj et al., 2025; Kaushik & Mukherjee, 2022). Contrarily, the study about HPWS in education sectors has been under-researched and remains a significant gap in the field (Xia et al., 2019, 2020). Among the dearth of attention to HPWS research in the education context, Huang et al. (2023) conducted research about HPWS in Australian public schools and found that HPWS significantly affects the teachers' creativity and performance. Akanbi Ashade et al. (2020) conducted research on how HPWS can increase teacher performance and found that helping behavior of teachers can be essential to elevate the impact of HPWS on teachers' performance. In addition, Maroufkhani et al. (2015) also studied HPWS in Malaysian secondary schools and found that by leveraging the teachers' organizational commitment and job satisfaction, HPWS can significantly boost organizational effectiveness. However, it is unclear whether the implementation of HPWS at the school organization may impact positively or negatively on teachers' well-being in the Indonesian context. This study aims to fill this gap by looking for the relationship between HPWS and thriving at work.

In Indonesia, research on HPWS is still emerging but shows growing interest in both private and public sectors. A few studies have begun to explore the implementation of HPWS in Indonesian organizations, particularly in relation to employee performance, well-being, knowledge sharing behaviour, and intention to stay (Almadana et al., 2022; An Nisa & Baskara, 2024; Ardianto & Rosari, 2024; Yang et al., 2022). In the public sector, HPWS adoption has been slow, primarily due to rigid civil service systems and centralized human resource policies. However, recent reform initiatives (e.g., bureaucratic reform agendas and merit-based recruitment) provide opportunities to integrate HPWS principles into public sector HRM. Decentralization policies have also opened space for local governments and educational institutions to innovate in their HR practices. In the education sector, HPWS concepts have been reflected in various policies aimed at improving teachers' quality, such as the Guru Penggerak (Teacher Transformation Program/ TTP) and Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) initiatives. However, we found the dearth of studies on HPWS in the Indonesian public sector, particularly in education. Using respondents who participated in the TTP held by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of the Republic of Indonesia during the period of 2021–2024, this study attempts to examine how the implementation of HPWS in the education sector impacts two opposing outcomes: thriving at work and emotional exhaustion. This research seeks to address the key question of how the implementation of HPWS among teachers affects their work behaviour. This study is important because research on HPWS in non-profit organizations remains limited (Fang Lee Cooke, 2009; Wagner et al., 2016; M. Wang et al., 2019), especially regarding its impact on the education sector. Therefore, there is still a need for empirical evidence on the application of HPWS in the education sector. Moreover, this research is adding to the contribution as it presents the context of Indonesia, a developing country that is still working hard to advance its national education system, thus offering a different perspective of studies on HPWS conducted in developing countries.

Literature review

As per JDR theory (Bakker et al., 2023), the implementation of HPWS in the teacher's transformation program can be perceived either as a job resource or a job demand. A teacher who considers HPWS as a job resource tends to have a positive perception of HPWS, while a teacher with a negative perception considers HPWS as a job demand (Han et al., 2020). When the teacher perceives HPWS as a job resource, the individual will likely have a higher psychological availability, which in the end, serves as the driver of the teacher's thriving at work. Consistently, the teacher who sees HPWS as a job resource will not experience role overload and emotional exhaustion. Conversely, when the teacher perceived the implementation of HPWS as job demand, the individual will likely experience lower psychological availability and higher role overload, which leads to emotional exhaustion. The implementation of HPWS on teacher TTP served as the development program to fuel teachers to be more innovative and proactive educators. The program was also designed to create future leaders in the education sector. The participation of TTP is not mandatory, but voluntary for every teacher. Therefore, in this context, applying the concept of JDR theory, the teachers who participate in this program will perceive HPWS as a job resource. The more the teacher perceives the implementation of HPWS in the program is good, the more the individual feels the psychological meaningfulness and experiences less work overload.

The JDR theory posits that job resources are a central point to enhance employees' positive behavior (Bakker et al., 2023). HPWS enhances individuals' competence and autonomy, fostering intrinsic motivation and creating the purpose of working (Wattoo et al., 2020). Research has shown that HPWS is positively related to psychological meaningfulness because employees who feel HPWS as the source of their development are more likely to perceive their work as purposeful and fulfilling (Agarwal, 2022; Cao et al., 2024), which further enhances their feeling of contribution to organizational purposes (Al-Ajlouni, 2020; Beltrán-Martín et al., 2023; Jatoi et al., 2024). Additionally, when HPWS is effective, employees are more likely to experience job satisfaction and feel valued within an organizational context (Alothmany et al., 2023; J. Zhang et al., 2024). Jansen In De Wal et al. (2020) found that teacher who has higher job resources tend to have more basic psychological needs for professional learning. Thus, HPWS is positively and significantly associated with psychological meaningfulness, as it provides the resources necessary for employees to find purpose in their work. Psychologically meaningfulness in teachers is essential to increase their competencies and energize their motivation to get the job done, which in turn we call thriving at work (Lu et al., 2025). Thriving at work is a positive psychological condition that relates to physical and mental health (Kleine et al., 2023). The employees are more likely to experience positive outcomes, such as thriving when they find they work with high levels of engagement and well-being (Bhatnagar & Aggarwal, 2020; Pathak & Srivastava, 2020; Porath et al., 2022). Employees are more likely to exhibit greater resilience, creativity, and energy when they view their work as meaningful (Panda et al., 2022; Xiongtao et al., 2021). Furthermore, meaningfulness fosters a sense of connection to organizational goals and values, encouraging employees to invest more effort into their work, thereby facilitating personal growth and professional development (Fletcher & Schofield, 2021). Therefore, psychological meaningfulness is expected to be positively and significantly associated with thriving at work.

According to JDR theory and some relevant literature, we propose our first four hypotheses as follows:
H1: HPWS is positively and significantly associated with psychological meaningfulness
H2: HPWS is positively and significantly associated with thriving at work
H3: Psychological meaningfulness is positively and significantly associated with thriving at work
H4: Psychological meaningfulness significantly mediates the correlation between HPWS and thriving at work

Research Methodology

Sample and Procedure

A questionnaire-based survey was conducted at the Educators Professional Development Centre in Central Java, operating under the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of the Republic of Indonesia, during the period from September to October 2024. The respondents of this research were teachers from across the Central Java Province who participated in the Ministry's Teacher Transformation Program implemented in 2024. The teacher transformation program integrates the HRM practices applied in HPWS into the teacher's development program. Teachers who participate in the program are contingent upon a merit selection process, which includes administrative screening and interviews conducted by professional assessors. Successful candidates underwent an intensive six-month training and development program, supported by training facilitators and mentors. The training curriculum encompassed classical instructional sessions, fieldwork applications, and reflective practice. Upon completion of the program, teachers became eligible for advanced career opportunities, including positions as school principals or school assessors. A convenience sampling method was used for data collection. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where participants are selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate (Etikan et al., 2016). While this method offers practical advantages, such as ease of data collection and reduced costs, it also limits the

generalizability of the findings to the broader population due to potential sampling bias. The survey was distributed via the WhatsApp Group of the teacher transformation program, and 225 teachers have completed the survey. The survey involved a group of respondents with diverse backgrounds. The majority of the participants were female, 71.11%, while male respondents accounted for about 28.89%. Most respondents were in the 31 – 40 years old age group (52.89%), followed by those aged 41 – 50 years old (40.89%). Smaller proportions were in the 20 – 30 years range (3,56%) and the 51 – 60 years group (92.67%). Regarding tenure, most respondents (60.44%) have worked between 10 and 20 years, 24.89% of respondents have worked under 10 years, while 14.67% have over 20 years of experience. A majority of the respondents (88.89%) work at public schools, while only 11.11% work at private schools. Among the teachers working in public schools, nearly half of the respondents (46.22%) are permanent civil servants, while 40.89% are under the contract system. The rest 12.89% of respondents are non-government employees. Most respondents (61.33%) work at the elementary school level, followed by junior high school teachers (24.44%), senior high/vocational (8.89%), and kindergarten/preschool levels (5.33%).

Measures

This research adopted a published and validated instrument developed in English. These instruments were translated into Bahasa and contextualized to suit the teaching profession. All questionnaire items utilized a ten-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree). Based on the HTMT ratio, the discriminant validity between latent constructs for all combination variables is relatively achieved with ratios for each below .85.

High-performance work system (HPWS) was measured by 9 items across six dimensions adopted from the scale developed by Sun et al. (2007). Psychological meaningfulness was measured using items adopted from May et al. (2004), while thriving at work was measured using the items developed by Russo et al. (2018). Overall, the value of Cronbach's Alpha (HPWS: 0.924; Psychological Meaningfulness: 0.954; Thriving at work: 0.996), Composite Reliability (HPWS: 0.936; Psychological Meaningfulness: 0.965; Thriving at work: 0.971), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (HPWS: 0.622; Psychological Meaningfulness: 0.846; Thriving at work: 0.751) show good validity and reliability of the measures. The following table outlines the items for each construct along with the corresponding measurement model assessment.

Findings (Results and Discussion)

Goodness of fit test, robust test, and heterogeneity test were conducted to ensure the quality of the conceptual model. Goodness of fit was measured using Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Chi-Square, and Normed Fit Index (NFI). The value of SRMR for the saturated model was 0.055 less than the commonly accepted threshold of 0.08, indicating a theoretically good fit, while the estimated model shows a higher SRMR of 0.140, suggesting a hypothetically less optimal fit (Shmueli et al., 2019). The Chi-Square values for the saturated and estimated models are 1792.758 and 1895.930, and NFI values of 0.804 and 0.793 indicate moderate fit levels. The model's robustness was further examined using information criteria, including AIC, BIC, CAIC, and HQ. Results show that the 2-segment model consistently yielded lower values across all criteria (e.g., AIC = 2093.891 vs. 2215.199 in the 1-segment model), suggesting better model parsimony and fit. The Log-Likelihood (LnL) value also improved in the 2-segment model (-1021.945 vs. -1095.600), reinforcing its superior performance. Additionally, entropy-based measures (EN = 0.697, NEC = 68.103, and NFI = 0.741) support the appropriateness of the segmentation, indicating relatively clear classification quality. Finally, the heterogeneity test further confirms that the 2-segment model provides a better fit. The reduction in AIC and BIC values (e.g., AIC = 582.229 and BIC = 622.971) in the 2-segment model compared to the 1-segment model reflects better overall model performance. The entropy value of 0.201, although lower than ideal, still suggests some level of classification usefulness. Together, these fit statistics validate the structural model and support the decision to apply a segmentation approach in the analysis.

The findings from this study (see Table 6) indicate a series of positive and statistically significant relationships among the examined variables. We analyzed the association between HPWS and thriving at work with psychological meaningfulness as a mediating variable. Hypothesis 1 tested the association between HPWS and psychological meaningfulness and showed the positive and significant relationship (O=0.374, Sig=0.000). Hypothesis 2 examined the direct relationship between HPWS and thriving at work. We found that HPWS is positively and significantly associated with thriving at work (O=0.275, Sig=0.000). Hypothesis 3 tested the relationship between psychological meaningfulness and thriving at work. The result points to yet another positive relationship, and statistically significant (O=0.735, Sig=0.000). Hypothesis 4 tested whether or not psychological meaningfulness fully mediates the association of HPWS and thriving at work. The result showed that psychological meaningfulness significantly mediates the effect of HPWS on thriving at work (O=0.275, Sig=0.000). Putting all Hypotheses 1 to 4 together, this research showed that the implementation of TTP conducted by the Ministry of Education in Indonesia was significantly successful. The teachers who attend the development program were likely to perceive the program as a job resource that can leverage

their sense of meaningfulness of being a teacher (psychological meaningfulness), which later creates a positive vibe for teachers to thrive at work.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

This study confirms that the HPWS is a job resource that can leverage the perceived meaningfulness of teachers and then boost the teachers to thrive at their work. This study strengthens the concept of the JDR model in explaining how positive resources of supply can boost performance. This study expands the efficacy of the JDR Model to understand the positive effect of HPWS on employees' well-being at work from the education sector in the Indonesian context, which is both understudied. This research presents strong empirical evidence on the efficacy of the teacher's transformational program on the quality of work. By implementing HPWS in the development program, the Ministry of Education can reinforce meaning and purpose in teaching roles. When the teacher feels greater meaningfulness of their role as educators, the more the teacher will act better in their duty. The impact of the teacher's transformation program can be beneficial if and only if the program can perform significant HRM practices through HPWS implementation, including a merit-based recruitment and selection system, a high-quality training and development program, and a prospective career track setting. In addition, educational policymakers and school administrators should integrate school-supportive practices to support the program. Schools should empower organizational communication, recognition programs, teacher voice in decision-making, and fair performance appraisals. The role of the school principal is vital to enhance the support climate at school, highlighting the importance of enforcing the role of resource enabler for school leaders. The leader's ability to empower a supportive climate reduces the negative impact of the teacher's transformation program on teachers' role overload and emotional exhaustion.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the undercover HPWS discourse in the context of public education. The findings confirmed that while HPWS can elevate motivation to a better performance through psychological meaningfulness. By leveraging the complementary insights of the JDR model, the research illustrates that teacher outcomes are shaped not only by structural features of work but also by the psychological and relational climates surrounding them. Therefore, effective educational reform requires a balance between high expectations and high support. Systems that demand performance without offering sufficient resources may lead to burnout, while those that match demands with meaning and support will foster sustainable engagement and growth. In conclusion, the teacher's transformation program with strong HPWS implementation must be continuously evaluated and upgraded, not just for effectiveness in teaching performance but also for the impact on teacher well-being.

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