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HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: A STUDY AMONG ACADEMICIANS IN MALAYSIAN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Academicians represent the key factor in providing education service to students and universities cannot work well without academicians. This study aimed to examine the influence of human resource practices (HR practices) on employee engagement among academicians in Malaysian private universities. This paper examined four HR practices, namely employee compensation, performance appraisal, training, and employee development. The conceptual framework developed for this paper aimed to fully understand the influence of HR practices and employee engagement. Self-administered questionnaires were

distributed to academicians in Malaysian private universities using the proportional stratified random sampling technique. This study was conducted on 331 respondents. Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis were performed with SPSS to test the hypotheses and secure results. The results indicated that each HR practice (performance appraisal, training, and employee development) has significant impact on employee engagement among academicians in Malaysian private universities. This study could provide useful information for decision-makers in Malaysian private universities in designing more appropriate and effective HR practices to improve employee engagement among academicians and for the government, in improving human resource employment acts, policies or legislation related to Malaysian private universities.

Keywords: Employee engagement, compensation, performance appraisal, training, employee development.

INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, humans are still the key factor to run a business, particularly in the education sector. Faculty members have a significant influence in determining the institution's service quality. Hence, HR practices is one of the most important factors to ensure high employee engagement (Alzyoud, 2018). This is because high levels of employee engagement in an organization shows the ability to retain talented employees, cultivate customer loyalty, and improve organizational outcome and partner esteem (Lockwood, 2007). An engaged employee feels energetic about the company's goals, is bound with the company, and retains its characteristics. Engaged employees perform additional outstanding burdens past essential occupational obligations and relate to the activities that drive the business (Mercy & Choudhary, 2019).

According to findings of the Malaysian Employers Federation, the education sector ranked the top three compared to other sectors with 29.28 percent for yearly turnover rate (Goh, 2012). Upon a closer look at the structure of the education sector, the research stated that the turnover rate for private universities (45.45 percent) was

relatively higher than public universities (18.18 percent) in Malaysia (Rathakrishnan et al., 2016). When employees are not engaged at work, they become less involved in their work and may have the intention to leave their organization, which leads to a high turnover rate. (Allam, 2017). Hence, turnover has been the main issue in institutions of higher education in Malaysia, especially private universities. This is because academics complained of high workloads that can exacerbate stress, which in turn can affect their personal or family life. When academics cannot afford the overburdened redundant work and tasks, they will leave their jobs (Ramasamy & Abbudullah, 2020). According to Comm and Mathaisel (2003) and Rihan (1998), HR practices consist of employee compensation, performance appraisal, training, and employee development in enhancing employee motivation and engagement in the workplace.

Many researchers have studied factors that influence employee engagement in other industries. For example, Abdullah et al. (2007) in the manufacturing industry, Lee and Chen, (2013) in the tourism industry and Mohamad et al. (2014) in the banking industry. However, there is a limited number of similar researches that study the private universities in Malaysia. Hence, the main objective of this study is to examine how HR practices can affect employee engagement among academics in private higher education establishments in Malaysia. Based on the findings, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) stated that Malaysian universities should continuously maintain their engagement levels in order to secure a higher position and to become leaders in the Asian region (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007; Patro, 2013). Ultimately, this study will help the management of Malaysian private universities to take appropriate measures to retain their academics and for the government in developing the future planning for higher education sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind” and is divided into three components, which are vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2001).

Firstly, vigour is characterized by the ability to stay energetic and have strong mental resilience at work. Therefore, employees are able to persevere when they face difficulties, and are willing to devote energy to their work. Employees who have high vigour can maintain energy, enthusiasm, and endurance during work. In other words, employees with low vigour will have reduced energy, enthusiasm and endurance when they work. Secondly, dedication of employees is shown when they are actively involved in work, and eventually they experience the meaning of work, inspiration, enthusiasm, sense of challenge and pride. Highly dedicated employees will be proud of their work and shape their identities based on their career (Anitha, 2013). This is because they experience meaningful, inspiring, and challenging life at work. Thirdly, absorption will allow employees to be happy to concentrate on their own work. Besides that, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) also claimed that employee engagement is “a more persistent and pervasive affective cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior”. Although their statements draw on Kahn’s (1990) theoretical research, the concept of employee engagement differs in its nature and role. It is a positive attitude. This can help researchers distinguish between employee engagement and flow. A study by Boushey and Glynn (2012) pointed out that replacing employees in the education sector costs about 20 percent of the annual salary of employees. Increased engagement rates of faculty and staff in a college or university could create a huge effect on efficiency and productivity (Wasilowski, 2016). Employee engagement has become an essential part of HR. Low levels of productivity among employees does not show significant employee engagement (Clack, 2021). According to Wollard and Shuck (2011), there is a shortage of research on the antecedents of employee engagement in exploring the relationship between HR practices and employee engagement. Thus, HR practices is one of the most important factors to ensure high employee engagement (Alzyoud, 2018).

Social Exchange Theory

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) can be defined as the “rules” of philosophical exchange in which the economic and socio-emotional resources are received by employees from their organizations (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The social exchange theory states that after offering your services to another party, you will expect a

return in the future. At the same time, that party will generate a sense of responsibility to return to you after receiving something of value (Masterson et al., 2000). The SET provides a beneficial insight of crucial factors which affect the relationship between organizations and individuals. Workplace behaviour and the relationship between employees and employers can be explained by one of the most influential theoretical paradigms, SET (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005). In order to repay the resources employees have received from their employer, a higher level of engagement is one of the ways for employees to reciprocate by involving themselves in their work roles more seriously. Conversely, after employees make specific contributions to the organization (time, effort and talent), they would expect to get better benefits, proportional to their contributions (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Kahn, 1990; Li, 2013; Maslach, et al., 2001; Saks, 2006).

Human Resource Practices

HR practices is defined as a system of planned strategies and policies by the organization to ensure effective and efficient human capital in the achievement of organizational objectives. (Dessler & Varrkey, 2005; Huselid, 1995; Mondy, 2011; Bohlander & Snell, 2013). HR practices are fundamental practices, activities and processes that have an influence on the perceptions, behaviour, attitude and performance of employees (Noe et al., 2010; Wright et al., 1994). Excellent HR practices contribute to improve the motivation, self-confidence, flexibility, morale, and organizational citizenship behaviour of the workforce, which results in enhancing the performance of both the individual and organization (Appelbaum, 2013; Tamkin, 2004).

Proper HR practices provide adequate resources to ensure that employee interest and well-being are looked after so as to let employees perceive that they are appreciated, make employees feel valued and to get recognition within the organization. The psychological contract of employees has been fulfilled. Employees who know that their effort is valuable to their organization are boosted in the supportive, work-related context (work practices), thus encouraging employees to devote themselves to their jobs through showing higher levels of dedication and enthusiasm when they perform their roles. (Aktar & Pangil, 2017; Lee & Bruvold, 2003; Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Wayne et al., 1997).

The social exchange perspectives are applied as a theoretical foundation in this study to examine and explain the relationship between employee engagement and HR practices, which are employee compensation, performance appraisal, training, and employee development. Huselid (1995) pointed out that HR practices are related to employee engagement. HR practices enable an organization to fuel employee engagement. It is significant when employees see HR practices as a wellspring of mental strengthening and high inspiration identified with commitment and better employment execution (He, 2014). If the academicians receive proper HR practices (employee compensation, performance appraisal, training and employee development) with adequate resources, they feel obligated and this can generate a sense of responsibility to respond in kind the resources with higher engagement. Thus, the academicians will be more engaged and perform their work roles more seriously.

Employee Compensation

Employee compensation refers to all different types of financial returns and actual benefits received by the employee as part of an employment relationship (Bernadin, 2007). Compensation is essential as a part of HR tools that are exchanged by managers and their respective organizations to achieve company goals. From an employee's point of view, ideal compensation can help to secure high employee motivation to improve performance and ultimately contribute to achieving a company's main goal. Idris et al. (2017) defined compensation as consisting of direct and indirect compensation. Moreover, Mardiyanti et al. (2018) and Pepra-Mensah et al. (2017) explained further that financial compensation consists of direct and indirect compensation. First, direct financial compensation refers to the compensation that employees receive directly from the place where they work. This includes salary, bonuses, overtime pay, and allowances. Indirect financial compensation is a non-monetary benefit to employees that includes health insurance, social security, and annual leave (Mardiyanti et al., 2018). Rivai (2011) added further that a company needs to fulfil both financial and non-financial needs to become a driving force for employees to work.

If employees are not well compensated by their organization, there will be feelings of discontent. This is because employees exchange their time, energy and loyalty for financial and non-financial compensation.

When companies give poor compensation to employees, there will be job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, separation, poor mental health, etc., among employees. Therefore, the ideal compensation can encourage employees to work hard, and strengthen their commitment to discharge their responsibilities (Heathfield, 2012, as cited in Pepra-Mensah et al., 2017). Thus, it can be expected that employee compensation in private universities help to enhance and improve academic engagement.

H₁: There is a positive and significant relationship between employee compensation and employee engagement.

Performance Appraisal

Performance appraisal is a process to review and evaluate individual performance to improve career development (Hong et al., 2012; Latham & Mann, 2006). According to Zhou (2003), performance appraisal is an opportunity for employees to get sound and relevant information about their performance and as reference for them to improve, learn and develop their future careers. Gruman and Saks (2011) mentioned that performance appraisal measures the overall contribution of the individual to the organization. Hong et al. (2012) pointed out that top corporations concern themselves with employee performance evaluation in order to enhance the ability of their organizations to survive in the competitive market by optimizing the competitive resources of their organizations in order to enhance and retain top talents. DeNisi and Pritchard (2006) and Gruman and Saks (2011) claimed that performance appraisal is a discrete, formal, organizationally authorized activity with clear performance dimensions and stated criteria, such as employee work performance, internal characteristics, and employee capability to pursue a higher position within the organization. Saks (2006) pointed out that employees will be obliged and responsible towards an organization and they will more engaged in the organization if they perceive that the organization has fair offers and allocates benefits according to their performance which is measured and evaluated fairly. To be clearer, performance appraisal is usually conducted at three different periods set by the organization, which are quarterly, semi-annually, or annually (Latham & Mann, 2006).

According to Seddon (1987) and Vance et al. (1992) as cited in Phin (2015), the use of a formal process needs to be applied to conduct

performance appraisal. The questions designed in performance appraisals should be able to measure the performance efforts on a group basis, and the process should be conducted consistently and frequently in terms of quarterly, semi-annually, or annually (DeNisi & Pritchard, 2006; Kondrasuk, 2012; LeVan, 2017). According to Phin (2015), employees from Malaysian private education industries perceive that an effective performance appraisal can be well described through effective: managerial system practices, system design, and system support. Aktar and Pangil (2018) found a positive significant relationship between performance appraisal and employee engagement. Furthermore, Saks (2006) added that organizations offering benefits based on employee performance and treating employees with fairness will build employee obligation towards the organization, resulting in a higher level of engagement. Thus, it can be expected that an effective performance appraisal implemented in private universities will help to enhance and improve academic engagement with the respective universities.

H₂: There is a positive and significant relationship between performance appraisal and employee engagement.

Training

Training is a platform that allows employees to develop the competencies required for employment tasks in order to accomplish the goals and objectives of their organizations (Noe et al., 2002). This is also supported by Noe et al. (2010), that training is a platform that allows employees to learn more task-related competencies. Normally, these competencies enhance employees' skills and knowledge and enable them to enhance their performance. According to Goldstein (2001), training as a long-term investment in organizations can contribute to individual and organizational improvement. Up-to-date training programs should be offered to employees in order for them to excel in a competitive environment. Extensive training programs improve employee performance and meet organizational objectives in an effective and efficient manner (Tahir et al., 2014). Asare-Bediako (2002) argued that training allows employees to perform better on their current job scope. Training is important for all employees to fulfil their career needs and the needs of their organization. Evans and Lindsay (1999) postulated that training not only enhances the quality of employees but also provides an advantage to the organization in the long term.

Training is a key element to enhance employee engagement (Armstrong, 2009; Azeem et al., 2013; Azmy, 2019; Nawaz et al., 2014; Samuel & Chipunza, 2009). Training is one of the important practices to promote employee engagement by improving the knowledge and skills of employees (Elnaga & Imra, 2013). Studies by Amin et al. (2013) and Azmy (2019) conducted in the education sector pointed out that training programs are essential to educational institutions for the continuous improvement of employees in terms of competence, productivity, and performance. Thus, it can be expected that training helps to enhance and improve academic engagement with the university.

H₃: There is a positive and significant relationship between training and employee engagement.

Employee Development

Employee development is an expertise development process which increases the abilities and capacities of employees to achieve better work performance. Employee development is essential to improve future employee performance through learning, attitude change of employees, or increasing their skills and knowledge for personal growth or future careers. Development activities focus on understanding long-term awareness, broadening employees' horizons, and offering unlimited opportunities for career advancement (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009; Alzyoud, 2018; Werner & Desimone, 2009). The organization's contribution to employee development enables updated skills and knowledge gained to be utilized by employees, as they put in effort to achieve the organization's goals. In order to keep both employees and the organization successful in the current business environment, employee development plays an increasingly significant role to gain strategic imperative within the organization (Hameed & Waheed, 2011). Employee development improves greatly when employees who are willing to learn are recognized by the organization, so that their interest concur with developmental activities. Aside from the willing participation of individual employees, employee development also depends on the attitude of top management, limited promotion opportunities and organizational culture (Antonacopoulou, 2000).

According to Cornerstone (2016), the recent Gallup survey found that many members of staff from faculties of higher education institutions (HEIs) have low levels of engagement due to several factors such as

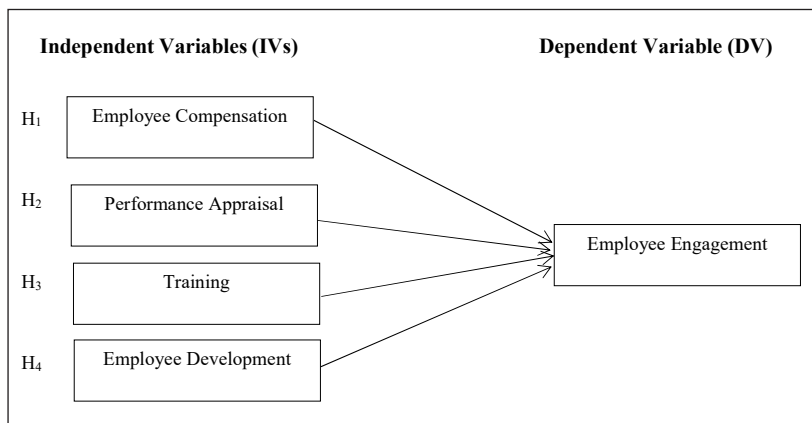
high workload and lack of opportunity for professional development. A total of 97 percent of the respondents stated that programs for the personal development of employees play a significant role in the success of students. It shows the need for and the importance of continuous learning and development for all employees in higher education (Cornerstone, 2016; Meyer, 2016). Thus, it can be expected that employee development helps to enhance and improve academic engagement with the university.

H₄: There is a positive and significant relationship between employee development and employee engagement.

The proposed conceptual framework of this study is illustrated in Figure 1. The framework illustrates the relationship between the variables of the study.

Figure 1

Proposed Conceptual Framework



METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Quantitative method and cross-sectional approach were applied in this study which was conducted on Malaysian HEIs. Probability sampling

design was used in this study due to the representativeness of the sample and the ability to get the full list of academicians with their email addresses from each targeted sample institution. Proportionate stratified sampling was applied to determine that the number of sampling units which were drawn from each stratum was in proportion to the population size in order to obtain the proper representation from each target university within the population studied. The sample group with their email addresses was obtained from the staff directory of the top three Malaysian private universities. With this sampling technique, the whole population was divided into three subgroups called stratum. Each of these top three private universities represented a stratum. The number of samples were drawn randomly from each stratum in proportion to the size of the population of each stratum as shown in Table 1 as follows.

Table 1

Summary of Samples

Stratum	Size of Population	Percentage (%)	Number of samples
University A	1378	59.86	198
University B	399	17.33	57
University C	525	22.81	76
Total	2302	100.0	331

Note: For confidentiality reasons, the top three Malaysian private universities were named as University A, University B and University C.

Participants and Procedure

According to the 2017 statistics provided by MOHE, Malaysia, there were 495 HEIs in Malaysia. The target population of this study was formed from academicians working in the top three Malaysian private universities based on the list by the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2019. Benchmarking has been proved as an effective method for an organization to determine best practices information and to improve procedures (Engelkemeyer, 1998). These top three private universities could serve as a benchmark for other private universities in Malaysia. Identifying the proper and effective HR practices is essential for HEIs.

Table 2

Summary of Demographic Information

Demographic Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	167	50.5
	Female	164	49.5
Age	21–30 years old	50	15.1
	31–40 years old	172	52
	41–50 years old	78	23.6
	Above 50 years old	31	9.4
Ethnic group	Malay	145	43.8
	Chinese	125	37.8
	Indian	35	10.6
	Foreigner	2	0.6
	Mixed parentage	5	1.5
	Hausa	4	1.2
	Bangladeshi	14	4.2
	Dusun	1	0.3
Marital status	Single	118	35.6
	Married	211	63.7
	Widowed	2	0.6
Number of years working in current university	Less than 1 year	31	9.4
	1–5 years	111	33.5
	6–10 years	110	33.2
	More than 10 years	79	23.9
Monthly income level	RM3000 or below	16	4.8
	RM3001–RM5000	88	26.6
	RM5001–RM7000	119	36
	RM7001–RM9000	62	18.7
	Above RM9000	46	13.9
Highest level of education	Diploma	2	0.6
	Bachelor's degree	39	11.8
	Master's degree	170	51.4
	Doctorate degree (PhD)	119	36
	Professional qualification	1	0.3
Current position	Tutor	9	2.7
	Lecturer	197	59.5
	Senior Lecturer	18	5.4
	Assistant Professor	91	27.5
	Associate Professor	8	2.4
	Professor	4	1.2
	Senior Professor	0	0
	Assistant Lecturer	2	0.6
	Graduate Assistant	2	0.6

Based on the information in the staff directory provided by these top three Malaysian private universities, the total number of academicians was 2302. The sample size was 331 based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970). In this study, a total of 1700 sets of questionnaires were administered to respondents through the drop-off and pick-up survey method and sending self-completed surveys through e-mail. The total number of usable received questionnaires was 331 sets, with a 19.47 percent response rate. Even if the response rate was only 19.47 percent, it was a sufficient sample size for this study based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970). After the 331 sets of completed questionnaires were collected, data coding and reliability test were conducted first by using SPSS statistics. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was also used for conducting statistical analysis which included descriptive analysis and inferential analysis.

Based on Table 2, the number of male and female respondents were almost equal with only 1 percent difference. The majority of the respondents were between 31 and 40 years old, which represented 52 percent of the sample size. Those above 50 years were the minority at 9.4 percent. The majority of the respondents (43.8 percent) were Malays, and 0.6 percent foreigners represented the minority. Most of the respondents were married (63.7 percent) and 0.6 percent of the respondents were widowed.

Furthermore, a majority of the respondents had been working at their current university between 1 and 5 years (33.5 percent), followed by those who had been working at their current university between 6 and 10 years (33.2 percent), and those who had been working at their current university for less than a year (9.4 percent). The majority of the respondents received a monthly income of RM5001 to RM7000 (36 percent), and those who received RM3000 or less represented the minority (4.8 percent). As illustrated in Table 2, the majority of the respondents held master's degrees (51.4 percent), followed by those with doctorate degrees (36 percent), and bachelor's degrees (11.8 percent), while 0.6 percent and 0.3 percent of the respondents possessed diplomas and professional qualifications, respectively. This showed that all the respondents were qualified academic staff. In terms of position, the majority of the respondents were lecturers, while assistant lecturers and graduate assistants represented the minority at 0.6 percent.

Measures

The question format applied were closed-ended and fixed alternative questions. The questions for the demographic profile used nominal, ordinal and ratio scale and all the variables of this study used five-point Likert scale.

Table 3

The Construct Measurement

Section	Variable	Item	Adapted from	Sample Item
A	Demographic profile	8	Chong et al. (2017).	-
B	Employee compensation	5	Moona Haji Mohamed et al. (2012) modified from Jun et al. (2006).	I am satisfied with the pay that I receive. My pay encourages me to improve the quality of my work.
	Performance appraisal	5	Pittino et al. (2016).	Appraisals are related to the allocation of awards, rewards, and benefits. Appraisals are aimed at giving feedback on the development of employees.
	Training	6	Marwat et al. (2006).	Employees in each job will normally go through training programs every year. Training needs are identified through a formal performance appraisal mechanism.
	Employee development	9	Lee and Bruvold (2003).	My university provides career counselling and planning assistance to employees. My university provides support when employees decide to obtain ongoing training.
C	Employee engagement	9	Schaufeli and Bakker (2004).	My job inspires me. I am immersed in my work.

The questionnaire was developed through adapting the questionnaires of other researchers. Questions related to the independent variables were the same as the sources as stated in Table 3. Previous studies (Fong & Ng, 2012; Shimazu et al., 2008; Simbula et al., 2013) showed an unsatisfactory fit for the original version of Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES) (UWES-17) developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004). In fact, if compared with UWES-17 (original version), the three-factor model of the UWES-9 (short version) exhibited greater model fit and stronger psychometric properties with the highest Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI), as well as the lowest Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) and chi-square statistic (Simbula et al., 2013). Therefore, the short version of UWES (UWES-9) was adopted in this study.

DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive analysis aims to transform raw data into data that facilitates overall response to generate descriptive information by manipulating, interpreting, ordering, and rearranging data (Zikmund et al., 2009). In this study, Section A consisted of eight questions on demographic information. Table 2 shows the rearranged statistical data in the order which shows the number of responses or observations for each category assigned to a variable in row or column format. Meanwhile, the reliability test was used to test the reliability and consistency of a variable (Sekaran, 2002). Cronbach's alpha was also used in this study. The variance can be interpreted as poor in reliability when the value of coefficient alpha is less than the value of 0.60. However, when the value of coefficient alpha is within the range of 0.60 to 0.70, it can be interpreted as fair reliability and as good reliability when the value of coefficient alpha falls within the range of 0.70 to 0.80. Excellent reliability is declared when the coefficient alpha for variance is within 0.80 to 0.95.

In addition, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient method and the Multiple Linear Regression Analysis method were used to test the relationship between the independent variance and the dependent variance in this study. Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to test the relationship between human resource practices and employee engagement.

The range is between the value of -1 to +1 which indicate perfect positive and negative relationship, respectively (Hauke & Kosowski, 2011). There is no relationship between variables when the r value is 0. Through this method, it tested whether the independent variables could be related to the dependent variable (Uyanık & Güler, 2013). Besides that, multiple linear regression analysis was also used for this study to examine the influence of human resource practices on employee engagement. By using this method, the relationship between multiple independent variables with a dependent variable was clearly shown; whether all independent variables significantly predicted the dependent variable (Uyanık & Güler, 2013). In this study, the purpose was to examine how well human resource practices (employee compensation, performance appraisal, training, and employee development) significantly explained variance in employee engagement among academics in Malaysian private universities.

Table 4

Summary of Cronbach's Alpha Value

Variable	Construct	Cornbach's alpha
Dependent variable	Employee engagement	0.950
Independent variable	Employee compensation	0.814
	Performance appraisal	0.826
	Training	0.891
	Employee development	0.874

According to Table 4, the Cronbach's alpha value for employee engagement, employee compensation, performance appraisal, training, and employee development were as follows: 0.950, 0.814, 0.826, 0.891 and 0.874, respectively. The alpha values of all the variables were above the cut-off point of 0.70 as proposed by Hair et al. (2019).

FINDINGS

Four hypotheses were formulated for this study. These hypotheses were tested by using inferential analyses: The Pearson Correlation Coefficients and the Multiple Regression Analysis. They were

performed with SPSS to test the hypotheses and conclude the findings. The results of the study were interpreted as per the results of the Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Multiple Regression Analysis.

Pearson Correlation Analysis

According to Table 5, significant relationship could be found between all independent variables and employee engagement. The coefficient value showed that there was a small but definite relationship between employee compensation and employee engagement. The results also stated that the strength of the relationship between each remaining independent variable (performance appraisal, training, employee development) and employee engagement as moderate.

As the p -value, 0.000 was lower than the alpha value of 0.05, all independent variables could be significantly correlated with employee engagement. The positive value of the correlation coefficient also demonstrated a positive correlation between each independent variable with employee engagement.

Table 5

Pearson Correlation Results

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1. Employee engagement	1.00				
2. Employee compensation	0.271**	1.00			
3. Performance appraisal	0.637**	0.271**	1.00		
4. Training	0.607**	0.076	0.685**	1.00	
5. Employee development	0.650**	0.331**	0.680**	0.731**	1.00

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

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was performed to examine whether the human resource practices (employee compensation, performance appraisal, training, and employee development) were significantly explained variance in employee engagement among the academicians in Malaysian private universities. Table 6 and Table 7 show the significant level of employee compensation, performance appraisal, training, and employee development on employee engagement.

Table 6

ANOVA^a results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. ^b
1	Regression	102.444	4	25.611	84.597	0.000
	Residual	98.693	326	0.303		
	Total	201.137	330			

Note:

a. Dependent variable: Employee engagement.

b. Predictors: (Constant), Employee compensation, Performance appraisal, Training, Employee development.

Table 7

Coefficient^a Results

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	0.439	0.0205		2.146	0.033
	Employee compensation	0.088	0.044	0.085	1.971	0.050
	Performance appraisal	0.334	0.068	0.287	4.953	0.000
	Training	0.204	0.066	0.198	3.068	0.002
	Employee development	0.260	0.060	0.282	4.356	0.000

Note. a. Dependent variable: Employee engagement.

The results showed that the F-statistic was significant ($F = 84.597$, $df = 4,326$) as the p-value was less than the alpha value of 0.05. The overall model for this study could be considered as a good descriptor of the relationship between the independent variable(s) and employee engagement. With reference to Table 8, the value of R square showing the independent variable could explain 50.90 percent of the variations in employee engagement but the 49.10 percent variations of employee engagement could not be explained in this study. Thus, there were other additional variables that were important in interpreting employee engagement that were not considered in this study. The results showed that performance appraisal posed

the strongest influence on employee engagement with the largest standardized coefficient beta value of 0.287. Employee development came second with a standardized coefficient beta value of 0.282. The third was training with a standardized coefficient beta value of 0.198. The independent variable which contributed the least in determining employee engagement was employee compensation, which showed the lowest standardized coefficient beta value of 0.085. Based on the results, all independent variables had a positive effect on employee engagement.

Table 8

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	0.714 ^a	0.509	0.503	0.55022

Note:

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Employee Compensation, Performance Appraisal, Training, Employee Development.
- b. Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement.

Employee compensation had no significant influence on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.088$, $p = 0.050$). The p -value did not reach the bottom line of the alpha value (less than 0.05). As such, hypothesis 1 was not supported. In contrast, performance appraisal had a positive and significant influence on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.334$, $p = 0.000$). The p -value was less than the alpha value (0.05). As such hypothesis 2 was supported. Meanwhile, training had a positive and significant influence on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.204$, $p = 0.002$). The p -value was less than the alpha value (0.05). As such, hypothesis 3 was supported. Finally, employee development had a positive and significant influence on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.260$, $p = 0.000$). The p -value was less than alpha value (0.05). As such hypothesis 4 was supported. All hypotheses were supported except Hypothesis 1.

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study showed that performance appraisal, training, and development have a positive, significant relationship

with employee engagement. Hence, Hypothesis 2, Hypothesis 3, and Hypothesis 4 are consistent with previous studies mentioned in the literature. Nevertheless, employee compensation does not have a significant relationship with employee engagement as the result is inconsistent with previous studies; therefore Hypothesis 1 is not supported.

In this study, performance appraisal proved the strongest predictor to employee engagement compared to other variables. It is consistent with previous studies such as LeVan (2017) which mentioned that high engagement can be obtained by receiving more frequent feedback at the workplace. Performance appraisal describes employees' strengths and weaknesses in a systematic manner (Lohman, 2021). In performance management system, performance appraisal works as a direct approach to observe employee performance and serves as a guide for organizations to keep employees aligned with their strategic goals through coaching based on feedback received (Aguinis, 2013). Keeping academic staff aligned with university goals in a systematic and continuous manner can enhance engagement levels among academic staff in the long term. Therefore, universities should focus more on performance appraisal in order to enhance employee engagement among academic staff.

The results showed that employee development is significant in influencing employee engagement. This is consistent with a real case study of Molson Coors Brewing Company. This case study showed that the level of its employee engagement increased from 86 percent to 89 percent during 2009 through a valuable and successful career development workshop provided by the company as one of the important components to evaluate the level of its employee engagement (Broadhurst, 2012). Khan et al. (2015) stated that if an organization has a transparent and fair career development system, the engagement level of its employees will increase. Universities are encouraged to involve academicians in career development plans to ensure that development programs are relevant to them. A sound and valuable development program will foster better engagement between academicians and the university.

This study proved that training has a positive and significant relationship with employee engagement. It is consistent with a study by Amin et al. (2013) which stated that sufficient training tends to

improve performance and engagement of employees on the job in the education sector. Islam et al. (2014) asserted that training leads to a positive change in behaviour and working skills which in turn lead to improved performance. Hiring a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce is essential for organizations to survive in a competitive environment (Shaheen et al., 2013). Training helps employees acquire new skills, knowledge and competencies required by tasks that they currently perform. Universities should conduct on-the-job training and off-job training for their academicians. Off-job training is important because it helps academicians gain knowledge and skills not only from within the organization, but also from outside expertise and professionals. This would help academicians obtain up-to-date information, knowledge, and skills. The more training that is provided to academicians, the higher the level of engagement.

In contrast, the results showed that Hypothesis 1 is not supported, as employee compensation does not have a significant relationship with employee engagement which is contrary to previous studies. In a study by Azmy (2019), testing factors affecting employee engagement in a higher education institution, the results showed that compensation have a significant effect on employee engagement. This result also concurred with Saks (2006), who argued that employees tend to respond with higher levels of engagement when they receive more compensation and benefits from their organization. Nevertheless, compensation may not be the major factor for Malaysian private university academicians to decide their level of engagement with their respective universities. Future research can study how employee compensation influence academicians when they make major decisions concerning their careers such as the intention to leave.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study set out to investigate which HR practices affected employee engagement among academicians in Malaysian private universities. The results of this investigation showed that HR practices (performance appraisal, training, and employee development) have a moderate relationship with employee engagement. These practices have a significant impact on employee engagement. However,

employee compensation has a non-significant impact on employee engagement. This study can assist decision-makers of Malaysian private universities and the government to design more appropriate and effective HR practices to improve employee engagement among academicians. Furthermore, this study fills the gap in previous studies that focused more on overall higher education institutions and less on investigating employee engagement in Malaysian private universities. Admittedly, there were two main limitations in this study. Firstly, the results of the study was limited in its scope and objective as it only focused on academicians from Malaysian private universities. Hence, further research could be conducted to include both Malaysian private universities and public universities as target population and to compare the difference in results between both types of universities. This research could help the government better understand the different requirements and in decision-making concerning these two types of institutions. Another limitation in this study was that it only examined the direct relationship between HR practices and employee engagement. Future research could test the relationship between HR practices and employee engagement with a mediator or moderator. This could clearly explain how HR practices is linked to employee engagement. To conclude, this study has identified several areas for further investigation.

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