

# The Relationship between Work Environment and Job Satisfaction of Administrative Staff in Open and Distributed Learning Centres

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.1017PSY0030>

Received: 03 May 2026; Accepted: 08 May 2026; Published: 30 May 2026

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between work environment and job satisfaction among administrative staff in Open Distance Learning (ODL) Learning Centres, utilizing Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory as a guiding framework. A positive working environment is crucial for maintaining employee productivity, fostering morale, and minimizing stress that negatively impacts work performance, all of which are vital for efficient support to ODL students and educators. The study focused on five specific dimensions of the work environment: job autonomy, job competency, collegial relationships, career commitment, and status of profession. A quantitative survey design was employed, with questionnaires distributed to 100 administrative staff members across various ODL Learning Centres in Malaysia. A total of 69 completed responses were received and analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient. The findings reveal that administrative staff generally perceive their work environment positively, with job competency, status of profession, and job autonomy scoring highest. The overall level of job satisfaction among the staff was also found to be satisfactory. Crucially, the results indicate a significant positive correlation between all examined dimensions of the work environment and job satisfaction. Specifically, job autonomy showed the strongest relationship with job satisfaction, followed by status of profession and career commitment. This study confirms the importance of a conducive work environment in enhancing job satisfaction among ODL administrative staff. The findings offer valuable insights for ODL's management and human resource department, informing the development of policies and practices aimed at fostering a positive work environment to improve employee motivation, engagement, and ultimately, organizational success in expanding educational opportunities for students and supporting educators in a distributed learning environment.

**Keywords:** Work Environment; Job Satisfaction; Open Distance Learning (ODL); Administrative Staff; Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

## INTRODUCTION

Employees are the most vital asset for any organization striving to achieve its objectives, and their well-being and satisfaction are paramount to sustained success. In Malaysia, Open Distance Learning (ODL) has been a pioneering and leading provider of flexible learning since its establishment in 2000. ODL operates and is designed to provide accessible and conducive learning environments for its diverse student body. The effective functioning of these Learning Centres, which are inherently part of a distributed learning network, hinges significantly on the dedication and efficiency of their administrative staff, who perform a myriad of essential tasks ranging from student support and academic administration to operational management.

The contemporary work landscape is increasingly dynamic and demanding, highlighting the critical influence of the work environment on employee performance, well-being, and ultimately, job satisfaction. A positive and supportive work environment is widely recognized as a catalyst for increased productivity, enhanced morale, stronger engagement, and reduced stress levels. Conversely, a negative or unsupportive environment can lead to frustration, anxiety, demotivation, and reduced overall organizational effectiveness. Within the unique context of Open and Distributed Learning (ODL) institutions, administrative staff often navigate distinct challenges, including managing diverse student populations across various locations, adapting to technological advancements that underpin distributed learning, and maintaining consistent service delivery across

geographically dispersed centres. Their job satisfaction is thus not only crucial for their individual well-being but also directly impacts the quality of support provided to students, the efficiency of administrative processes for educators, and the overall success of the institution's ODL mission to expand educational access.

This study aims to explore the intricate relationship between various dimensions of the work environment and job satisfaction specifically among the administrative staff of ODL Learning Centres. Building upon theoretical foundations such as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg et al., 1959), this research investigates how aspects like job autonomy, job competency, collegial relationships, career commitment, and the status of profession collectively contribute to the job satisfaction levels of these crucial personnel. By understanding these dynamics, the study seeks to provide actionable insights for human resource management and policy development within ODL, with the ultimate goal of fostering a more positive and productive work setting that directly supports the enhancement of educational opportunities for students and efficient operations for educators in a distributed learning environment.

### **Problem Statement**

The significant influence of the work environment on job satisfaction, and subsequently on employee performance and organizational outcomes, is well-established in organizational psychology. A positive work environment, characterized by supportive conditions and opportunities for growth, is known to foster higher levels of productivity, boost morale, and enhance employee engagement. Conversely, a suboptimal work environment can lead to increased frustration, anxiety, burnout, and demotivation, thereby diminishing overall organizational effectiveness and potentially increasing turnover rates. Job satisfaction, as a key attitudinal construct, is intricately linked to employee well-being, safety, and the ability of an organization to achieve its strategic objectives.

Despite the general understanding of this relationship, there remains a need for focused research within specific organizational contexts, particularly within higher education institutions that operate distinct models like Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Administrative staff in ODL Learning Centres face unique operational demands, often acting as the primary point of contact for students, managing logistical complexities across distributed locations, and adapting to a constantly evolving educational technology landscape. Their direct involvement in the day-to-day operations and student experience makes their job satisfaction a critical factor in the smooth and efficient delivery of ODL services, which directly impacts student success and retention.

While existing literature addresses various aspects of job satisfaction and work environment in general organizational settings, there is a paucity of research specifically examining how distinct dimensions of the work environment impact job satisfaction among administrative staff in Malaysian ODL Learning Centres. This study seeks to bridge this gap by systematically examining the relationship between five specific, yet interconnected, dimensions of the work environment—job autonomy, job competency, collegial relationships, career commitment, and status of profession—and the overall job satisfaction among the administrative staff of ODL Learning Centres. Understanding these specific linkages is crucial for ODL to develop targeted human resource interventions and create a work environment that not only retains talent but also enhances the overall quality of service delivery in its nationwide network of distributed Learning Centres, thereby directly benefiting ODL students and supporting effective teaching by educators.

### **Research Objectives and Hypotheses**

The overarching aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between the work environment and job satisfaction among administrative staff in Open Distance Learning (ODL) Learning Centres. To achieve this, the study is guided by the following specific research objectives:

- To explore the perceptions of administrative staff in ODL Learning Centres regarding the various dimensions of their work environment (job autonomy, job competency, collegial relationships, career commitment, and status of profession).
- To determine the overall level of job satisfaction among administrative staff in ODL Learning Centres.

- To examine the relationship between the work environment (overall and its specific dimensions) and job satisfaction among administrative staff in ODL Learning Centres.

Based on the established theoretical frameworks and a review of the existing literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H0: There is no significant relationship between the Work Environment (including its dimensions) and Job Satisfaction among administrative staff in ODL Learning Centres.
- H1: There is a significant positive relationship between the Work Environment (including its dimensions) and Job Satisfaction among administrative staff in ODL Learning Centres.

### Significance of the Research

This study holds significant implications for various stakeholders within Open Distance Learning and the broader context of Open and Distributed Learning institutions. The findings can provide valuable empirical evidence and actionable insights, contributing to both theoretical understanding and practical human resource management.

From an **organizational perspective**, the study's findings can directly inform ODL's management and human resource department regarding the crucial role of the work environment in fostering and enhancing job satisfaction among its administrative staff. By identifying which specific dimensions of the work environment (e.g., job autonomy, collegial relationships) are most strongly correlated with job satisfaction, the university can strategically allocate resources and develop targeted interventions. This can lead to the formulation of more effective human resource management policies and practices that are specifically tailored to the needs and perceptions of administrative staff in ODL Learning Centres. Such initiatives may include redesigning job roles to increase autonomy, implementing training programs to enhance job competency, fostering supportive collegial networks, or developing clearer career progression pathways. Ultimately, a work environment that promotes higher job satisfaction is likely to result in increased employee motivation, greater engagement, reduced turnover, and improved overall organizational success and efficiency in delivering ODL services, directly impacting the quality of support for students, the effectiveness of distributed learning operations, and the ability to expand educational access for a wider population. This enhancement of administrative effectiveness indirectly but significantly contributes to student achievement, performance, and retention within the ODL model.

From an **academic and theoretical perspective**, this research contributes to the existing body of literature on work environment and job satisfaction, particularly within the under-researched context of administrative roles in ODL institutions in Malaysia. By applying and testing aspects of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory within this specific demographic, the study offers empirical validation or refinement of the theory's applicability. It highlights the importance of considering context-specific factors when studying organizational behaviour and human resource management, especially within the unique structure of distributed learning environments. The findings can serve as a foundation for future research, prompting further investigations into other potential variables influencing job satisfaction in similar settings or exploring the causal relationships through different research designs.

### Definition and Operational Terms

To ensure clarity and consistency throughout this study, the key terms are defined conceptually and operationally as follows:

- **Work Environment:** Conceptually, the work environment refers to the collective setting, conditions, and atmosphere in which employees perform their job roles and responsibilities. Operationally, in this study, it encompasses the overall office environment and setup within ODL Learning Centres, measured through respondents' perceptions across five dimensions: job autonomy, job competency, collegial relationships, career commitment, and status of profession.

- **ODL Learning Centre:** Refers to the physical and administrative hubs established by Open Distance Learning throughout the country, equipped with facilities and staff to support a conducive learning environment for ODL students in a distributed network.
- **Job Satisfaction:** Conceptually, job satisfaction is defined as an employee's overall level of contentment with their work, or the extent to which employees are happy with various aspects of their work. Operationally, it is measured by the administrative staff's self-reported satisfaction levels across multiple facets of their job, as assessed by a structured questionnaire.
- **Job Autonomy:** Conceptually, job autonomy refers to the degree to which employees are empowered to make decisions about their work, including how and when tasks are performed. Operationally, it is measured by questionnaire items assessing the perceived freedom and independence in decision-making related to work tasks and responsibilities.
- **Job Competency:** Conceptually, job competency refers to the combination of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that employees must possess and effectively apply to perform their duties efficiently. Operationally, it is measured by questionnaire items assessing administrative staff's self-perception of their capabilities and effectiveness in fulfilling their job roles.
- **Collegial Relationship:** Conceptually, a collegial relationship denotes the reciprocal exchange process of socioemotional benefits among colleagues, which can manifest in behavioral, cognitive, or emotional consequences within the workplace. Operationally, it is measured by questionnaire items evaluating the quality of interactions, support, and collaboration among administrative staff members.
- **Career Commitment:** Conceptually, career commitment is defined as an individual's sense of responsibility towards their organization that motivates them to actively contribute to the achievement of organizational goals and objectives. Operationally, it is measured by questionnaire items assessing the administrative staff's loyalty, dedication, and long-term attachment to their career paths within ODL.
- **Status of Profession:** Conceptually, the status of profession refers to an individual's perception of themselves as a member of their profession, influenced by attributes, beliefs, values, motivation, and experience. Operationally, it is measured by questionnaire items assessing the administrative staff's perceived prestige, recognition, and value associated with their professional role within ODL.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a comprehensive review of existing literature pertaining to the work environment and job satisfaction, drawing upon relevant theoretical frameworks and empirical studies. The discussion will elaborate on the key constructs of this study—work environment (including its specific dimensions) and job satisfaction—and synthesize prior research findings to establish the theoretical and empirical foundations for the current investigation.

**Theoretical Framework: Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory** This study is primarily framed by Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, also known as the Motivation-Hygiene Theory (Herzberg et al., 1959). This theory posits that two distinct sets of factors influence job satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

**Hygiene factors**, which are extrinsic to the job itself, relate to the work environment and context. These include company policy, supervision, working conditions, interpersonal relations, salary, status, and security. According to Herzberg, the absence or inadequacy of hygiene factors can lead to job dissatisfaction, but their presence merely prevents dissatisfaction and does not necessarily lead to satisfaction.

**Motivator factors**, on the other hand, are intrinsic to the job content and are directly related to job satisfaction and motivation. These include achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and advancement. The presence of motivators leads to satisfaction and motivation, while their absence does not necessarily cause dissatisfaction but rather a lack of satisfaction.

In the context of this study, the dimensions of the work environment (job autonomy, job competency, collegial relationships, career commitment, and status of profession) can be viewed through Herzberg's lens. Some of these, like collegial relationships and possibly status of profession, might function more as hygiene factors, where their positive presence prevents dissatisfaction. Others, like job autonomy and job competency, or even career commitment, could potentially act as motivators, directly contributing to higher levels of satisfaction due to the inherent nature of the work and opportunities for personal growth and achievement. This theoretical lens helps to explain why different aspects of the work environment might have varying degrees of influence on job satisfaction among administrative staff, particularly within the unique operational structure of a distributed learning environment.

## Work Environment

The work environment is a multifaceted construct encompassing the physical, social, and psychological conditions under which employees perform their duties. It is widely acknowledged as a critical factor significantly affecting employee attitudes, well-being, and ultimately, job satisfaction. A positive work environment is instrumental in fostering employee morale, improving mood, increasing engagement, and ultimately enhancing overall business performance, which translates to better support for ODL students and educators. Organizations are increasingly recognizing their responsibility to provide a safe, healthy, and supportive work environment to promote employee well-being and productivity. The dimensions of the work environment considered in this study are:

- **Job Autonomy:** The degree of freedom and independence employees have in making decisions about their work, including scheduling and procedures. Research indicates that higher levels of job autonomy are generally associated with increased job satisfaction, as it provides employees with a sense of control, responsibility, and ownership over their tasks. When administrative staff in ODL feel empowered to make decisions, it can lead to greater engagement and a stronger sense of accomplishment, which can translate to more proactive and effective problem-solving for student inquiries and operational challenges.
- **Job Competency:** Refers to the extent to which employees possess the necessary knowledge, attitudes, and skills to perform their duties effectively. Feeling competent in one's role is a powerful determinant of job satisfaction. When ODL administrative staff are equipped with the right skills and feel capable of successfully completing their tasks, it contributes to self-efficacy, confidence, and a positive perception of their work, directly impacting their ability to provide high-quality support to students and manage complex ODL systems.
- **Collegial Relationship:** Encompasses the quality of interactions and relationships among colleagues within the workplace. Positive collegial relationships, characterized by mutual support, trust, and effective communication, are essential for job happiness and overall well-being. Strong collegial bonds among ODL administrative staff can enhance organizational performance by fostering teamwork, facilitating knowledge sharing, and creating a more comfortable and supportive work environment, which is crucial for coordinated service delivery across distributed learning centers.
- **Career Commitment:** Represents an individual's psychological attachment and dedication to their career path or profession. Employees who are highly committed to their careers are typically more motivated to achieve both personal and organizational goals. Organizations that successfully foster career commitment among their ODL administrative staff often experience lower turnover rates and higher levels of job satisfaction, as individuals see a clear future and growth within their chosen profession, ensuring continuity and expertise in supporting ODL operations.
- **Status of Profession:** Pertains to an individual's perception of their professional identity, including the perceived prestige, recognition, and value associated with their role and profession based on attributes, beliefs, values, motivation, and experience. A positive perception of one's professional status can significantly influence job satisfaction, as it contributes to self-esteem, pride in work, and a sense of contribution to a larger purpose within the ODL ecosystem.

## Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a complex and multifaceted psychological construct that describes an individual's positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences. It is a critical indicator of employee well-being and has far-reaching implications for organizational efficiency and revenues. Job satisfaction is influenced by a myriad of factors, including the inherent nature of the work, working conditions, relationships with colleagues and superiors, compensation, opportunities for advancement, and organizational policies. High levels of job satisfaction are typically associated with increased productivity, lower absenteeism, reduced turnover intentions, and a greater commitment to organizational goals, all of which are essential for effective ODL service delivery and student support. Conversely, low job satisfaction can lead to disengagement, stress, and poor performance. The concept of job satisfaction is often explored in relation to various environmental and individual factors, highlighting its role as a key outcome variable in organizational behaviour research.

## Research Gap

While extensive research has consistently demonstrated a significant link between the work environment and job satisfaction across various industries and contexts, there remains a specific research gap that this study aims to address. Prior studies have often examined general aspects of the work environment or focused on different employee populations. There is a discernible scarcity of empirical investigations that specifically isolate and examine the relationship between granular dimensions of the work environment (i.e., job autonomy, job competency, collegial relationships, career commitment, and status of profession) and job satisfaction among administrative staff within the unique operational context of Open and Distributed Learning (ODL) Learning Centres in Malaysia. The distinctive administrative demands and distributed operational models of ODL institutions, particularly in a developing country context like Malaysia, may present unique challenges and opportunities that influence staff perceptions and satisfaction differently from conventional organizational settings. This study therefore seeks to contribute to the literature by providing context-specific insights into these relationships, thereby enriching the understanding of job satisfaction within the ODL sector and its implications for supporting distributed learning efforts globally.

## Methodology Research Design

This study employed a quantitative survey research design to investigate the relationship between the work environment and job satisfaction among administrative staff in ODL Learning Centres. A survey design is a well-established method for gathering data from a sample of individuals to make inferences about a larger population, where respondents provide answers to a set of pre-defined questions. This approach was deemed most suitable for this study as it allows for the systematic collection of perceptual data on various dimensions of the work environment and job satisfaction, facilitating statistical analysis to identify relationships between the variables.

## Population and Sample

The target population for this study comprised all administrative staff employed across the various Open Distance Learning (ODL) Learning Centres nationwide. These staff members are integral to the daily operations and student support services offered by ODL's extensive distributed learning network. For this study, a purposive sampling technique was employed. This non-probability sampling method involves selecting participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. In this context, administrative staff members were specifically chosen due to their direct and continuous involvement in the work environment being studied and their pivotal role in the functioning of the Learning Centres, particularly in facilitating the distributed learning experience for students. A total of 100 self-administered questionnaires were distributed to administrative staff members across various ODL Learning Centres. Out of these, 69 completed and usable responses were received, yielding a response rate of 69%.

## Instrumentation

The data for this study were collected using a self-developed questionnaire, adapted from existing validated scales where appropriate, designed to measure both the work environment and job satisfaction. The questionnaire was structured into three main sections:

- **Demographic Information:** This section collected basic demographic details of the respondents (e.g., age, gender, length of service), which were used for descriptive purposes.
- **Work Environment:** This section measured the respondents' perceptions of their work environment across five key dimensions. Each dimension was assessed using a set of Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The number of items for each dimension was as follows:
  - Job Autonomy (7 items)
  - Job Competency (5 items)
  - Collegial Relationship (9 items)
  - Career Commitment (4 items)
  - Status of Profession (3 items)
- **Job Satisfaction:** This section assessed the overall job satisfaction of the administrative staff using 5 Likert-scale items (1 = Very Dissatisfied to 5 = Very Satisfied).

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, a measure of internal consistency. As shown in Table 2 (in the Results section), all variables demonstrated acceptable to good reliability coefficients, ranging from

$\alpha=.736$  for Career Commitment to  $\alpha=.912$  for Job Satisfaction, indicating that the items within each construct were closely related and consistently measured the same underlying concept. The use of Likert scales, while offering ease of administration, is acknowledged to potentially limit the capture of nuanced responses; however, it remains a standard and effective method for quantitative surveys.

### Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, formal approval was obtained from the relevant authorities at Open Distance Learning to conduct the research within its Learning Centres. Once approval was secured, the questionnaires were distributed to administrative staff members through designated liaison persons at each participating Learning Centre. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to all potential participants, and their voluntary participation and confidentiality were assured. Participants were given ample time to complete the questionnaires at their convenience, and the completed forms were then collected. The data collection process was conducted ethically, ensuring the privacy and anonymity of all respondents.

### Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 23.0 for analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Mean, standard deviation, and variance were calculated for all variables (job autonomy, job competency, collegial relationships, career commitment, status of profession, work environment, and job satisfaction) to summarize the characteristics of the sample and to determine the central tendency and dispersion of the data. Frequency distributions and percentages were also used to provide an overview of the data. A descriptive interpretation scale was applied: 4.21-5.00 (Very good/Very satisfied), 3.41-4.20 (Good/Satisfied), 2.61-3.40 (Somewhat good/Somewhat satisfied), 1.81-2.60 (Bad/Dissatisfied), and 1.00-1.80 (Very bad/Very dissatisfied).
- **Reliability Analysis:** Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were computed for each scale to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the measurement instruments.
- **Inferential Statistics:** Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient was utilized to examine the relationships between the independent variables (dimensions of work environment) and the dependent

variable (job satisfaction). Spearman's correlation was chosen due to the ordinal nature of the Likert scale data and to assess the monotonic relationship between the variables. The significance level for all statistical tests was set at  $p < .01$ .

## RESULTS

The data collected from 69 administrative staff members were analysed, and the key findings are presented in this section, encompassing descriptive statistics, reliability analyses, and correlation results.

### Descriptive Statistics for Variables

Table 1 presents the mean, standard deviation, and variance for all the study variables.

Table 1 Mean, Standard Deviation, and Variance for Variables (N = 69)

Variables	No. of respondents	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Job Autonomy	69	2.57	5.00	4.0169	.54262	.294
Job Competency	69	2.60	5.00	4.0565	.57637	.332
Collegial Relationship	69	2.00	5.00	3.9601	.63274	.400
Career Commitment	69	1.00	5.00	3.3913	.88415	.782
Status of Profession	69	1.67	5.00	4.0338	.68156	.465
Job Satisfaction	69	1.40	5.00	3.9464	.78301	.613
Work Environment	69	2.10	5.00	3.8083	.61354	.376

Note: Descriptive interpretation scale: 4.21-5.00 (Very good/Very satisfied); 3.41-4.20 (Good/Satisfied); 2.61-3.40 (Somewhat good/Somewhat satisfied); 1.81-2.60 (Bad/Dissatisfied); 1.00-1.80 (Very bad/Very dissatisfied)

As presented in Table 1, the mean score for Job Satisfaction is 3.9464, which falls within the "Good/Satisfied" range, indicating that ODL administrative staff generally experience a high degree of job satisfaction. The overall Work Environment received a mean score of 3.8083, also in the "Good/Satisfied" range, suggesting staff are largely content with their working environment. Among the dimensions of the work environment, Job Competency exhibited the highest mean (4.0565), followed closely by Status of Profession (4.0338), Job Autonomy (4.0169), and Collegial Relationships (3.9601), all of which are interpreted as "Good/Satisfied". Career Commitment had the lowest mean score (3.3913), falling into the "Somewhat good/Somewhat satisfied" category, implying that while satisfactory, there is relatively less satisfaction in this particular dimension compared to others.

### Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Table 2 displays the reliability coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha) for all variables, assessing their internal consistency.

Table 2 Cronbach's Alpha for Variables

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No of Items
Job satisfaction	.912	.913	5

Job Autonomy	.784	.778	7
Job Competency	.790	.795	5
Collegial Relationship	.879	.880	9
Career Commitment	.736	.744	4
Status of Profession	.761	.764	3

Table 2 demonstrates that all scales used in this study possess acceptable to strong levels of internal consistency. Job Satisfaction, the dependent variable, showed excellent reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of .912. Among the independent variables, Collegial Relationship had the highest reliability (.879), followed by Job Competency (.790), Job Autonomy (.784), Status of Profession (.761), and Career Commitment (.736). These results confirm that the questionnaire items for each construct are reliable and consistently measure the intended variables.

### Overall Mean for Frequency Distribution, Mean, and Percentage for Work Environment

Table 3 provides an overall summary of the mean scores and their descriptive interpretations for each dimension of the work environment.

Table 3 Overall Mean for Frequency Distribution, Mean, and Percentage for Work Environment

Work Environment Dimension	Frequency	Mean	Percentage	Descriptive Interpretation
Job Autonomy	3.86	4.02	17.4	Good/Satisfied
Job Competency	4.00	4.06	24.6	Good/Satisfied
Collegial Relationship	4.00	3.96	14.5	Good/Satisfied
Career Commitment	4.00	3.39	14.5	Somewhat good/Somewhat satisfied
Status of Profession	4.00	4.03	29.0	Good/Satisfied
Overall	3.97	3.90	100	Good/Satisfied

Note: Descriptive interpretation scale: 4.21-5.00 (Very good/Very satisfied); 3.41-4.20 (Good/Satisfied); 2.61-3.40 (Somewhat good/Somewhat satisfied); 1.81-2.60 (Bad/Dissatisfied); 1.00-1.80 (Very bad/Very dissatisfied)

Table 3 further reinforces the generally positive perception of the work environment. The overall mean for the work environment dimensions is 3.90, falling into the "Good/Satisfied" category. This table also highlights that Job Competency and Status of Profession contribute the largest percentages to the overall work environment perception, suggesting their significant influence.

### Mean for Job Satisfaction

Table 4 presents the overall mean score for Job Satisfaction.

Table 4 Mean for Job Satisfaction

Job Satisfaction	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Job Satisfaction	3.95	Good/Satisfied

Note: Descriptive interpretation scale: 4.21-5.00 (Very good/Very satisfied); 3.41-4.20 (Good/Satisfied); 2.61-3.40 (Somewhat good/Somewhat satisfied); 1.81-2.60 (Bad/Dissatisfied); 1.00-1.80 (Very bad/Very dissatisfied)

Consistent with the earlier descriptive findings, Table 4 confirms that the overall mean for job satisfaction among ODL administrative staff is 3.95, indicating a "Good/Satisfied" level of job satisfaction.

### Correlation between Work Environment Dimensions and Job Satisfaction

Spearman's Rank Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between each dimension of the work environment and job satisfaction. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Spearman's Rank Correlation between Work Environment Dimensions and Job Satisfaction (N = 69)

		Job Satisfaction	Job Autonomy	Job Competency	Collegial Relationship	Career Commitment	Status of Profession
Job Satisfaction	Correlation Coeff.	1.000	.829**	.763**	.716**	.783**	.805**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	69	69	69	69	69	69
Job Autonomy	Correlation Coeff.	.829**	1.000	.825**	.735**	.724**	.774**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	69	69	69	69	69	69
Job Competency	Correlation Coeff.	.763**	.825**	1.000	.789**	.654**	.725**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
	N	69	69	69	69	69	69
Collegial Relationship	Correlation Coeff.	.716**	.735**	.789**	1.000	.604**	.584**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
	N	69	69	69	69	69	69
Career Commitment	Correlation Coeff.	.783**	.724**	.654**	.604**	1.000	.680**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
	N	69	69	69	69	69	69
Status of Profession	Correlation Coeff.	.805**	.774**	.725**	.584**	.680**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.
	N	69	69	69	69	69	69

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

Table 5 reveals significant positive correlations between all five dimensions of the work environment and job satisfaction. Specifically, Job Autonomy ( $r_s=.829, p<.001$ ) shows the strongest positive correlation with Job Satisfaction, followed by Status of Profession ( $r_s=.805, p<.001$ ), Career Commitment ( $r_s=.783, p<.001$ ), Job Competency ( $r_s=.763, p<.001$ ), and Collegial Relationship ( $r_s=.716, p<.001$ ). All these correlations are statistically significant at the 0.01 level, indicating a strong and consistent positive relationship between each work environment dimension and the level of job satisfaction among the administrative staff.

### Overall Correlation between Work Environment and Job Satisfaction

To address the primary research question regarding the overall relationship, Spearman's Rank Correlation was also calculated between the aggregate Work Environment score and Job Satisfaction. These results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Spearman's Rank Correlation between Overall Work Environment and Job Satisfaction (N = 69)

		Job Satisfaction	Work Environment
Job Satisfaction	Correlation Coeff.	1.000	.896**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	69	69
Work Environment	Correlation Coeff.	.896**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	69	69

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

As depicted in Table 6, there is a very strong and highly significant positive correlation between the overall Work Environment and Job Satisfaction ( $r_s=.896, N=69, p<.001$ ). This robust finding provides strong evidence that as the perception of the work environment improves, so too does the level of job satisfaction among the administrative staff in ODL Learning Centres. This result leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ).

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between the work environment and job satisfaction among administrative staff in ODL Learning Centres, focusing on five specific dimensions: job autonomy, job competency, collegial relationships, career commitment, and status of profession. The findings provide substantial insights into these relationships, which are discussed below in relation to the research objectives and existing literature.

### Perceptions of Work Environment and Level of Job Satisfaction

The descriptive findings indicate that administrative staff at ODL Learning Centres generally hold a positive perception of their work environment (Mean = 3.81, "Good/Satisfied" range). This positive outlook is consistent across most dimensions, with job competency (Mean = 4.06), status of profession (Mean = 4.03), and job autonomy (Mean = 4.02) showing the highest mean scores, indicating strong satisfaction in these areas. Collegial relationships also scored highly (Mean = 3.96). These results align with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, where factors like working conditions and interpersonal relationships (hygiene factors) contribute to preventing dissatisfaction and creating a generally acceptable environment. The high scores in job competency and autonomy suggest that staff feel capable in their roles and have a degree of control over their work, which can

be seen as motivator factors contributing to satisfaction, and are particularly important for administrative staff managing the complexities of a distributed learning model.

Conversely, Career Commitment (Mean = 3.39) emerged as the dimension with the lowest mean score, falling into the "Somewhat good/Somewhat satisfied" category. While still satisfactory, this finding suggests that administrative staff may perceive fewer opportunities for career progression or experience a slightly weaker sense of long-term professional attachment compared to other aspects of their work environment. This could be a critical area for ODL management to address, as career commitment is a significant motivator factor in Herzberg's framework, directly impacting employee engagement and retention. Policies focused on clear career pathways for administrative staff could significantly boost this aspect.

The overall level of job satisfaction among the administrative staff was found to be satisfactory (Mean = 3.95, "Good/Satisfied" range). This positive finding resonates with previous research on job satisfaction among non-academic employees, which often identifies factors such as conducive working conditions, job security, and positive relationships with colleagues and superiors as key determinants. The generally positive work environment perceptions likely contribute significantly to this overall satisfaction, which is essential for consistent and high-quality student and educator support in ODL.

### **Relationship between Work Environment and Job Satisfaction**

The core finding of this study is the confirmation of a very strong and highly significant positive relationship between the overall work environment and job satisfaction ( $r_s=.896$ ,  $p<.001$ ). This robust correlation provides compelling evidence to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis: a positive work environment is indeed significantly associated with higher levels of job satisfaction among administrative staff in ODL Learning Centres. This finding is consistent with a vast body of literature emphasizing the critical importance of a positive work environment in maximizing employee job satisfaction. When employees perceive their work surroundings and conditions positively, their overall contentment with their jobs tends to increase substantially, leading to improved service delivery for ODL students and more effective support for educators.

Delving into the specific dimensions, the analysis revealed significant positive correlations between each work environment dimension and job satisfaction. Job autonomy exhibited the strongest correlation ( $r_s=.829$ ), suggesting that providing administrative staff with the freedom to make decisions about their work is highly influential in driving their job satisfaction. This aligns with Herzberg's concept of "the work itself" and "responsibility" as strong motivators. When staff feel empowered and trusted, it fosters a sense of ownership and achievement, which can directly translate to more efficient handling of student queries, proactive problem-solving for distributed learning challenges, and enhanced support for ODL operations.

The status of profession ( $r_s=.805$ ) also showed a very strong correlation, indicating that when administrative staff perceive their profession as valued and respected, their job satisfaction significantly increases. This underscores the importance of recognition and the professional identity for these employees. Career commitment ( $r_s=.783$ ) followed closely, highlighting that a sense of belonging and dedication to one's career path is a substantial contributor to satisfaction, reinforcing the importance of clear career development opportunities and policies within ODL. Job competency ( $r_s=.763$ ) and collegial relationships ( $r_s=.716$ ) also demonstrated strong and significant positive correlations, reinforcing that feeling capable in one's role and having supportive colleagues are fundamental to job satisfaction. These findings collectively emphasize that while the overall work environment is crucial, specific elements within it play varying but consistently positive roles in shaping job satisfaction. For ODL, understanding these nuanced relationships is key to strategically enhancing staff well-being and productivity, directly benefiting the quality of educational provision and expansion of opportunities for students.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study successfully investigated the relationship between the work environment and job satisfaction among administrative staff in Open Distance Learning Learning Centres. The findings affirm that administrative staff generally hold positive perceptions of their work environment, and their overall job satisfaction is at a

satisfactory level. Critically, the research established a significant and strong positive correlation between the work environment, in both its aggregate form and its specific dimensions (job autonomy, job competency, collegial relationships, career commitment, and status of profession), and job satisfaction. Job autonomy emerged as the most influential dimension contributing to job satisfaction.

These findings highlight the undeniable importance of a conducive and supportive work environment in enhancing employee job satisfaction within the unique context of ODL Learning Centres. By carefully managing and optimizing elements of the work environment, particularly by fostering job autonomy through specific policies and recognizing professional status, ODL can significantly improve the job satisfaction of its administrative staff. This, in turn, is expected to lead to greater employee motivation, engagement, and ultimately, a more efficient and effective delivery of Open and Distributed Learning services, directly enhancing student achievement, performance, and retention, and better supporting educators in their roles. The study provides a valuable empirical basis for human resource interventions and policy development aimed at creating an optimal working environment that supports both staff well-being and organizational objectives in expanding educational opportunities.

### Limitations of the Study

While this study offers valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations, which may influence the generalizability and scope of the findings:

- **Sample Size and Generalizability:** The relatively small sample size of 69 respondents, combined with the study's specific focus on administrative staff within ODL Learning Centres, limits the generalizability of the findings to other universities, industries, or broader populations of administrative staff.
- **Cross-Sectional Design:** This study employed a cross-sectional design, which captures data at a single point in time. Therefore, it can establish correlations but cannot infer causal relationships between the work environment and job satisfaction.
- **Self-Reported Data:** The reliance on self-reported questionnaire data may introduce potential biases, such as social desirability bias, where respondents might provide answers they perceive as more socially acceptable rather than their true feelings.
- **Likert Scale Limitations:** While widely used, the use of Likert scales for data collection may have resulted in forced responses that do not fully capture the nuanced complexities of participants' experiences or sentiments.
- **Geographical Scope:** The study focused exclusively on ODL Learning Centres across Malaysia, which might not fully represent the diversity of work environments in other ODL institutions globally, particularly those with different distributed learning models.

### Directions for Future Research

Building upon the findings and acknowledging the limitations of the current study, several directions for future research are suggested to further enhance our understanding of work environment and job satisfaction in ODL contexts:

- **Larger and More Diverse Samples:** Future research should aim to conduct studies with larger and more diverse samples, encompassing administrative staff from a wider range of public and private universities, including those with different operational and distributed learning models. This would significantly improve the generalizability of the results.
- **Additional Variables and Dimensions:** Investigations could explore additional dimensions of the work environment (e.g., leadership style, organizational culture, workload, technological support relevant to distributed learning) or other variables (e.g., employee engagement, organizational commitment,

turnover intention, well-being) that may influence the relationship between the work environment and job satisfaction. Mediating or moderating effects of other variables could also be examined.

- **Longitudinal and Mixed-Methods Designs:** Employing longitudinal research designs would allow for the examination of causal relationships and changes in job satisfaction over time in response to shifts in the work environment. A mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews or focus groups, could provide more in-depth and nuanced insights into administrative staff's experiences and perceptions, complementing the statistical findings.
- **Comparative Studies:** Future studies could conduct comparative analyses between administrative staff in ODL institutions and those in traditional face-to-face universities to identify unique factors or challenges specific to the ODL environment, particularly those related to its distributed nature and impact on student and educator experiences.
- **Intervention Studies and Policy Evaluation:** Based on the findings, future research could also design and evaluate the effectiveness of specific interventions or human resource programs and policies aimed at improving the identified work environment dimensions (e.g., autonomy-enhancing initiatives, career development programs) and assess their impact on job satisfaction, as well as on broader ODL outcomes such as student retention or successful course completion.

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