



## EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION IN THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY IN MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRACT

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Following the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a decline in employee satisfaction. It would appear that ensuring the contentment of one's workforce in their place of employment is the most significant obstacle that companies must overcome. Therefore, this study examined the effects of wages and welfare, relations with superiors, and learning and development on employee satisfaction in Malaysia. The study employed a cross-sectional design, and the research instruments were adapted from several prior studies. Employees working for a telecommunications company in Malaysia completed a total of 162 questionnaires online. The research hypotheses were analysed using SPSS Version 26.0. The findings show that although relations with superiors had a significant positive effect on employee satisfaction, learning and development had an even stronger positive effect. On the other hand, wages and welfare did not display a significant effect on employee satisfaction. This study makes a unique contribution to theoretical understanding by investigating these factors in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic as intrinsic and extrinsic components impacting employee satisfaction. Additionally, this research gives corporate organisations vital insights to ensure they can maintain a competitive edge in their industry.

**Contribution/Originality:** The effects of COVID-19 continue to put pressure on the majority of businesses in Malaysia, and it is essential that these companies take the appropriate actions and make the most expedient decisions possible in order to overcome the challenges they face. Our study contributes to the motivation-hygiene theory by examining the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that keep Malaysian employees satisfied during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As a result of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, the world has come to a halt; businesses are finding it difficult to stay afloat and are looking for inventive ways to do so (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). Most companies did not have a conventional contingency plan in place in the event of an emergency such as the COVID-19 pandemic. However, with the outbreak of COVID-19, business production and operations have been severely harmed (Song, Wang, Li, Yang, & Li, 2020). Employee happiness in Malaysia was measured in the COVID-19 Job Report by

Jobstreet. The percentage of employees happy with their job dropped from 68% prior to COVID-19 to 42% after COVID-19. Meanwhile, the number of employees not happy with their job amongst those currently working increased from 18% to 40%. Past studies have used "job happiness" and "job satisfaction" interchangeably (Qaiser, Abid, Arya, & Farooqi, 2020). This means that employee satisfaction has dropped since the COVID-19 pandemic, and employee dissatisfaction has increased. Therefore, the greatest challenge that organisations are currently facing is ensuring that their employees are content at work (Ntimba, Lessing, & Swarts, 2021). Organisations thus need to know about the many factors that affect how satisfied employees are with their jobs (Enkhbaatar, Gurbazar, & Chojil, 2021).

There are various telecommunications service providers in Malaysia who compete with one another to attract more clients to their services by offering similar services with varying coverage levels, pricing ranges, and customer benefits (Shamsudin, Azmi, Nayan, Esa, & Kadir, 2020). To establish long-term dominance, these telecommunications companies must drive productivity through their employees' job performance and job satisfaction (Kanapathipillai & Azam, 2020). Fundamentally, a telecommunications service provider's duty is to increase customer communication through wireless and wired communications to achieve domestic and worldwide network information exchange via electronic devices (Shamsudin et al., 2020). In addition, employees' work and professional lives, as well as corporate priorities in general, have been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic (Sija, 2021). Technology has played a vital role in the COVID-19 pandemic since it has allowed all tasks to continue to be executed (Sapta, Muafi, & Setini, 2021). However, technostress has risen because due to the technology-related job demands during the pandemic, and employers should provide training and tools to help employees cope with the effects of remote working (Molino et al., 2020). This training can assist employees in maintaining their mental health and developing positive work attitudes (Song et al., 2020). In addition, education and training facilities for employee growth might impact other elements that bring satisfaction (Uddin, Uddin, Paul, Khan, & Ali, 2019). Nevertheless, employees whose pay was reduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic or who were concerned about losing their jobs were reported to have lower job satisfaction and a higher intention to leave (Song et al., 2020). A positive association between job satisfaction and employee performance in terms of the compensation payment system has also been reported (Rachman, 2021). Many different incentive types, including equity, salary, promotion, and rewards, give employees a sense of satisfaction (Chen, 2020). Furthermore, relations between employees and employers also play an important role in keeping employees satisfied (Uddin et al., 2019). Superiors who listen to and understand employees' thoughts and needs, interact with them, and provide timely assistance make them feel valued (Tang, Lee, Huang, Rahman, & Wu, 2021).

Thus, the purpose of this research is to address the research question, "What are the perceived effects of wages and welfare, relations with superiors, and learning and development on employee satisfaction in Malaysia's telecommunications industry?" Answering this question is critical since few previous studies have been conducted on employee satisfaction in the telecommunications industry, particularly in Malaysia (Kanapathipillai & Azam, 2020). The results of this study are intended to be applied in sustainable human resource management to increase companies' sustainable competitive advantage by enabling flexible managerial decisions to maximise employee satisfaction (Strenitzeroová & Achimský, 2019).

### 1.1. Underlying Theory

The foundation of this study is the motivation-hygiene theory proposed by Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959). The theory is based on two elements – motivation factors and hygiene factors – both of which can affect one's job satisfaction (Rai, Thekkekara, & Kanhare, 2021). Herzberg based this theory on the findings of job satisfaction studies and the observation that some aspects of employment lead to job happiness, while others lead to job dissatisfaction (Nazari, Sayadi, Pourkiani, & Kamali, 2020). Equal levels of authority and responsibility, appropriate recognition and professional advancement, achievement, personal growth, and enthusiasm in the job are

all examples of "motivation" characteristics; on the other hand, organisational policy, interpersonal relationships, job security, physical working conditions, compensation, and supervision quality are examples of "hygiene" factors, which, if not provided, can lead to job unhappiness (Rai et al., 2021). The factors are thus split into motivational factors (intrinsic) and hygienic factors (extrinsic) (Sobaih & Hasanein, 2020). Job satisfaction is caused by motivating or intrinsic elements, such as progress, success, and the nature of work, whereas job dissatisfaction is caused by retaining or external variables, such as salary, job security, company policies, and business management (Nazari et al., 2020). Performance, employment, progression, and growth all affect one's work effectiveness, but hygiene aspects, including remuneration, working environment, coworker relationships, and leadership role, affect job satisfaction (Ali, Mustapha, Jalila, Elias, & Nordin, 2021). Employees are motivated to do their work because of the hygienic element, and they work hard to achieve their goals because of the motivational factor. Motivational factors produce favourable job attitudes or job content, which leads to improved workplace performance (Sobaih & Hasanein, 2020). If the hygiene factors are met, employees will be happy at work, and if the motivational factor is met, employees will be driven to do their best (Ali et al., 2021).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Wages and Welfare and Employee Satisfaction

A fair and equitable salary-performance system can help smooth employee relations and promote a harmonious working environment from the perspective of organisational change (Ma, Shao, & Li, 2019). However, employees may be enticed to quit their positions and transfer jobs frequently because of competition in compensation, working conditions, and favoured management regimes (Tung, Van Anh, & Anh, 2019). On the other hand, when appropriately compensated in accordance with their type of work and job title, employees will feel satisfaction at work (Saman, 2020). Management teams frequently attempt to improve employee job satisfaction by increasing salaries. This may be acceptable to a certain extent because such compensation allows employees to make ends meet (Londa & Permatasari, 2020). Management teams provide compensation to increase job satisfaction and employee performance, using it as a tool to motivate employees (Saman, 2020). In addition to the salary or income employees earn, complete welfare and a benefits system in addition to a decent income will help improve employee satisfaction (Tang et al., 2021). These kinds of benefits and compensation plans were created to encourage, appeal to, reward, and retain employees (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Following the completion of specified work, organisations provide rewards in the form of money and non-financial incentives as a token of appreciation (Ng & Salamzadeh, 2020). Normally, the compensation employees receive in exchange for the services they provide helps improve employee job satisfaction (Sija, 2021). When compensating employees with pay, three primary factors must be considered: it must be equal to the work the employee has provided, competitive in relation to market prices in the business sector, and the amount must encourage the employee to work as effectively as feasible (Ali & Anwar, 2021). A well-managed wage system can improve employee motivation, productivity, and satisfaction. Therefore, companies can use wages as a motivator and a determinant in enhancing employee motivation and confidence at work. Meanwhile, compensation can increase employee job satisfaction (Purwanto & Perkasa, 2021). Greater welfare facilities also contribute to increased job satisfaction among employees (Beloor, Swamy, Nanjundeswaraswamy, Swamy, & Nagesh, 2020). Employee compensation and benefits must be based on the type and quality of work completed so that employees believe they are being fairly compensated for their role and contribution (Ingsih, Prayitno, Waluyo, & Suhana, 2020). In short, we hypothesise that:

*H1: Wages and welfare have a positive effect on employee satisfaction.*

### 2.2. Relations with Superiors and Employee Satisfaction

Boosting communication between employees and their supervisors so that employees can reflect on problems at work and receive appropriate guidance is conducive to improving employee work satisfaction (Ma et al., 2019).

Supervisors could play a greater role in improving job satisfaction by giving praise when it is due and efficiently planning and organising the work (Mohanty & Aamir, 2018). The supervisor is the person with the most influence over an employee's pay, career advancement, and other administrative matters and is, therefore, the most significant and influential person at work (Alam & Singh, 2019). A good supervisor should be able to set objectives, instil a positive attitude in the workplace, and raise employee understanding of the value of training (Winarto & Chalidyanto, 2020). One of a supervisor's roles is to detect any concerns with their employees' performance and to guide and motivate them to enhance their performance (Alam & Singh, 2019). Supervisors must pay attention to supervision methods, interpersonal relations, and job security because these factors are all linked to employee job satisfaction (Londa & Permatasari, 2020). An employee's confidence in a supervisor's qualities and traits to perform well as a leader will increase if the supervisor has a good understanding of the concept of development and the fact that support from the organisation, supervisor, and partners has an impact on the employee's performance. If the supervisor frequently supervises the staff's work, the employees will feel guided and cared for. Supervisory interactions and supervisors' willingness to listen to and understand employees' ideas and needs, communicate with them, and assist them in a timely manner make subordinates feel appreciated and understood (Tang et al., 2021). Supervisors must provide employees with encouragement, support, and effective work advice (Sija, 2021). The quality of supervision is important because individuals in the organisation must see their supervisor as competent at developing people, leading by example, and providing complete support in their work. For this reason, aside from the employee's work circumstances and wages and benefits received, the relationship with the supervisor influences employee satisfaction (Ingsih et al., 2020). Therefore, we hypothesise that:

*H2: Relations with superiors have a positive effect on employee satisfaction.*

### *2.3. Learning and Development and Employee Satisfaction*

Appropriate training for employees meets their individual growth needs, allowing them to put their skills to use, which makes employees aware of the significance and worth of their work and thus increases their job satisfaction (Enkhbaatar et al., 2021). Employees are more likely to believe they are appropriately compensated for their efforts if the organisation provides them with growth opportunities (Ma et al., 2019). Employees gain confidence in their ability to execute tasks, leading to the feeling that they are highly qualified for their jobs and have prospects for advancement. At the corporate level, everyone agrees that well-organised and thorough staff training is essential for boosting employee satisfaction (Kanapathipillai & Azam, 2020). Therefore, organisations should provide any required training, coaching, and mentorship to help employees improve their knowledge and abilities, thereby demonstrating that they care about their employees' success (Manivannan & Bhuvanawari, 2020). For corporate leaders of telecommunication companies, training is the most important method of improving job satisfaction (Kanapathipillai & Azam, 2020). This is because training is often regarded as one of the most universal strategies for increasing an organisation's productivity and performance levels (Siddiqui & Sahar, 2019). Companies that ignore training programmes as a strategy for improving employee satisfaction will not be able to achieve an optimal level of employee job satisfaction and will thus be susceptible to high dissatisfaction, low morale, and ultimately high turnover (Kanapathipillai & Azam, 2020). This is because employee satisfaction is influenced by the availability of ample learning materials and the planning of employees' personal development (Tang et al., 2021). Therefore, we hypothesise that:

*H3: Learning and development have a positive effect on employee satisfaction.*

Based on the literature review and underlying theory, the conceptual framework in Figure 1 was developed.

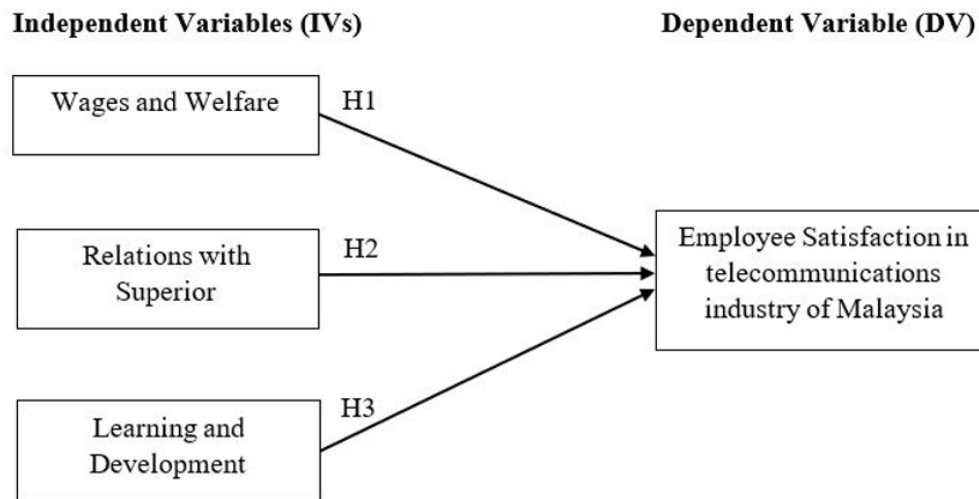


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1. Samples

This study focused on Malaysian employees in the telecommunications industry. G\*Power was used to calculate the sample size. The research model's three predictors – statistical power of 0.95, a significance level of 0.05, and an effect size of 0.15 – resulted in a minimum sample size of 119 (Chen & Liu, 2019). Consequently, we can assert with confidence that our research, which included a sample size of 162 participants and had a statistical power greater than 0.95, was sufficiently substantial, and the findings can be relied upon. The data was collected using a technique known as snowball sampling. The self-report survey was distributed online via social networks such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and LinkedIn (using a link to a Google Form), and the first participant who fulfilled the inclusion criteria was chosen to complete it. Next, the participant was asked to suggest more individuals meeting the sample requirements who they believed would be ideal survey participants. The demographic profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1. In terms of gender, 35.8% (n = 58) of the respondents were male, while the remaining 64.2% (n = 104) were female. In terms of age, most of the respondents in the study were in the age group 31–40 years old (40.7%, n = 66), followed by respondents aged 21–30 (32.1%, n = 52), 41–50 years old (23.5%, n = 38), 18–20 years old (1.9%, n = 3), and 51 years old and above (1.9%, n = 3). In terms of education, the majority of the respondents held a bachelor's degree (54.3%, n = 88), followed by respondents with a master's degree (33.3%, n = 54), a diploma (8.0%, n = 13), SPM/STPM (3.1%, n = 5), and PhD holders (1.2%, n = 2). Most study participants were executives (28.4%, n = 46), followed by senior executives (18.5%, n = 30), managers (17.3%, n = 28), senior managers (11.7%, n = 19), assistant managers (9.9%, n = 16), employees in other positions (8.0%, n = 13), officers (4.3%, n = 7), and clerks (1.9%, n = 3).

#### 3.2. Measures

##### 3.2.1. Employee Satisfaction

This construct consisted of five items, which were adapted from Kanapathipillai (2021) and used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item is "I am satisfied with the work done". The Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.93.

##### 3.2.2. Wages and Welfare

This construct consisted of four items, which were adapted from Ma et al. (2019) and Ingsih et al. (2020) and used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Example items included "the

salary offered is better than other companies" and "satisfied with the welfare provided". The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .89.

**Table 1.** Demographic profile of respondents (N = 162).

Demographic	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	58	35.8
	Female	104	64.2
Age	18-20 years old	3	1.9
	21-30 years old	52	32.1
	31-40 years old	66	40.7
	41-50 years old	38	23.5
	51 years and above	3	1.9
Education Qualification	SPM/STPM	5	3.1
	Diploma	13	8.0
	Bachelor's degree	88	54.3
	Master's degree	54	33.3
	PhD	2	1.2
Job Position	Clerk	3	1.9
	Officer	7	4.3
	Executive	46	28.4
	Senior Executive	30	18.5
	Assistant Manager	16	9.9
	Manager	28	17.3
	Senior Manager	19	11.7
	Other	13	8.0

### 3.2.3. Relations with Superiors

This construct consisted of four items, which were adapted from Tang et al. (2021) and used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item is "my superiors are willing to listen to my opinion". The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .94.

### 3.2.4. Learning and Development

This construct consisted of four items, which were adapted from Manivannan and Bhuvaneshwari (2020) and used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item is "my company prioritizes career and skill enhancement.". The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .92.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

To analyse the data, we used Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0. Several levels of analysis were conducted to test the study's hypotheses. Descriptive analyses were performed on the data to assess the frequency distribution of the respondents' backgrounds and the understudied factors. Next, Pearson correlation analysis was used to investigate the correlations between wages and welfare, relations with superiors, learning and development, and job satisfaction. Finally, multiple regression analysis was used to examine the unique predictors of job satisfaction. The significance value of .05 was used as the cut-off point for all statistical tests.

## 4. RESULTS

The findings of the Pearson correlation between wages and welfare, relations with superiors, learning and development, and employee satisfaction are shown in Table 2. The tests revealed a positive correlation between wages and welfare and employee satisfaction ( $r = 0.604$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that employees who receive high levels of earnings and benefits tend to have a higher degree of job satisfaction. Additionally, there was a significant correlation between relations with superiors and employee satisfaction ( $r = 0.686$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Employees who feel



that they have a positive connection with their superiors tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction. Finally, a significant correlation was also found between learning and development and employee satisfaction ( $r = 0.773$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that employees who have opportunities for learning and advancement tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics and correlations among variables (N = 162).

No.	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1	Employee Satisfaction	3.66	0.913	1			
2	Wages and Welfare	3.16	0.946	0.604**	1		
3	Relations with Superiors	3.48	0.938	0.686**	0.519**	1	
4	Learning and Development	3.56	0.965	0.773**	0.674**	0.621**	1

Note: \*\* $p < 0.001$ .

The results of the multiple regression analysis, which examined the predictors of employee satisfaction, are presented in Table 3. The results indicated that the combination of wages and welfare, relations with superiors, and learning and development significantly explained 67.1% of the variance in employee satisfaction. Learning and development ( $\beta = 0.510$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) was found to be the strongest predictor of employee satisfaction, followed by relationships with superiors ( $\beta = 0.320$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). On the other hand, wages and welfare was found to be a non-significant predictor of employee satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.095$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Thus, hypotheses H1 and H2 are supported, but not hypothesis H3.

**Table 3.** Predictors of job satisfaction (n = 162).

Criterion Variable	Predictor Variable	F	R <sup>2</sup>	df	Beta	t	p
Employee Satisfaction	Wages and Welfare	101.176**	0.671	-3,158	0.095	1.508	0.133
	Relations with Superiors				0.320	5.399	0.000
	Learning and Development				0.510	7.451	0.000

Note: \*\* $p < 0.001$ .

## 5. DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to determine the effect of wages and welfare, relations with superiors, and learning and development on employee satisfaction in the Malaysian telecommunications industry. The findings revealed that both learning and development and relations with superiors are significant in predicting satisfaction among employees in the telecommunications industry.

Specifically, the results of this study indicated that learning and development is the most important factor in determining employee satisfaction in the Malaysian telecommunications industry, which provides support for Hypothesis 3. The results of our study are consistent with those obtained by Enkhbaatar et al. (2021), Kanapathipillai and Azam (2020), and Uddin et al. (2019). When employees are provided with the right learning and development, their weaknesses can be turned into strengths that can help employees excel in their jobs. Employee training increases employees' job skills and knowledge while increasing their confidence in their abilities. Employees benefit from training in terms of both job security and job satisfaction. In addition, employees who participate in employee training and development are more likely to have a positive attitude toward their employers. Employees should be assigned tasks that allow them to learn and grow quickly in their job. This provides employees the opportunity to learn from their job. Companies should also provide employees with opportunities for career enhancement so that they can grow within the company. Aside from that, companies should create policies that prioritize necessary training and development for all employees – they should all be given the opportunity for training. Employees' career and skill development should be companies' priority. Company policies should align with this priority to ensure that employee career and skill development are given importance. Employee turnover is reduced by both general and firm-specific training. This is because generic skills can assist employees in increasing their sense of connection with the firm, allowing them to leverage training opportunities

and stay with the company (Ji-Young & Huang, 2021). Furthermore, a more educated and effectively trained workforce boosts innovation. Employer-provided on-the-job training can help employees be more innovative (Na, 2021). Employers should be motivated to maintain training programmes because they can improve employee performance. Employees that participate in training activities, such as seminars, workshops, and technical training, will become better employees (Alhempri & Supeno, 2021).

The study's second hypothesis was that relations with superiors positively affect employee satisfaction. The findings supported this hypothesis and therefore aligned with those of Ingsih et al. (2020), Ma et al. (2019), and Sija (2021). When workplace relations are healthy and harmonious, the working environment will be encouraging. This includes relations with superiors as well. A healthy and happy working environment will cause employees to work happily, making them more committed to their job and improving their productivity. Since employees spend considerable time in the workplace each day, it is essential to have good relationships in the workplace, including with superiors. In addition, a superior is the person employees will seek advice from concerning their work. If the working relationship with their superiors is good, employees will not hesitate to seek advice from them. When problems at work are solved immediately, employees are more satisfied with their work. Hence, good relations with the supervisor are beneficial to employees. Companies can make it part of a superior's job to set appropriate goals for their subordinates, always be available to their employees to listen to their opinions, and always encourage their employees, especially when they have problems. Superiors can provide proper guidance to employees in setting appropriate goals for their career growth. Superiors must always be open and welcome opinions from their employees. There is a chance that these employees may bring new ideas to the company. Superiors can play the role of a motivator by encouraging employees when they have problems. Encouragement from superiors will help employees to face and handle their challenges. In addition, companies should strongly encourage all their employees to communicate with each other without fear, so that it is easy and comfortable for employees to get along with their superiors. Employees who have a strong and healthy relationship with their employers, one that is based on mutual respect, are more likely to be happy, loyal, and productive in the long run, which will benefit the entire organisation (Staniec, 2021). Furthermore, since work settings must be supportive, encouraging, hopeful, and stimulating to ensure the highest degree of job satisfaction, leaders, using different types of conduct, have the power and ability to affect an increase or reduction in job satisfaction (Bakotić & Bulog, 2021). Finally, businesses should maximise employee engagement through internal communication, and all employees should have the ability to be engaged (Verčič, 2021). Hence, internal communication can improve employee engagement.

The last finding of this study, which related to H1, was the insignificant effect of wages and welfare on employee satisfaction in the Malaysian telecommunication industry, which contradicted the findings of Ali and Anwar (2021), Londa and Permatasari (2020), and Tang et al. (2021), who found that wages and welfare influenced employee satisfaction. It also contradicted the Herzberg motivation-hygiene theory. Workload and stress may play a role in employees feeling they receive insufficient pay. Employees who work more than a reasonable number of hours may not feel that their pay is adequate or fair. Thus, wage dissatisfaction may be linked to workloads and job-related stress (Young, Moulton, Julian, Smith, & Butler, 2021). Consequently, this factor should be investigated further.

## 6. LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSIONS

This study had certain limitations that should be taken into account. First, due to the Movement Control Order in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all data collection had to be conducted online. Longitudinal studies, as opposed to cross-sectional ones, can be used to conduct research over a longer period of time. Second, although the study used a large and representative sample, all the participants worked in the telecommunications industry; thus researchers should proceed with caution when generalizing the results.



Since the current study was conducted in the telecommunications industry, more value might be added to the research if future studies focused on multiple sectors, such as manufacturing, technology, or services. Also, to create a comprehensive understanding of how diverse cultures view employee satisfaction, future research could study additional variables.

This study is noteworthy in that it has provided insight into both motivation and hygiene factors that may impact employee satisfaction in the Malaysian telecommunications industry. Our study has introduced an ideal framework for understanding the interactions between organisations and their workers, focusing on crucial factors such as learning and development and relations with superiors. Learning and development, in particular, was found to have the greatest impact. Nevertheless, since the impact of COVID-19 continues to put pressure on most Malaysian businesses, it is critical that organisations adopt proper steps and make effective choices to overcome these obstacles so that they preserve a competitive edge in the industry. Notably, our research has contributed to the motivation-hygiene theory by examining intrinsic and extrinsic components and discovering that these are things that keep employees satisfied.

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