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Work-Life Balance and Faculty Morale: A Study among Self-Financing Colleges in Salem District, Tamil Nadu

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Abstract: *This study explores the intricate relationship between work-life balance (WLB) and faculty morale within self-financing engineering colleges in Salem district, Tamil Nadu. Faculty members in these institutions often face excessive workloads, limited job security, and a lack of institutional support, exacerbated by evolving educational policies such as NEP 2020 and OBE frameworks. Using a descriptive-analytical approach, the research surveyed 210 faculty members through structured questionnaires and applied statistical tools including correlation and regression analysis. Results reveal a strong positive relationship between institutional support and faculty morale, with institutional support emerging as a more significant predictor than work-life balance. The study also highlights the gendered challenges faced by female faculty due to socio-cultural expectations. The findings underscore the critical need for supportive institutional policies and flexible work arrangements to enhance faculty well-being, morale, and retention. This research contributes to the limited body of literature on WLB and morale in semi-urban, self-financing academic contexts and offers actionable recommendations for educational policymakers and administrators.*

Keywords: *Work-Life Balance, Faculty Morale, Institutional Support, Self-Financing Colleges and Higher Education.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of work-life balance (WLB) has become a crucial area of study in organizational behavior and human resource management, particularly in professions involving high levels of emotional, cognitive, and institutional demand—such as those found in higher education. Work-life balance refers to the ability of an individual to effectively manage work responsibilities alongside personal roles and obligations, including family, health, and social life. While WLB is relevant across all sectors, it is especially significant in academia, where faculty members are expected to perform in multiple domains: teaching, research, mentoring, administration, and continuous professional development.

In India, the rapid growth of self-financing colleges over the past two decades—driven by privatization policies and increased demand for higher education—has contributed to mounting pressure on faculty members. These institutions, especially in Tamil Nadu, operate under highly structured schedules and stringent performance expectations, often without providing commensurate institutional support. Faculty working in self-financing colleges frequently face the following challenges:

- Extended teaching hours and multitasking without commensurate compensation,
- Limited access to research funding, academic autonomy, or career advancement mechanisms,
- Non-teaching responsibilities including admission, examination, and administrative tasks,
- Lack of formal mechanisms to support work-life balance or employee well-being.

These challenges are particularly pronounced in semi-urban regions such as Salem district, where self-financing colleges play a major role in the educational landscape. Many faculty members in these institutions live in rural or peri-urban areas, where they must manage travel time, family responsibilities, and professional obligations with

limited infrastructural and institutional support. In such contexts, female faculty are often more vulnerable to work-life imbalance due to prevailing socio-cultural norms that expect them to manage household and caregiving duties alongside their careers.

While several studies have examined work-life balance in corporate and public sector settings, there is a noticeable lack of research on how WLB impacts faculty morale—particularly in self-financing colleges situated outside urban centers. Most of the available literature is focused on government-funded institutions or universities in metropolitan areas, leaving a significant gap in understanding the lived experiences and job satisfaction levels of faculty in self-financing institutions.

Moreover, recent policy developments such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, increased focus on accreditation (NAAC, NBA), and implementation of outcome-based education (OBE) frameworks have heightened performance expectations. These trends demand more documentation, evaluation, and institutional accountability—adding further strain on faculty morale in the absence of support structures.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Work-life balance (WLB) has become a vital area of inquiry in higher education research, particularly as faculty members increasingly navigate the dual demands of institutional responsibilities and personal life roles. WLB refers to the ability to effectively manage and fulfill both professional and personal obligations without undue conflict or compromise. Faculty in self-financing colleges often faced with rigid performance metrics, long working hours, and limited support, may find achieving this balance particularly challenging.

Clark (2000) conceptualized WLB as a dynamic interface between work and home domains, emphasizing the importance of boundary management to avoid conflict and burnout. Kinman and Jones (2008) reinforced this by noting that the academic profession involves emotional and cognitive overload, which—without adequate coping strategies or institutional support—can lead to stress, dissatisfaction, and reduced morale.

From a gendered lens, Rajadhyaksha (2012) and Agarwal & Lenka (2015) highlighted that women faculty in India often face disproportionate pressures, as they juggle both professional duties and caregiving roles. The strain of dual responsibilities contributes to work-family conflict, which in turn affects motivation and workplace engagement. Bhuvaneswari and Thirumoorthi (2023), though focused on women in law enforcement, found similar patterns of emotional burnout caused by inadequate institutional sensitivity—paralleling the experiences of many women in academia.

Singh et al. (2023) observed that faculty members in self-financing colleges in Tamil Nadu often work without the benefit of well-being programs, flexible work arrangements, or stress-coping interventions. Mehta & Balasubramani (2024) further argue that such institutions operate with a corporate-like structure in terms of expectations, but do not provide equivalent support systems, resulting in poor faculty morale and increasing turnover rates.

Moreover, educational reforms such as the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), accreditation norms from NAAC and NBA, and implementation of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) have introduced new dimensions to faculty workload. These include increased documentation, assessment responsibilities, and performance reporting—all of which heighten institutional pressure, especially in under-resourced self-financing colleges (Khan & Reddy, 2023).

While much of the literature focuses on WLB itself, emerging studies suggest a strong correlation between work-life satisfaction and faculty morale—defined as the emotional, psychological, and professional outlook of educators in their institutional environments. Low morale has been associated with reduced motivation, emotional disengagement, and a higher likelihood of faculty attrition. Therefore, understanding how work-life dynamics influence morale is essential for building supportive academic ecosystems.

3. RESEARCH GAP

Although the existing literature offers useful perspectives on work-life balance in academia, there remains a notable lack of research exploring the relationship between work-life balance and faculty morale, particularly within the context of self-financing colleges in semi-urban regions like Salem district, Tamil Nadu. Most prior studies have concentrated on urban, government-funded, or central institutions, overlooking the unique structural, administrative, and socio-cultural pressures faced by faculty in privately managed colleges. Furthermore, faculty morale—though widely acknowledged as a critical element of institutional performance—has seldom been

examined in relation to work-life balance in this specific setting. There is also limited empirical exploration that considers differences in designation, teaching experience, and employment type. This study aims to bridge these research gaps by providing a focused and context-specific investigation into how work-life balance impacts faculty morale in self-financing colleges in Salem.

Statement of the Problem: In recent years, the rapid expansion of self-financing colleges in Tamil Nadu—particularly in semi-urban districts like Salem—has significantly transformed the landscape of higher education. These institutions, while catering to the growing demand for professional and academic courses, often operate under intense financial and administrative constraints. Faculty members working in self-financing colleges are expected to juggle multiple responsibilities, including teaching, student mentoring, administrative tasks, research contributions, and compliance with regulatory requirements. However, these responsibilities are frequently carried out in environments lacking sufficient institutional support, job security, or avenues for professional growth. Unlike their counterparts in government or autonomous institutions, faculty in self-financing colleges often face extended teaching hours, contractual employment, and performance pressures tied to institutional rankings and accreditations. The introduction of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), National Education Policy (NEP 2020), and increased emphasis on quality assurance mechanisms such as NAAC and NBA have further added to their workload, with little relief in terms of support systems, leave flexibility, or wellness initiatives.

In addition to institutional demands, socio-cultural expectations, particularly for female faculty, compound the challenge of achieving work-life balance. Many are expected to balance demanding professional duties with caregiving, domestic responsibilities, and community obligations—leading to heightened stress, emotional fatigue, and reduced job satisfaction.

While the concept of work-life balance has received considerable attention in urban and corporate contexts, there is limited empirical research addressing how work-life challenges affect faculty morale—including motivation, job satisfaction, and emotional well-being—specifically in self-financing colleges located in semi-urban districts like Salem. Given that faculty morale plays a vital role in ensuring student outcomes, institutional reputation, and long-term faculty retention, it is critical to explore this under-researched intersection.

This study, therefore, seeks to understand how work-life balance impacts the morale of faculty members working in self-financing colleges in Salem, and to identify actionable strategies for improving institutional support, reducing stress, and fostering a more motivating academic environment.

Objectives of the Study

This study, therefore, seeks to:

1. Identify the work-life balance challenges experienced by faculty members in self-financing colleges in Salem district.
2. Understand the role of institutional factors such as workload, job security, management policies, and support systems in shaping faculty well-being.
3. Explore the relationship between work-life balance and faculty morale.

Hypotheses of the Study

1. H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between institutional support and faculty morale among faculty members in self-financing engineering colleges.
2. H₀₂: Institutional support does not significantly predict faculty morale.
3. H₀₃: Work-life balance does not significantly predict faculty morale.
4. H₀₄: Institutional support and work-life balance together do not significantly predict faculty morale.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design, aimed at exploring how work-life balance influences faculty morale in self-financing colleges. The research also investigates the role of demographic and institutional variables in shaping faculty perceptions and well-being.

Study Area: The study is conducted in self-financing colleges located in Salem district, Tamil Nadu, a region known for its large number of private institutions offering diverse academic programs including arts, science, commerce, and professional courses.

Population and Sample: The target population consists of faculty members from various disciplines employed in self-financing colleges in Salem district. A non-probability convenience sampling method was adopted due to time and accessibility constraints. The proposed sample size is approximately 210 respondents, ensuring adequate representation across gender, experience levels, and academic designations.

Data Collection Method: Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire, distributed both physically and via digital platforms (e.g., email, Google Forms). The questionnaire included closed-ended and Likert scale items, divided into the following sections:

- Demographic and professional profile
- Work-related aspects and responsibilities
- Perceptions of work-life balance
- Institutional environment and support
- Faculty morale indicators

Tools for Analysis

Data collected was analyzed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel. The following statistical techniques were used:

- Descriptive statistics (frequencies) for profiling and summarizing data
- Correlation and regression analysis to assess the impact of Work-life balance and Institution Support on Faculty morale

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The data was collected solely for academic research and used responsibly to protect the identity of participants.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Demographic Profile of Respondents: The study gathered responses from 210 faculty members working in self-financing engineering colleges. Among the respondents, a majority (97) were below the age of 31, followed by 70 in the 31–40 age group, 28 in the 41–50 age group, and 15 above 50 years of age. Gender-wise, the sample comprised 68 male and 142 female respondents. Regarding marital status, 136 were married while 74 were single. In terms of family structure, 115 respondents belonged to nuclear families, whereas 95 were from joint families. When considering the number of children, 85 had none, 42 had one child, 69 had two children, and 14 had more than two. With respect to their professional designation, a significant majority (162) were Assistant Professors, followed by 43 Associate Professors and 5 Professors.

Experience-wise, 102 faculty members had less than 6 years of teaching experience, 53 had 6–10 years, 41 had 11–15 years, and 14 had more than 15 years of experience. In terms of employment type, only 12 were employed permanently, while 198 were employed temporarily. The mode of transportation used by the respondents showed that 57 commuted by two-wheelers, 23 by four-wheelers, 47 used public transport, and 83 used other means. Lastly, the distance from residence to workplace indicated that 26 faculty members lived within 6 km, 61 within 6–10 km, 45 within 11–15 km, and 78 resided more than 15 km away from their institutions.

Spearman Correlation

The present analysis explores the relationship between Institution Support and Faculty Morale using the Spearman's rank-order correlation method (Spearman's rho). This non-parametric test is employed to determine the strength and direction of association between two ranked variables. Unlike Pearson's correlation, Spearman's rho does not assume normal distribution and is suitable when the data are ordinal or not normally distributed.

This analysis is particularly relevant in educational research, where institutional support—such as administrative backing, resources, and recognition—can significantly influence the morale and motivation of faculty members.

Hypotheses:

- Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relationship between institution support and faculty morale.
- Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant relationship between institution support and faculty morale.

TABLE 1.

Spearman's rho	Correlations			
			Institution Support	Faculty Morale
	Institution Support	Correlation Coefficient	1	.924**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Faculty Morale	Correlation Coefficient		1
		Sig. (2-tailed)		
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Interpretation of Results:

- The Spearman correlation coefficient (ρ) between Institution Support and Faculty Morale is 0.924, indicating a very strong positive correlation.
- The p-value (Sig. 2-tailed) is 0.000, which is less than 0.01, showing that the correlation is statistically significant at the 1% level.

Since the p-value is less than the significance level (0.01), we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. This means that there is a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between institution support and faculty morale. As institutional support increases, faculty morale also tends to increase.

Regression Analysis

This study aims to explore how Work Life Balance and Institution Support influence Faculty Morale in educational institutions. Faculty morale plays a critical role in productivity, job satisfaction, and student outcomes. Identifying key organizational factors that contribute to morale helps institutions better support their faculty. A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power of Work Life Balance and Institution Support on Faculty Morale.

Hypotheses:

- H_0 (Null Hypothesis): Work Life Balance and Institution Support do not significantly predict Faculty Morale.
- H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): Work Life Balance and Institution Support significantly predict Faculty Morale.

TABLE 2. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.937 ^a	.878	.877	3.045

The model explains 87.8% of the variance in faculty morale, indicating a strong and well-fitting model.

TABLE 3. ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	13869.383	2	6934.692	747.673	.000 ^b
	Residual	1919.931	207	9.275		
	Total	15789.314	209			

The F-value is 747.673 with a p-value < 0.001 , indicating that the model is statistically significant. This means that Work Life Balance and Institution Support together significantly predict Faculty Morale.

TABLE 4. Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	-16.263	3.323		-4.895	.000
	Work Life Balance	1.514	.200	.191	7.590	.000
	Institution Support	1.361	.035	.970	38.563	.000

- Institution Support has a very strong positive influence on Faculty Morale ($\beta = 0.970, p < 0.001$), suggesting it is the strongest predictor.
- Work Life Balance also has a significant positive impact on Faculty Morale ($\beta = 0.191, p < 0.001$), though the effect is comparatively smaller.

The regression analysis confirms that both Work Life Balance and Institution Support are significant predictors of Faculty Morale, with Institution Support being the more influential factor. The high R^2 value (0.878) indicates that a substantial proportion of the variation in faculty morale can be explained by these two variables. These findings highlight the importance of creating supportive institutional environments and promoting work-life balance to enhance faculty well-being and morale.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The present study explored the influence of work-life balance and institutional support on faculty morale in self-financing colleges in Salem district, Tamil Nadu. The findings reveal critical insights consistent with, and at times extending, earlier research in this domain.

1. Demographic and Employment Patterns

The data indicate that a significant proportion of faculty members are young (under 31 years), female, and employed temporarily. This aligns with Singh et al. (2023), who noted that self-financing colleges in Tamil Nadu

often rely on temporary and contract-based faculty appointments, contributing to job insecurity and lower morale. Additionally, the predominance of nuclear families and long commutes, especially among female faculty, echoes the findings of Rajadhyaksha (2012), who emphasized the gendered nature of work-life balance challenges in India.

2. Strong Correlation Between Institutional Support and Faculty Morale

A key finding of this study is the very strong positive correlation ($\rho = 0.924$, $p < 0.01$) between institutional support and faculty morale. This supports earlier work by Kinman and Jones (2008), who argued that the lack of institutional recognition, autonomy, and support structures is a major contributor to stress and disengagement among academic staff. Similarly, Mehta and Balasubramani (2024) concluded that faculty in corporate-structured institutions with minimal support systems report significantly lower morale and higher turnover intentions.

3. Predictive Power of Work-Life Balance and Institutional Support

Regression analysis confirms that both work-life balance ($\beta = 0.191$) and institutional support ($\beta = 0.970$) significantly predict faculty morale, with institutional support being the more dominant factor. The model explains 87.8% of the variance in morale, consistent with the observations by Khan and Reddy (2023), who found that the increasing administrative workload and accountability measures under NEP 2020 and accreditation norms substantially affect faculty satisfaction and well-being.

These findings are also in line with Clark's (2000) boundary theory, which emphasizes the need for institutional frameworks that allow faculty to manage their work and personal domains effectively. When institutions fail to accommodate this balance, faculty are more likely to experience burnout, a conclusion further supported by Bhuvaneswari and Thirumoorthis (2023), who documented emotional exhaustion due to institutional insensitivity.

4. Gendered Implications and Socio-Cultural Pressures

The study found that female faculty—who constitute a majority of respondents—face greater work-life imbalance due to caregiving duties and societal expectations. Agarwal and Lenka (2015) observed similar patterns, where women in academia experienced higher levels of stress and job dissatisfaction owing to limited institutional flexibility. This underscores the importance of gender-sensitive policies and flexible support systems.

5. Challenges from Education Policy Reforms

Faculty reported increased stress from documentation, assessments, and compliance requirements tied to NEP 2020, NAAC, and OBE mandates. These findings echo Khan and Reddy (2023), who warned that without parallel investments in faculty development and administrative support, such reforms may degrade rather than enhance academic morale.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance work-life balance and faculty morale in self-financing colleges:

1. Strengthen Institutional Support Systems

Institutions should establish structured support mechanisms such as mentoring programs, peer networks, and wellness initiatives. As noted by Kinman and Jones (2008), such support can significantly buffer emotional exhaustion and increase job satisfaction.

2. Introduce Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible scheduling, remote work options for administrative tasks, and provision for emergency leave would help faculty—especially women—better manage personal and professional responsibilities. Rajadhyaksha (2012) emphasized that flexible work policies are particularly beneficial for female faculty in managing work-family conflict.

3. Promote Professional Development and Recognition

Providing opportunities for research funding, conference participation, and career advancement can enhance morale and reduce turnover. Mehta and Balasubramani (2024) pointed out that lack of recognition and advancement opportunities in self-financing institutions leads to disengagement.

4. Institutionalize Gender-Sensitive Policies

On-site childcare, maternity leave provisions, and supportive return-to-work programs would empower female faculty. Agarwal and Lenka (2015) and Bhuvaneswari and Thirumoorthis (2023) both stressed that gender-sensitive environments lead to improved morale and retention.

5. Align Policy Implementation with Faculty Capacity

Reforms under NEP 2020 and accreditation bodies like NAAC and NBA should be implemented with due consideration for workload and available support. Khan and Reddy (2023) recommended that institutional accountability should be matched with adequate infrastructural and human resource investments.

8. CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between work-life balance, institutional support, and faculty morale in self-financing colleges in Salem district, Tamil Nadu. The findings highlight that institutional support plays a pivotal role in determining faculty morale, more so than work-life balance alone. While both factors are significant, the strength of institutional support as a predictor underscores the need for organizational change and policy reform. The study also reveals that women faculty members face disproportionate work-life challenges due to socio-cultural expectations, highlighting the importance of gender-sensitive institutional policies. Moreover, increasing accountability demands driven by policy reforms like NEP 2020, without parallel support mechanisms, may worsen morale and retention in the long run. To cultivate a motivated and resilient faculty, self-financing colleges must invest in a holistic ecosystem of support that recognizes the interdependence of professional fulfillment and personal well-being. Only through such inclusive and strategic interventions can these institutions ensure academic excellence and sustainable growth.

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