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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Academia, Employee Autonomy, Employee Engagement, Employee Performance.	Background: One of the most critical organizational challenges faced by practitioners and scholars is reduced level of Employee Engagement (EE) and one of its major outcome is reduced employee performance (EP) in workplace. Theories also suggest that work autonomy (WA) can increase employee engagement, commitment, and hence employee performance. Objective: This research fills this gap by exploring the impact of work autonomy and employee engagement on employee performance. Methods: This study was conducted on academic employees currently working at Higher Education Institute. This study uses a quantitative study design; data was collected from 265 participants through an online questionnaire. The questionnaire included demographic details, two independent variables WA and EE, and one dependent variable EP adapted from validated tools measured from 5-point Likert scale. Data analysis show high reliability of WA, EE, and EP i.e. 0.843, 0.878, and 0.71, respectively was analyzed using SPSS. Results: Regression analysis showed that WA and EE has 57% of the variance in EP. Both WA ($\beta = 0.317$, $t = 4.484$, $p < 0.001$) and EE ($\beta = 0.473$, $t = 6.680$, $p < 0.001$) were significant predictors of EP. Conclusion: These results highlight the role of autonomy and engagement in enhancing employee performance in academic institutions. According to the results study recommends that institutions should work on nurturing environments that enhance WA and EE to improve EP.
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Introduction

Background

In today's organizations, structural job design has increasingly evolved into a process of delegating more power to employees to make decisions and to plan, and systematically decreasing direct management (Kubicek, 2017). Available evidence demonstrates that such organizational job design alterations are advantageous since they improve workers' performance and well-being at work (Kubicek, 2017; Wegman, 2018). Existing empirical data from two different theoretical stances support this strategy (Muecke, Iseke, 2019). According to the motivational approach, job autonomy increases employee performance since it creates a sense of ownership over one's work and meets a psychological demand (Dawkins, 2017; Ryan, Deci, 2017). As a result, people who have greater autonomy at work are more committed to their work (Bakker, A.B, Demerouti, 2017; Christian, 2011), which leads to improved efficiency (Tisu, 2021), and performance (Volmer, 2012) at work.

Amabile (1988) argues that workplace autonomy has great influence on employee performance in conjunction with employee engagement. Employees are encouraged to explore their ideas and decision-making abilities when it comes to their performance through workplace autonomy. Actually, a key component of an employee's performance is the motivation they get from their independence at work (Bammens, 2016). However, employees may see reality differentially (Ichheiser, 1949; Fiske, Taylor, 1991), and as a result, workplace autonomy may have varying degrees of impact on employees' performance based on how they interpret it (Hackman, Lawler, 1971).

The degree of devotion and participation an employee has with the organization and its fundamental values is known as employee engagement. A dedicated and engaged employee interacts with colleagues to enhance performance at work for the organization's benefit and is mindful of the organization's context. Employees maintain a positive and supportive approach toward the organization and its core values. They demonstrate high levels of engagement by being deeply committed to their work and enthusiastic about it. These employees genuinely concerned about the company's success and are eager to go beyond their regular responsibilities, contributing extra efforts to help the organization achieve success. In addition to being cognitively alert, they have an emotional bond with the organization. Kahn (1990) defines employee engagement as the ability of employees to be fully engaged in their work roles. According to Harter (2002) the Gallup Research Group defines the degree of a person's involvement, satisfaction, and excitement for their work as employee engagement. An employee turns into a valuable asset in which an organization might invest.

Employee performance includes output quantity, quality, attendance, usefulness, accommodations and correctness. The study on individual's performance by Yang (2008) showed that it is impossible to validate an individual's performance. We don't know the unswerving influence of work autonomy and employee engagement on employee performance in academia. By investigating the connections between employee engagement, work autonomy, and performance in the academic

setting, this research contributes to the literature by shedding light on the potential strategic applications of these components to achieve organizational excellence. This study can therefore be justified as a means of increasing employee engagement and work autonomy to enhance their performance. Various workplace outcomes can be explained by determining the relationships among job autonomy, employee engagement, and employee performance. Work autonomy and employee engagement may improve employee performance and mitigate the negative effects of the workplace.

Understanding how work autonomy, employee engagement and employee performance interact is important because it has significant ramifications for organization looking to promote creativity, output, and employee happiness. Juyumaya (2024) study covering multinational corporations to family-owned enterprises in Santiago, Chile, found that work autonomy and engagement affect employee performance in the sales industry, with age being regarded as a moderating element. There is a knowledge deficit about these dynamics in other crucial sectors, especially academia, due to the findings' sectorial and regional specificity.

There are particular difficulties in the academic field including increased workloads the need for innovation in research, instruction and the demands of performance evaluations. Academic staff frequently need autonomy in order to innovate in their job and handle the challenges of research and teaching contexts.

Furthermore, the shift toward knowledge-oriented economies has highlighted the importance of employee innovation, specifically in academia. Innovative behaviors, which are essential for coming up with fresh research ideas, instructional strategies, and administrative fixes are more likely displayed by engaged workers (Schaufeli, 2002; Bakker 2009). Furthermore, academic institutions can encourage creativity and improve organizational outcomes by giving their employees more autonomy to take responsibility for their jobs (Amabile, 1996; Orth, Volmer, 2017)

Autonomy and engagement at work are important elements for employee performance. There is limited research on how these variables work in academic settings; instead, much of the literature currently in publication concentrates on business and other service sectors and industry. Understanding the relation between work autonomy, engagement, and performance is becoming more important in academic institutions deal with organizational pressure to increase their output and global competitiveness. The significance of this research is further increased by the inclusion of cultural and contextual factors, such as differences in autonomy perceptions and engagement levels among various age groups and academic roles. Earlier researches has demonstrated the moderating effects of age and autonomy perception on creativity and engagement, suggesting that academic settings should also take these factors into account (Hackman, Lawler, 1971; Ichheiser, 1949). In addition to adding to the body of knowledge already in existence, this study offers practical suggestions for academic administrators and policymakers by addressing these subtleties.

This study underwrites significantly to our understanding of how employee engagement and work autonomy affect performance in academia, a field that places a high value on innovation and

worker well-being. The results could help academic institutions succeed and grow sustainably by influencing performance management procedures, engagement tactics, and job design.

Objective of the Study

- 1) To determine the impact of work autonomy on employee performance.
- 2) To determine the impact of employee engagement on employee performance.

Literature Review

Work Autonomy and Employee Performance:

The word "autonomy" comes from the Greek terms "autonomia" and "autonomos," combining "auto" (self) and "nomos" (rule) to mean "self-rule." It refers to individuals or entities governing themselves through their own laws and procedures (Agich, 1994). Historically, Greek city-states practiced autonomy by independently making decisions and managing their affairs (Agich, 1994). Independence of an employee to work in a way that befits them is work autonomy (henceforth, autonomy) (Juyumaya, Torres, 2022). Employees with work autonomy are able to determine the type of work they do as well as how and when to complete it. Work autonomy is a vital job asset that can enhance employee's performance and engagement. As previously noted, research indicates that autonomy influences job performance by positively impacting motivation. In a study involving public employees, Borst, Kruijen, and Lako (2019) discovered a correlation between autonomy and performance. Later, in research with private workers by Tisu, Virga, Mermeze (2023), also discovered work autonomy to be the key indicator of high proficiency, as a form of performance. Some studies also suggests that when supervisors authorized their employees to exercise autonomy at work places, the performance of employees enhanced and they present with improved mental health. Moreover, numerous studies have also suggested work autonomy and job performance are positively correlated (Johannsen, Zak, 2020).

Autonomy allows employees to adapt their work processes based on their strengths and preferences, which often leads to higher efficiency and output. Moreover, autonomy supports innovation and creativity in problem-solving by giving employees the freedom to experiment with new approaches. In dynamic work environments, the ability to self-management and make autonomous decisions becomes a competitive advantage for both employees and organizations. According to Borst, Kruijen, Lako, 2019, an enhancement of job performance was positively seen with work autonomy because it encourages self-management techniques, self-directed modifications and proactive work adjustments. Research supports the notion that autonomy influences engagement, which in turn impacts job performance (Halbesleben, 2010). In this vein of thinking, due to paucity of research in academia and in order to enhanced our knowledge about how work autonomy effects performance in academic sector employees, the following hypothesis was formulated.

H1: Work autonomy has significant impact on employee performance

Employee Engagement and Employee Performance:

Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006) refers engagement to a meaningful and rewarding mental state at work, distinguished by enthusiasm, commitment and complete immersion in tasks. Employee engagement is a key driver of organizational success, influencing effectiveness, fostering innovation, and strengthening competitive advantage. That is why it has become an area of concern for the managers and higher ups across the globe. Until the 1990s, the idea of employee engagement was mainly seen as a practical consulting concern, but it has its roots in academic research. Over time, it has gained significant attention from researchers across fields such as behavioral analysis, psychology, and business management (Xu, Thomas, 2011). It is also a challenging and comprehensive task to define engagement and outline its scope, and there is a dearth of critical academic literature on the issue (Kular, 2008). The relationship between an organization's financial performance and employee engagement has received a lot of attention. EE first boosts employee performance, which in turn boosts organizational performance (Perrin, 2009). Literature from a previous study by Smith, Markwick (2009), engagement stretches employees the advantage to put their efforts into their work and promotes self-efficacy. Previous research highlights the optimistic thoughts toward work and the organization as well as improved health are possible outcomes of employee engagement. Highly committed employees speak more of affiliation and positive emotions while lowly committed employees make more references to power and negative emotions (Roekel, Wigger, Veldkamp, Bakker, 2023). Over the past years, a growing number of studies have linked job performance and engagement, demonstrating that engaged workers outperform others. (Inam, 2021; Neuber, Englitz, Schulte, Forthmann, Holling, 2021). Scholars have outlined five essential factors that influence engagement: leadership, job design, team and organizational dynamics, organizational interventions and psychological states. Furthermore, four vocational factors: individual morale, task performance, organizational performance, and extra-role performance are found to have a positive correlation with engagement. Employee engagement acts as a driving force that enhances job performance by leveraging job resources like autonomy. Numerous studies have examined the relationship between engagement and job performance (Christian, Garza, Slaughter, 2011; Sekhar, Patwardhan, Vyas, 2018). According to Christian, (2011) work engagement is a powerful predictor of performance because it creates a positive state in which employees are eager, proud, and willing to go above and beyond for their jobs. Furthermore, previous metanalytical research that examines the relationship among job resources, employee well-being and performance comes to a similar conclusion (Nielsen, 2017). Therefore, based on the above arguments this study considered academia as the research setting while studying the relationship between EE and EP. Hence, hypothesis states that:

H2: Employee engagement has a significant impact on employee performance.

Theoretical Framework

The association between work autonomy, employee engagement, and employee performance investigated in this study, is supported by accepted theories and empirical data. According to Bakker, Demerouti's (2018) Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, job resources like autonomy and engagement are essential for improving employee performance. According to Juyumaya, Torres (2022), one of the main factors influencing intrinsic motivation is work autonomy, which is the freedom to choose how, when and where to complete tasks. Autonomy promotes creativity, adaptability, and efficiency in workers by letting them match their tasks to their preferences and strengths. This improves the job outcome (Borst, Kruyen, Lako, 2019). Additionally, autonomy increases the growth of self-management techniques which have favorable impact on workers' affective-cognitive functions and individual output.

Key factor in performance is employee engagement, which is classified by strength, commitment, and devotion (Schaufeli, Bakker, Salanova, 2006). Employee Engagement serves as a motivating mechanism that increases worker's potential to put in extra effort, which promotes better task performance and organizational contribution (Christian, Garza, Slaughter, 2011). According to the JD-R theory, performance and job resources like autonomy are mediated by engagement. Numerous aspects of employee performance, such as individual task outcomes and extra-role behaviors, are strongly positively correlated with engagement, according to empirical research. By investigating the influence of work autonomy and engagement on employee performance, this study adds to the small body of research in the academic sector and offers insightful advice on how to improve academic organizational effectiveness.

Conceptual Framework

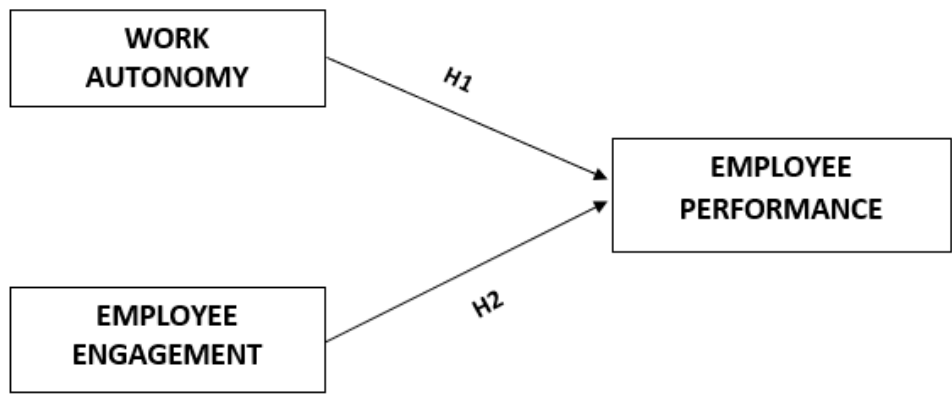


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Study Design

The study used a quantitative approach, specifically, a cross-sectional design and an electronic structured questionnaire to test the conceptual framework and explore the relationships between work autonomy, employee engagement, and employee performance.

Study Population and Sample

The target population were the academic faculty members of different departments in HEI. Based on the Raosoft sample size calculator (with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error), the sample size was determined as 265 respondents. The sampling method used was purposive sampling which is a type of non-probability sampling to select the currently employed faculty as respondents. The inclusion criteria were active academic faculty members working at HEI. Exclusion criteria included non-teaching staff, administrative staff, students, faculty outside of HEI, and those who refused to be interviewed or gave incomplete responses.

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

The survey was conducted over a period of 6 months from October 2024 to February 2025. The survey was completed online through Google forms. Survey instrument includes socio-demographic variables (age, gender, education, income, experience) and the validated measurement scales for the main constructs. Work Autonomy (Independent Variable) was measured with an 8 item scale (Researcher's Field Survey Report, 2015); Employee Engagement (Independent Variable) was measured with a 9 item scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006); and Employee Performance (Dependent Variable) was measured with a 3 item scale (Bishop, 1987). All the items used a 5-point standard closed-ended Likert scale with a range of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) in measuring the core constructs.

Data Analysis Tools and Procedures

IBM SPSS Statistics (version 27) was used for data processing and analyses. The statistical analysis used was descriptive statistics to describe the sample's demographic characteristics, Cronbach's alpha coefficient to test construct internal consistency and scale reliability, and linear regression analysis to test the direct effect of the independent variables on employee performance.

Ethical Consideration

The study was performed under strict ethical guidelines after formal approval of the study by the IRB. Informed consent explaining the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty was incorporated at the start of the online questionnaire. Confidentiality of the participant's identity, survey responses, and storage of these were maintained, and the information was used only for academic research.

Results

Demographic Profile:

The table 01 represents the sample has the following distribution of age: 36.2 % of the population from the sample lies in the category of 42 years – 50 years age group which shows the majority staff members of academia fall in the middle age group. This data shows that 52.8% of the participants were male and 47.2% were female gender. The data shows that 41.9% of the participants were having Master's degree indicating higher contribution of this category contributing in the study while Bachelors education level had small proportion of 1.9%. 29.8% of the respondents fell under the category of 6-10 years of working experience that is the largest proportion of the sample. While the smallest proportion of this data is 1.9% that are participants having above 30 years of experience. In terms of employment, 34.3% of employment type of the faculty are contractual. While 35.5% are Government employees. Regarding income status, 26% of the sample falls in the income range of 225,001-275,000 constitutes the highest percentage. Likewise, the smallest proportion 6% have less than 75,000.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics

<i>Items</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Frequency N</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
AGE	265		
24 - 32 years		28	10.6
33 - 41 years		81	30.6
42 - 50 years		96	36.2
51 - 60 year		60	22.6
GENDER	265		
Male		140	52.8
Female		125	47.2
EDUCATION	265		
Bachelors		5	1.9
Masters		111	41.9
MPhil / MS		71	26.8
PhD		78	29.4
EXPERIENCE	265		
0 - 5 years		20	7.5
6 - 10 years		79	29.8
11 - 15 years		58	21.9
16 - 20 years		50	18.9
21 - 25 years		36	13.6
26 - 30 years		17	6.4
Above 30 years		5	1.9

EMPLOYMENT TYPE	265		
BPS / Government Employee		94	35.5
Contractual		91	34.3
Third Party		3	11
Visiting		77	29.1
INCOME	265		
Less than 75,000		16	6.0
75,001 - 125,000		39	14.7
125,001 - 175,000		56	21.1
175,001 - 225,000		45	17.0
225,001 - 275,000		69	26.0
275,001 - 325,000		31	11.7
Above 325,000		9	3.4

Reliability Test:

Work autonomy, employee engagement and employee performance had high reliability coefficients of 0.843, 0.878 and 0.781 respectively. However, according to research experts' reliability of 0.60 can be considered average, and a reliability of 0.80 considered as coefficient reliability with high value (Nunnally, 1978; Sekaran, Bougie, 2010). According to the results every measure achieved a high dependability coefficient, which varied from 0.78 to 0.87. (Table 2)

Table 2 Reliability test

Variable	Responses	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Work Autonomy	265	8	0.843
Employee Engagement	265	9	0.878
Employee Performance	265	3	0.781

Pearson Correlation

Table 3 Correlation

		WA	EE	EP
WA	Pearson Correlation	1	.820**	.705**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001
	N	265	265	265
EE	Pearson Correlation	.820**	1	.733**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001
	N	265	265	265
EP	Pearson Correlation	.705**	.733**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	
	N	265	265	265

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

Note. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). All correlations are based on N = 265.

Pearson correlation indicates significant and positive relationship between WA, EE & EP with the p-value of <.001 representing the implying improvements in work autonomy and employee engagement may leads to better performance outcomes in academic staff (Table 3).

Regression

Table 4 shows that 57% of variance in dependent variable ~ employee performance (EP), is due to the independent variables; Employee engagement and work autonomy.

Table 4 Model summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.755 ^a	.570	.564	.584
a. Predictors: (Constant), EE, WA				

Following table 05 illustrates the relationship between independent variables (WA and EE) and dependent variable (EP) is positive and significant. Work autonomy ($\beta=0.317$, $t=4.484$, $\text{sig}<0.001$) and employee engagement ($\beta=0.473$, $t=6.680$, $\text{sig}<0.001$) were found to be significant in predicting employee performance.

Table 5 Results of regression analysis

Coefficients^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	.211	.153		1.381	.168
	WA	.366	.082	.317	4.484	<.001
	EE	.558	.084	.473	6.680	<.001
a. Dependent Variable: EP						

Hypothesis Testing

Table 6 Summary finding

Hypothesis	Statement	Supported
H1	<i>Work autonomy has significant impact on employee performance.</i>	Yes
H2	<i>Employee engagement has a significant impact on employee performance.</i>	Yes

From previous discussion table 9 concludes that the objectives of the study have been accomplished via hypothesis testing.

Discussion

The research designed to discover about the direct impact of work autonomy and employee engagement on employee performance. Academic staff members are the focus of this study. Previous research backs the idea that employees who are highly engaged tend to perform better (Anitha, 2014; Dajani, 2016) and there are also studies which suggest that autonomy is a precursor of performance (Tisu, Virga, Mermeze, 2023). But most of these studies were conducted in other industries like manufacturing. Given the rapidly evolving work conditions in Pakistan, particularly within the public sector university that is HEI, examining the direct impact in this specific sector holds significant relevance. The research findings give insights on how work autonomy and employee engagement affect employee performance in the academic setting of HEI.

Findings of this study also emphasize relationships between the dependent and the independent variables are significant positive. Both Work autonomy & Employee Engagement made significant contributions to Employee Performance, regression analysis results explained 57% of the model's variance. The results are consistent with previous research emphasizing the value of engagement and autonomy in raising worker performance. According to the Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) theory, work autonomy gives workers the ability to design their own work processes, which enhance motivation and improves results of their tasks. Comparatively, vigor, dedication, and absorption qualities that define employee engagement motivate workers to make extra effort, which raises performance levels. Academicians frequently work in dynamic, remote, complex environments that perseverance, creativity, and self-control. Giving faculty members the privilege to make innovations and make their own decisions may improve their performance, as evidenced by the positive relationship between Work autonomy and Employee performance. Furthermore, encouraging culture of engagement through rewarding success and offering fulfilling work opportunities can have a big impact. To utilise the potential of their employees completely, academic institutions should operate in dynamic and competitive situations should concentrate on developing an engaged and autonomous culture. Managers can promote both creative work practices and long-term performance gains by creating an environment that inspires staff members to put their "hands, head, and heart" into their jobs (Ashforth, Humphrey, 1995). The results also support the theoretical framework in the literature review, demonstrating the importance of WA and EE in determining EP. For academic administrators and policymakers at HEI and other similar institutions. These findings offer practical insights that highlight the necessity of creating job roles that encourage autonomy and engagement in order to improve overall organizational performance.

Strength of Study

This study fills a gap of direct effect of work autonomy & employee engagement on performance of employee in an academic sector which had received limited attention. The results provided

actionable considerations to academic sectors/institutions to enhance employee engagement and provide standard work autonomy to get better performance outcome. This study have diverse data from different departments and education levels of the university.

Limitations and Weakness of the Study

Besides this study's contribution to a different sector, it has several limitations:

- Data collection was only taken from HEI.
- Cross-sectional design was used in the research.
- This study was done on few variables with no interference of any mediator or moderator.

Conclusion

This research emphasize that work autonomy and employee engagement have a significant role in improving employee's performance in academia. The positive and significant association between variables shows that the academic institution can have greater performance levels and motivating the environment that encourages autonomy and engagement. These findings highlights the understanding of researchers to boost academic faculty performance effectiveness to increase organization success.

Contribution and Implications:

This research contributes in presenting the significance of work autonomy and employee engagement on employee performance. Organizations would get benefit by implementing strong HR practices and policies to encourage work autonomy to increase employee performance. To enhance employee performance, following strategies will be beneficial:

- Flexible work policies to enhance work autonomy
- Designing employee engagement programs tailored to different job roles
- Provide leadership trainings to encourage autonomy while maintaining accountability.

Recommendations

Future researchers should consider and compare these variables contributions in different universities/institutions and study other variables like any mediator; HR practices involvement or moderator's effect can change the outcomes and gives variety of implications for managers and policy makers to enhance employee performance and expand the study to non-academic and in other settings. More comprehensive understanding between these variables can be obtained by these implications.

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