

# A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON ACADEMICS' JOB PERFORMANCE DISPARITIES IN WORKING FROM HOME (WFH) PRACTISES

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**Abstract:** *WFH has been used in the workplace since the 1970s and is known for promoting a healthier work-life balance and can offer many benefits to both the organization and its employee, also known as teleworking or telework, these practices are widely implemented around the world during pandemic COVID-19 since March 2020. As in Malaysia, the relevance of today's work arrangement that is now being questioned due to the current pandemic situation had driven the researcher to examine the relationship between the impacts of telecommuting work arrangement and employee performance during the Movement Control Order (MCO) due to COVID-19 pandemic. The telecommuting work arrangement has played a significant role in Malaysia nowadays and it has become one of the mechanisms to ensure business continuity. This study will further collect a response from academic staff in UiTM by using a set of questionnaires distributed online. By addressing the issues, it is strongly believed that the findings from this study will contribute to the significant development of WFH policies and guidelines for company practices ensuring employees are performing their job meeting the expectation even though not in a conventional office setting.*

**Keywords:** *Work From Home, Telework, Job Performance, Covid-19*

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## Introduction

WFH is a popular work style in most developed countries, and it has been used in the workplace since the 1970s. Known for promoting a healthier work-life balance, WFH can offer many benefits to both the organization and its staff, including reduced real estate costs, enhanced efficiency, reduced absenteeism, flexible labor relations, and improved customer service (Saludin, Karia, & Hassan, 2020). The literature on technological change in the 1950s led to the hypothesis that telecommunications, when combined with computer technology, could allow work to be offshored outside of the traditional office (Baruch & Yuen, 2000). There are also several similar terms to working from home, namely "telecommuting", "teleworking", and "working from home", but the common term use is WFH (Hassan & Nuruddin, 2011).

Virtual working is becoming more common due to the possible cost savings. It also helps an organization to be more flexible and respond to crises such as global pandemics. Organizations that are forced to turn to telecommuting face new obstacles because of this new way of working. WFH does, in fact, cause a slew of issues for employees in terms of communication, teamwork, and the use of ICT (information and communication technologies). Although WFH has been promoted in Malaysia since then, the implementation of WFH is still underappreciated and unpopular in Malaysia, despite the multiple benefits it offers (Ndubisi & Kahraman, 2005). Businesses are struggling with the prospect of making WFH a permanent choice as the world reaches the next step of the Covid-19 pandemic and makes vaccination a priority for the most vulnerable. As Covid-19 spreads, WFH is being hailed as the 'new normal'. This work regime is unlikely to become the 'new normal' for most Malaysian employees due to gaps in digital technology and the nature of work across the region.

Other than that, in regardless of the WFH's positive effects, only a few in-depth studies have been conducted in Malaysia (Perez et al., 2004; Asaari & Karia, 2001). As a result, it is critical for this study to recognize the WFH's implementation, the challenges when WFH as well as factor that affect the performance of the employee when WFH. These can advise Malaysian organizations to adopt the WFH definition that has been addressed implicitly. The result from this study will helps organization, especially the Human Resource Department to develop a working system that can fulfil the needs of WFH employees aiming to improve the performance of their employees.

## Problem Statement

The perk of working at home has been proven beneficial to many of the employees or company's perspective, however the program of working from home still not gained enough popularity in Malaysia (Hooi, Hong & Ong, 2013). Hence, it is important for us to go for a further identification regarding the effectiveness and depth challenges of working from home especially during the Pandemic Covid-19 that has been experienced to all Malaysians for more than a year. Plus, the implementation of working from home has become a norm for majority of the employees in Malaysia.

In Malaysia, many of the researchers used to determine the advantages and disadvantages of working from home among employees, however, the status of the respondents did not give much attention. The study of the nature working from home should be expended to the unmarried or single respondents. As we can see, majority of the finding only focus on the only to the married and having children (Hanim et. al, 2020). The perspectives of working from home by single employees may be resulted to a difference aspect compared to existing respondents. By looking into the other perspective such as generations, gender and geographical

location also may help better understanding on the perception of WFH employees. Perhaps, there is only little acknowledgement about the implementation WFH even though it is one of the natures that has been promoted in Malaysian from 1990 (Asaari & Karia, 2001). However, until Malaysian is being attacked by the Covid-19 pandemic since 2020, this norm is getting arises from day to day. The process of adopting to the telecommuting is one of the new challenges that need to be overcome by the employees in Malaysia and the capability to cope with the situations of working from home is still questionable in multiple industries, especially in Education Industry whereby we understand that all academician facing this situation as the classes held fully online. Referring to *Surat Edaran JPA.SARAAN(S)256/6/31 JLD.6(2)*, an official order from Public Service Department Malaysia had been issued to government staff in Malaysia to work from home from because of movement control orders and closure of government premises starting 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020. In line with the government orders, policy of WFH have been issued by most of the IPTA in Malaysia in year 2020. For UiTM itself, referring to “*Pekeliling Naib Canselor Bilangan 04 Tahun 2020*”, *Pekeliling Naib Canselor Bilangan 06 Tahun 2020*”, *Pekeliling Naib Canselor Bilangan 8 Tahun 2020*”, official orders to work from home have been issued by UiTM for its staff. For academicians, all the teaching and learning had to move to online platform. All the teaching method have been recognized as Online Distance Learning (ODL).

The experience of working from home between male and female are slightly difference because of the housing chores, family management and parenting issues. Thus, this is supported by Rego (2017) that also aimed to discover how do female experience work life balance from telecommuting process and what did they perceived regarding the good and bad of telecommuting compared to male employees. Getting the result based on gender is very crucial and serve as an importance data for the management to provide the best mechanism to support the employees both mentally and physically. This statement also supported by UiTM Happiness Index 3.0 in 2020 conducted from 1<sup>st</sup> October to 30<sup>th</sup> October during MCO. A total 12,143 academic and administration staff in UiTM indicated that their happiness index is 73 percent during the WFH.

Working from home can also produce work-family conflict due to social expectations, duties, psychological demands, and working environment (Kreiner, 2006). Employee’s state of mind in adapting the situation are highly difference, depends on the level of jobs and family condition. Thus, employees nowadays are still looking for a better flexible working condition that able to provide the support between working and family lives (Rincon & Martinez, 2020).

Despite of WFH bring a lot of significant advantages, WFH employees want to make sure others like family, friends and supervisors are aware with the significant amount of time they need to devote between the work and family every day (Barron, 2007). Normally supervisors and other co-workers are expecting them to be at standby mode everyday regardless of the time and place. Besides, many of the employees that WFH claimed that they even not remember the last time they are able to take a break from electronic devices since they started to WFH (Mustafa & Gold, 2013). This situation shows a serious warning sign for employees’ well-being.

Therefore, the aim of this study to explore the difference of employee’s job performance among the demographic variables. This study also will examine the relationship between telework motivation, telework self-efficacy, telework efficiency and telework qualities towards employee’s job performance.

## Research Questions

The research questions for this study will be as follows:

1. Is there any difference on Working from Home practices by different level of generations?
2. To what extent gender can differentiate the perception of Working from Home practices?
3. Does marital status significantly affect the perception of Working from Home practices?
4. How does geographical location can alter the perception of Working from Home practices?

## Research Objectives

The research objective for this study will be as follows:

1. To identify the perception of Working from Home practices among different level of generations.
2. To explore the perception of Working from Home practices by gender.
3. To examine the perception of Working from Home practices by marital status.
4. To investigate the perception of Working from Home practices by geographical location.

## Literature Review

### Employee's Job Performance

Managers often look for ways to increase productivity by using new products, processes, or technologies, but until there is a virtual employee, there must be some focus on real job performance. Traditionally, job performance was associated with a defined list of tasks, all of which were often included in an employee's job description. Currently, job performance is assessed dually, with respect to job tasks and with respect to context. Understanding job performance factors and how they interact with demographic and categorical variables can help explain issues in this study. Employee's performance is highly related with teleworking during the pandemic covid-19. According to the Bloom et al. (2015), employees at the largest Chinese travel agency are having a very higher overall performance rather than staff who working from the office because of the more silence environment of work, beside they are to enjoy their rest time when working. Employees can increase the job performance if they are able to work away from the office compared to stay within the office (Caillier, 2021) and it has been proof by Susilo (2020) that employees job performance are positive and significant effect with working from home. In contrast, the quick use of many ICT gadgets and smartphones when working at home can upset employees and lower their job performance, according to a study by Li and Lin (2019). In fact, the effect of job performance towards the employees working from home still receive a little attention in nowadays literature (Rupietta & Beckmann, 2017).

### Telework Motivation

One of the most related aspects of job performance are telework motivation. Working from home especially during pandemic Covid-19 has become crucial aspect that has been encouraged by the publics. According to a Japanese study, teleworking reduces staff efficiency (Morikawa et al., 2020). However, Bloom et al., (2015), found that teleworking able to increase staff productivity, in which it able to increase even higher if the decision of teleworking is made by the employees themselves, and this is not even related within context of pandemic. Telework can be a beneficial, ingenious incentive to improve the motivation of the employees with the existence of employees needs such as childcare essential, remote work options as well as flexibility in choosing the working hours. In other options, staff can choose the most typical working times and durations when teleworking, in which the feel most effective, beside they are able to have direct control over their own working hours (Eversole et al., 2012). The performance of the individuals able to affect the performance of the business, thus HR professionals need to find a way to increase employee motivation in their workforce (Fujii, 2020).

### **Telework Self-Efficacy**

Based on Bandura (1986), self-efficacy theory is determined as social cognitive theory that describe individual's behaviour, environment as well as cognitive factors in result of expectations. The immediate transformation of the working environment able to change the employee's self-efficacy, especially when the situations of teleworking workplace influence the staff self-esteem (Brown, 2014). Teleworking is not lightly brought negative implication towards employees' self-efficacy if they staff are being including along in social circle, beside the social media program led them to perform their job well (Prihadi et al., 2021). Lang and Kayser (2022) conducted a study in Germany and found that self-efficacy can be a key element in reducing job stress and improving employees' performance during home-based remote work. Thus, self-efficacy can be a significant resource that can promote staff functioning and well-being (Yap & Baharudin, 2016).

### **Telework Efficiency**

Several studies have shown the benefits of telework in increasing the efficiency of employees. Teleworkers in the US enjoy reduced commute time, flexible working hours, and higher productivity (Barrero et al., 2021). Teleworking allows employees working 0.8 hours more than working at the office, with more attendees attending the meeting (DeFilippis et al., 2020) and Microsoft staff also presenting the similar efficiency while they are working from home (Teevan et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the study by Choudhury et al., (2019), found that staff of the US Patent and Trademark can work anywhere, and their efficiency were rising to 4.4 percent with no affect or declining of work quality, and this is note that the task does not require any kind of collaborations from employees. However, not all teleworkers are able to perform well. In certain area of work, they are decreasing in the efficiency of their performance resulted that job with high cognitive needs but no cooperation (i.e., professional chess players) are having lower quality performance when playing online when they are away from their tournaments practice places (Kunn et al., 2020).

### **Telework Qualities**

It is not easy to ensure the good quality of teleworker due to its nature of working environment. Beckel and Fisher (2022) suggest that the teleworkers must have a good communication skill and be organized so that they can be able to manage their workload effectively. Meanwhile, successful teleworkers should be able to work independently and be self-motivated to complete tasks without direct supervision (Wang et al., 2023). There are several studies that relate leadership with telework qualities. Researchers agree that being a leader when work is organized virtually is generally more difficult than leading traditional teams, especially in the virtual world, teleworkers tend to act as leaders themselves, because the digital platform removes some of the organizational powers and privileges of the leaders and enables employees to take the lead (Lindeblad et al., 2016). Thus, the power dynamics between leaders and employees change due to remote interaction (Malakyan, 2020). Hence, lack of communication and leadership can give extreme impact towards telework qualities.

### **Employee's Job Performance and Gender**

Gender and job performance is another relationship that has been researched extensively. A study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic found that women reported lower work productivity and job satisfaction than men while working from home due to increased housework and childcare responsibilities (Feng & Savani, 2020). In addition, O'Neill et al. (2009) concluded that males have better work performance than females in an examination of the state of women's careers at the dawn of the 21st century. Meanwhile, Gaskell (2023)

highlights that work interruptions are associated with reduced employee performance and higher levels of emotional exhaustion, which can be more prevalent for women working from home due to gendered expectations around caregiving and household responsibilities. On the contrary, a study conducted by Bernardi and Guptill (2007) in which investigated the attitudes of 713 business students from seven different nations revealed that females exhibited higher levels of accomplishment in the workplace compared to their male counterparts. Overall, the research suggests that working from home can have an impact on employee performance and productivity, and that gender can play a role in how employees experience working from home. However, the specific findings vary depending on the industry, job type, and location.

### Employee’s Job Performance and Marital Status

Research varies regarding the relationship between marital status and job performance. Some studies have found that single individuals are more likely to telework than married ones (Zhang et al., 2020). According to a study by Pordelan et al. (2021) focusing on married teleworking, allowing married women to work remotely can improve closeness to family. Choong et al. (2012) address similar result in which married employees are more committed and motivated than single employees because they require a solid career to support their families and ensure financial security. Additionally, in their roles as providers, married men are more likely than unmarried men to encounter and internalize norms such as hard work, obedience to superiors, and achievement that make them better workers (Gorman & Mosseri, 2019).

### Model Framework

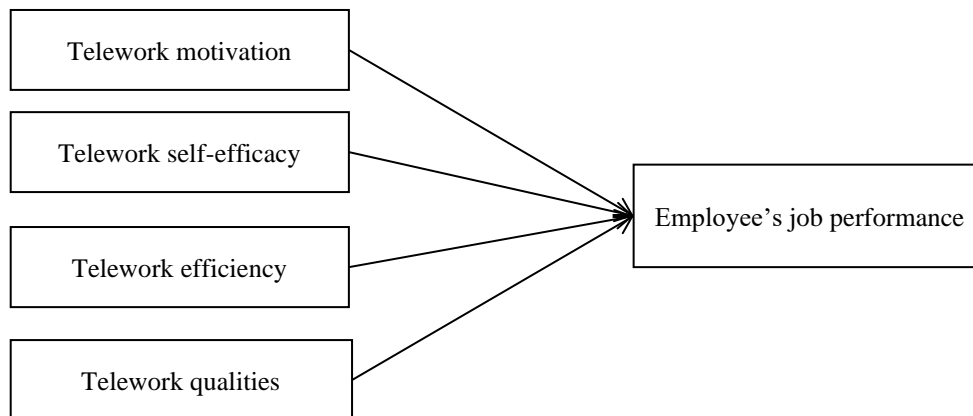


Figure 1: Model Framework

### Methodology

#### Research Population

A research population is a large collection of individual or projects known to have the same characteristics of the research. The population for this study is academic staff at UiTM all campuses. There are currently 8788 academicians across all 13 campuses in Malaysia.

#### Research Design

The research design is intended to provide an appropriate framework for a study. The aim of this research is to conduct a cross-sectional study. This research intends is to determine the most important factors (telework motivation, telework self-efficacy, telework efficiency and telework qualities) that will affect employee’s job performance.

### Sample Size Determination

In this research, 369 samples from 8788 academic staff will be selected by random for each 13 campuses in Malaysia. As the total population in this research is large, the program can be divided into subgroups. Hence, this research used stratified sampling. In this research, proportionate stratification is used.

### Sampling Technique

Sampling method of this research is stratified sampling method. Stratified sampling is a form method of sampling in which the entire population is separated into smaller groups or strata to complete the process of sampling. The strata in the population data are formed based on some common characteristics. After splitting the population into strata, the researcher randomly selects the sample proportionally. The strata in this study are 13 UiTM Campuses in Malaysia.

### Measuring Instrument

Data is collected by questionnaire. As presented in Table 1, the questionnaire contains 6 parts which are Section A, B, C, D, E, and F. Section A is demographic profile while Section B (Telework motivation), Section C (Telework self-efficacy), Section D (Telework efficiency), Section E (Telework qualities) and Section F (Employee's job performance) and the questions are using Likert scale questions which is the values are from 1 to 7. The Likert scale values for 1-7 which is strongly disagree and strongly agree, respectively. The descriptions of questionnaire are presented in Table 2.

**Table 1: Division of Questionnaire**

Section	Construct	Number Of Items
A	Demographic Profile	4
B	Telework motivation	9
C	Telework self-efficacy	15
D	Telework efficiency	7
E	Telework qualities	7
F	Employee's job performance	11

**Table 2: Descriptions of Questionnaire**

#### Section A: Demographic Profile

The academic staff need to provide background information which is age, gender, marital status, and campus. For age, there are 5 options which is the first option is below 25, the second option is range between 26 until 35, the third option is range between 36 until 45, the fourth option is range between 46 until 55 and the last option is for age above 55. For gender, there are two options which are male and female. For the marital status, the options provided are single, married and widow. Lastly, the options for the campus are all 13 campuses in Malaysia.

#### Section B: Telework motivation

The scale to evaluate Telework motivation of respondents consisted of 9 items (e.g., "I have the flexibility to choose workplace", "I have the flexibility to choose worktime"). It aimed to measure the benefits of WFH telework. All items were positively worded and rated using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). Higher scores indicated a greater importance of the motivational factors.

<b>Section C: Telework self-efficacy</b>	The scale to evaluate Telework self-efficacy of respondents consisted of 15 items (e.g., “I lack face-to-face interaction with colleagues”, “I lack face-to-face interaction with the manager”). It aimed to measure the Telework self-efficacy. All items were positively worded and rated using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). Higher scores indicated a greater importance of the motivational factors.
<b>Section D: Telework efficiency</b>	The scale to evaluate Telework efficiency of respondents consisted of 7 items (e.g., “I have to work overtime due to the manager’s inability to estimate the workload”, “I am burdened with overloading information”). It aimed to measure the Telework efficiency. All items were positively worded and rated using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). Higher scores indicated a greater importance of the motivational factors.
<b>Section E: Telework qualities</b>	The scale to evaluate Telework qualities of respondents consisted of 7 items (e.g., “I have the ability to work independently”, “I have a good time-management skill”). It aimed to measure the Telework qualities. All items were positively worded and rated using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). Higher scores indicated a greater importance of the motivational factors.
<b>Section F: Employee’s job performance</b>	The scale to evaluate Employee’s job performance of respondents consisted of 11 items (e.g., “managed to plan my work so that I finished it on time”, “I kept in mind the work result I needed to achieve”). It aimed to measure the Employee’s job performance. All items were positively worded and rated using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). Higher scores indicated a greater importance of the motivational factors.

### Data Analysis

Data will be gathered and evaluated to answer questions, test hypotheses, or disprove theories. The software that will be used to analyse the data gathered are the IBM SPSS Statistics Version 24.0. The data will be analysed using a series of tests namely, normality test, reliability test, descriptive analysis, independent t-test, ANOVA test, correlation analysis and multiple linear regression analysis. The statistical techniques that were used to analyse the data in this research are as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Summary of the method of analysis between the variables.**

Objectives	Method of Analysis
• To determine the significant mean difference of employee’s job performance among gender.	Independent t-test
• To determine the significant mean difference of employee’s job performance among marital status.	ANOVA
• To determine the relationship between telework motivation, telework self-efficacy, telework efficiency and telework qualities towards employee’s job performance.	Correlation analysis



- To determine the most important factors (telework motivation, telework self-efficacy, telework efficiency and telework qualities) that will affect employee's job performance. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

### Conclusion

The meticulous initial investigation on this topic has proved useful in conducting the actual analysis for this study. The findings of this study will significantly contribute to the development of WFH policies and practises guidelines. The outcomes of this research will also assist policymakers in determining whether a new policy is required to provide academicians with the option to work from home or the office. By examining this, the findings will provide academicians with new perspectives on achieving greater well-being.

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