

Work-Life Balance, Social Support, and Work Stress in Explaining Early Childhood Teacher Job Satisfaction

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Abstract:

Teacher job satisfaction is a critical factor in sustaining a positive work environment and supporting the quality of early childhood education. Beyond job characteristics, teachers' satisfaction may be shaped by their ability to balance professional and personal demands, access supportive social resources, and manage work-related stress. This study aims to examine the relationships between work-life balance, social support, and job satisfaction among early childhood education teachers, while investigating the mediating role of job stress. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed involving 345 early childhood education teachers in Labuhanbatu Regency. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to assess both direct and indirect relationships among the variables. The results showed that work-life balance had a positive and significant relationship with job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.328$; $t = 6.888$; $p < 0.001$), while social support also had a positive and significant relationship with job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.116$; $t = 2.141$; $p = 0.016$). In contrast, job stress was negatively and significantly related to job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.335$; $t = 7.661$; $p < 0.001$). Work-life balance was negatively associated with job stress ($\beta = -0.152$; $t = 2.733$; $p = 0.003$), as was social support ($\beta = -0.318$; $t = 7.022$; $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, job stress significantly mediated the relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.051$; $t = 2.449$; $p = 0.007$) and between social support and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.107$; $t = 5.825$; $p < 0.001$). These findings highlight the interconnected roles of work-life balance, social support, and job stress in shaping PAUD teachers' job satisfaction.

Keywords: early childhood teachers; job satisfaction; social support; work-life balance; work stress.

INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction is a crucial aspect of an individual's workplace experience because it relates to their evaluation of their work, work environment, and the accompanying psychological experiences. In the education profession, job satisfaction is becoming increasingly important because teachers' psychological well-being is

linked to their continued engagement in their work and the quality of their professional experiences. Studies on educator job satisfaction indicate that this experience is influenced by a combination of job characteristics, the organizational environment, and psychological factors (Tria, 2023). The context of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers has its own unique characteristics. The work of PAUD teachers involves intensive interaction with children, parents, fellow teachers, and educational institution administrators. In addition to carrying out learning functions, teachers also face administrative, emotional, and interpersonal demands. These demands mean that job satisfaction cannot be explained solely through job characteristics but must be understood through the relationship between work life, non-work life, social support, and the psychological stress experienced by teachers.

One relevant condition is work-life balance. This concept relates to an individual's experience in managing the relationship between work and non-work life. Fisher et al. (2009) explain that the relationship between these two domains can involve both interference and enhancement. Therefore, work-life balance does not merely mean an equal division of time between work and personal life, but encompasses the extent to which both domains can be managed without causing excessive interference. Empirical evidence regarding the relationship between work-life and job satisfaction is supported by various meta-analyses. These analyses demonstrate a cross-domain relationship between work-family experiences and satisfaction. One such study, conducted by Allen et al. (2020), through a cross-national meta-analysis covering 332 studies and 2,733 effect sizes from 58 countries, also showed that work-family conflict is associated with various work outcomes and that the socio-cultural context needs to be considered in understanding this relationship (Allen et al., 2020; Fisher et al., 2009).

For teachers, this issue becomes increasingly relevant because the demands of educational work often extend beyond learning activities. Systematic studies of teacher well-being indicate that workload, job demands, social support, and psychological well-being are important factors in teachers' professional experiences. These conditions can influence stress, well-being, and job satisfaction. In addition to work-life balance, social support is an important resource in the work experience. Social support can help individuals obtain emotional, informational, and instrumental support when facing job demands. From the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) perspective, social resources are a form of job resource that can help individuals cope with job demands and maintain a more positive psychological state (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Social support is also related to job satisfaction. Harris et al. (2007) showed that various forms of support in the workplace contribute to job satisfaction. In the context of early childhood education teachers, the relationship between social support and job satisfaction becomes even more relevant because teachers work in an environment that relies heavily on interpersonal interactions (Harris et al., 2007). However, the relationship between work-life balance, social support, and job satisfaction is not necessarily a direct one. One psychological mechanism that may explain this relationship is job stress.

In the JD-R model, job demands can drain an individual's resources and produce negative psychological consequences. Conversely, job resources can help individuals cope with these demands. Thus, when work-life balance is better and social support is more readily available, teachers' psychological distress is expected to be lower. Conversely, high job stress is expected to reduce job satisfaction. This argument leads this study to a more specific question: are work-life balance and social support directly related to job satisfaction, and does this relationship also operate through job stress? This question is important because research that only examines direct relationships may miss the psychological mechanisms that explain how resources relate to job satisfaction. Therefore, this study integrates the four constructs of work-life balance—social support, job stress, and job satisfaction—into a single structural model. The study was conducted among early childhood education (PAUD) teachers in Labuhanbatu Regency. This context provides an empirical contribution because most of the literature on job satisfaction and work-life balance comes from general worker populations, teachers at other educational levels, or different organizational contexts. Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the relationship between work-life balance and social support with job satisfaction of PAUD teachers and to test the role of work stress as a mediator in both relationships.

This research begins from the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) perspective. The JD-R model distinguishes work environment characteristics into two main groups: job demands and job resources. Job demands are aspects of work that require sustained physical or psychological effort, while job resources are aspects of work that facilitate the achievement of work goals, reduce demands, and support individual development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). This framework is relevant to the experiences of early childhood education (ECE) teachers. Teachers face pedagogical, administrative, emotional, and interpersonal job

demands. At the same time, teachers require resources to cope with these demands. In this study, work-life balance and social support are positioned as conditions that can help teachers manage demands, while job stress is positioned as a psychological condition that reflects the pressure caused by these demands. Job satisfaction is then positioned as a job outcome. Thus, the model not only examines whether resources are related to job satisfaction but also considers the psychological processes that may link the two.

1. Conceptual Model

Based on this theoretical framework, the study developed a conceptual model that positions work-life balance and social support as two key factors related to teachers' work experiences. Conceptually, this relationship can be described as follows.

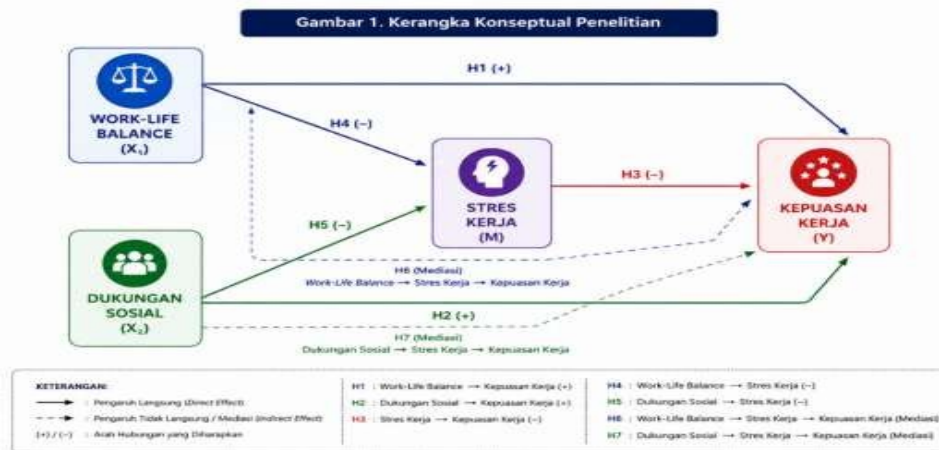


Figure 1. Conceptual Research Model

2. Job Satisfaction

The conceptual model suggests that work-life conditions and social support are expected to be related to job stress, which in turn is related to job satisfaction. However, this relationship is not assumed to be entirely through job stress. Work-life balance and social support could also theoretically have a direct relationship with job satisfaction. Therefore, the research conceptual framework encompasses two concurrent mechanisms: a direct pathway from resources to job satisfaction and an indirect pathway through job stress.

3. Work-life Balance and Job Satisfaction

Work-life balance describes an individual's experience in managing the relationship between work and non-work life. Fisher et al. (2009) showed that this relationship can be either interference or enhancement. Therefore, work-life balance is related to an individual's ability to ensure that demands from one domain do not excessively interfere with other domains (Fisher et al., 2009). Empirically, the cross-domain relationship with satisfaction has been supported by various meta-analytic studies. Allen et al. (2020) showed that work-family conflict is associated with various forms of satisfaction, including job satisfaction, family satisfaction, and life satisfaction. These findings confirm that experiences and conditions in both work and family domains can influence individual satisfaction evaluations in other life domains (Allen et al., 2020). In the context of early childhood education teachers, the ability to maintain a balance between work and personal life can provide a space for recovery from job demands. Teachers who are able to manage both domains more adaptively are expected to have more positive evaluations of their work.

H1: Work-life balance is positively related to job satisfaction of PAUD teachers.

4. Social Support and Job Satisfaction

Social support is an interpersonal resource that can help individuals cope with job demands. Support can take the form of emotional, instrumental, or informational assistance. In the JD-R model, social support can function as a job resource that helps individuals cope with job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). This support can also increase the perception that individuals are valued and not facing job demands alone. Harris

et al. (2007) found that various forms of workplace support are related to job satisfaction. In the context of early childhood education, the relevance of social support is even stronger because teachers' work relies heavily on interactions with principals, fellow teachers, families, and the social environment (Harris et al., 2007). Therefore:

H2: Social support is positively related to job satisfaction of PAUD teachers.

5. *Job Stress and Job Satisfaction*

Job stress describes psychological conditions related to work pressures. In the JD-R model, high job demands not matched by adequate resources can lead to health impairment processes that impact an individual's psychological well-being. High stress can reduce psychological energy, interfere with positive work experiences, and ultimately affect job evaluations. Therefore:

H3: Job stress is negatively related to job satisfaction of PAUD teachers.

6. *Work-life balance and work stress*

An imbalance between work and non-work life can produce stress because individuals must manage demands from multiple domains simultaneously. Michel et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis showed that time demands, role conflict, and various work stressors are important antecedents of work-family conflict (Michel et al., 2011). Conversely, the ability to maintain work-life balance can reduce cross-domain stress and provide opportunities for psychological recovery. Thus:

H4: Work-life balance is negatively related to work stress of PAUD teachers.

7. *Social Support and Work Stress*

Social support can help individuals cope with job demands by providing emotional, instrumental, and informational resources. When teachers receive adequate support, job demands can be perceived as more manageable. From the JD-R perspective, social support is one resource that can mitigate the negative consequences of job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Therefore:

H5: Social support is negatively related to work stress of PAUD teachers.

8. *Job Stress as a Mediator*

If work-life balance is related to job stress and job stress, in turn, to job satisfaction, then job stress may be a mechanism that partially explains the relationship between the two constructs. The same logic applies to social support. Social support can contribute to job satisfaction directly, but it can also contribute through reducing psychological distress. Thus:

H6: Job stress mediates the relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction of PAUD teachers.

H7: Job stress mediates the relationship between social support and job satisfaction of PAUD teachers.

METHOD

The study employed a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design. The respondents were 345 early childhood education (PAUD) teachers in Labuhanbatu Regency. Data were collected using psychological instruments used in the thesis research. The data were then analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The study involved four main constructs: work-life balance, social support, job stress, and job satisfaction. The research constructs have a multidimensional structure. Therefore, the measurement process considered the higher-order construct structure. In the initial measurement stage, indicators form the construct dimensions; at the next level, these dimensions are used to represent higher-order constructs. This approach is important because second-order construct evaluation is not conducted by treating all first-order items as direct indicators of the second-order construct. PLS-SEM analysis is conducted through two main stages: measurement model evaluation and structural model evaluation. Measurement model evaluation includes construct reliability and validity, while structural model evaluation includes collinearity, path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and indirect effect testing. Significance testing was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure as recommended in PLS-SEM analysis (J. Hair et al., 2022; J. F. Hair et al., 2019). Mediation testing was conducted by evaluating the significance of the indirect effect (Nitzl et al., 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents

Respondent characteristics are summarized based on age, gender, marital status, length of service, education, job duties, employment status, and work area. This presentation is intended to provide context for the sample without including demographic characteristics as variables in the structural model.

Table 1 Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 345)

Characteristics	Category	N frequency	Percentage
Age	Early adulthood	241	69,9 %
	Middle adults	92	26,7 %
	Senior adults	12	3,5 %
Gender	Man	16	4,6 %
	Woman	329	95,4 %
Marital status	Marry	251	72,8 %
	Single	94	27,2 %
Working hours	Short	124	35,9 %
	Secondary	79	22,9 %
	Long	142	41,2 %
Education	High school/equivalent	92	26,7 %
	Diploma	31	9,0 %
	Master's degree (S1)	222	64,3 %
Job description	accompanying teacher	57	16,5 %
	Main teacher	152	44,1 %
	Headmaster	113	32,8 %
	Other categories	23	6,7 %
Employment status	Honorary/non-PNS/ASN	314	91,0
	ASN/PNS	31	9,0 %
Working area	Northern Region	103	29,9 %
	Southern Region	80	23,2 %
	Western Blade	40	11,2 %
	Central Panai	62	18,0 %
	Downstream Blade	60	17,4 %

Source: SPSS Analysis V26.1, 2024

The sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents provide important context for understanding the research findings on work-life balance, social support, job stress, and job satisfaction of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers. The composition of the respondents indicates that the study sample was dominated by teachers in the early adulthood phase, female, married, with a bachelor's degree, and mostly held non-civil servant positions. This profile indicates that the work experiences analyzed in this study took place within the context of professional life that overlapped with personal and family responsibilities. The predominance of respondents in the early adulthood group (69.9%) indicates that most teachers are at a phase of life when individuals are generally building and developing their professional careers. In this phase, work demands can coexist with establishing a family life, developing competencies, and various personal responsibilities. This condition makes work-life balance relevant not only as a matter of time allocation, but also as the ability to manage multiple roles sustainably. Thus, the high proportion of early adulthood teachers can provide context for why work-life balance is an important factor in explaining job satisfaction.

The overwhelmingly female-dominated gender composition (95.4%) also reflects the empirical characteristics of the PAUD profession, which is predominantly female. However, this dominance needs to be interpreted with caution. This gender composition indicates that the study results primarily represent the experiences of female teachers in managing the demands of work, personal life, and social relations in the workplace. Therefore, findings regarding the relationship between work-life balance, social support, job stress, and job satisfaction should not be automatically generalized to the same patterns for male teachers. The very small proportion of male teachers also prevents this study from providing an adequate basis for comparing experiences by gender. In terms of marital status, 72.8% of respondents were married. This composition is important because the teachers' work lives in this study largely coincided with their family lives. For married

teachers, work demands have the potential to interact with household responsibilities, caregiving, and family needs. Therefore, work-life balance in this study can be understood as a condition that allows teachers to maintain professional engagement without excessively sacrificing family life. However, marital status cannot be used to conclude that married teachers necessarily experience higher levels of work-family conflict because this study did not specifically test differences in levels of work-life balance based on marital status.

The characteristics of tenure indicate that 41.2% of respondents were in the long-tenure category, while 35.9% were in the short-tenure category, and 22.9% were in the medium-tenure category. This distribution indicates that the sample not only represents teachers newly entering the profession but also teachers with considerable professional experience. The presence of teachers with diverse tenure provides context that experiences with stress, social support, and job satisfaction are likely shaped through different stages of professional experience. Teachers with longer tenure may have developed adaptation strategies, social networks, and a more developed understanding of the work environment, while teachers with shorter tenure may still be in the process of adjusting to job demands. However, because tenure was not included as a predictor variable in the structural model, this interpretation is positioned in the context of sample characteristics, rather than as a conclusion regarding the influence of tenure.

In terms of education, the majority of respondents had a bachelor's degree (64.3%), while 26.7% had a high school diploma or equivalent, and 9.0% a diploma. The predominance of bachelor's degrees indicates that most respondents have a relatively high level of formal education. This can provide professional capital in facing the pedagogical, administrative, and interpersonal demands of early childhood education. However, formal education does not in itself guarantee low stress or high job satisfaction. Workload, organizational support, interpersonal relationships, employment conditions, and work-life balance remain important factors to consider. Therefore, education level is more accurately understood as part of the respondents' professional profile rather than as a direct indicator of work well-being. The composition of job descriptions shows that respondents comprise assistant teachers, main teachers, principals, and other categories. Main teachers constitute the largest group (44.1%), followed by principals (32.8%) and assistant teachers (16.5%). This diversity of positions indicates that respondents have varying levels of organizational experience and responsibilities. A principal, for example, not only performs pedagogical functions but also has managerial and administrative responsibilities, while a teacher's assistant is more concerned with implementing learning and assisting children. This difference in responsibilities is important in interpreting the research findings because the demands and support experienced by each position can differ. However, because job descriptions were not tested as moderators or predictors, this study cannot yet conclude that differences in job titles cause differences in stress levels or job satisfaction.

The most prominent characteristic of the respondents was their employment status, as 91.0% of respondents were honorary/non-civil servant/state civil servant teachers, and only 9.0% were civil servants/state civil servants. This composition provides an important structural context for interpreting job satisfaction. Employment status can be related to perceptions of job security, career certainty, compensation, rewards, and professional future. Therefore, the teachers' experiences of job satisfaction in this study cannot be completely separated from the institutional conditions in which they work. However, because employment status was not included in the structural model, this study cannot state that non-civil servant status directly causes specific levels of satisfaction or stress. These findings are more appropriately understood as dominant characteristics of the sample population that need to be considered when interpreting the research results.

The distribution of work areas indicates that respondents came from several regions in Labuhanbatu Regency, with the largest proportion coming from North Rantau (29.9%), followed by South Rantau (23.2%), Central Panai (18.0%), Bilah Hilir (17.4%), and West Bilah (11.2%). This geographic distribution indicates that the study does not only represent teachers from one work environment, but covers several regions with diverse educational unit characteristics. Regional variations can mean differences in social context, access to resources, institutional characteristics, and work environment conditions. Therefore, regional characteristics strengthen the empirical context of the study, although they cannot be used to conclude whether there are differences in levels of work-life balance, social support, job stress, or job satisfaction between regions because the comparison was not tested statistically.

The sociodemographic profile of the respondents indicates that this study primarily describes the experiences of female early childhood education teachers, who are in early adulthood, mostly married, have a bachelor's degree, have varied work experience, and are predominantly non-civil servants. This combination of characteristics is important because it demonstrates that teachers' experiences of job satisfaction occur within

a complex context. Teachers face not only pedagogical demands but also demands from their personal lives, families, social relationships, and the structural conditions of their work. This reinforces the relevance of using the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) perspective, as occupational well-being can be understood through the balance between the demands teachers face and the resources available to address them. Therefore, the demographic characteristics in this study are not positioned as causal factors for job satisfaction, job stress, work-life balance, or social support, but rather as socio-professional contexts that help explain who the respondents are and the life circumstances under which the relationships between these variables are found. This interpretation is important to prevent overuse of sample characteristics to explain causal relationships that are actually tested through the PLS-SEM model.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptively, the statistics of the research variables show the general profile of the data before testing the measurement model and structural model is carried out.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Construct	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Work-life balance	46	13	17	68
Social support	52	9	22	64
Work stress	38	14	21	64
Job satisfaction	146	38	75	175

Source: Descriptive statistical analysis SPSS 25.1., 2024

Descriptively, work-life balance had an empirical mean of 46 (SD = 13; range 17-68), social support had an mean of 52 (SD = 9; range 22-64), work stress had an mean of 38 (SD = 14; range 21-64), and job satisfaction had an mean of 146 (SD = 38; range 75-175). This distribution provides context regarding the general condition of respondents and the variation in scores on each construct. Descriptive statistics were not used to infer relationships between variables; testing of relationships and mediation mechanisms was conducted in a PLS-SEM structural model. In general, respondents were predominantly female (95.4%), married (72.8%), had a bachelor's degree (64.3%), and were honorary/non-PNS/ASN (91.0%). A total of 41.2% of respondents had long service tenure, while the largest age group was early adulthood (69.9%). This profile provides an important context in interpreting the relationships between work-life balance, social support, job stress, and job satisfaction in the research sample.

Evaluation of Measurement Model

The evaluation results indicate that the research constructs have good internal reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs were above 0.70. The composite reliability value also exceeded 0.7070.

Table 3 Reliability and Convergent Validity of Constructs

Cronbach's α construct	CR (rho_a)	CR (rho_c)	AVE
Social Support	0,949	0,954	0,833
Job Satisfaction 0,964	0,976	0,969	0,756
Work Stress 0,983	0,984	0,987	0,951
Work-life balance 0,962	0,964	0,971	0,869

Source: SmartPLS 4.1 analysis, 2024

These values indicate adequate internal consistency at the construct level. Discriminant validity was also evaluated using HTMT. All HTMT values were below 0.85. The results of the measurement model evaluation indicate that all research constructs have an excellent level of internal reliability. Based on Table 4.3.1, the Cronbach's alpha value for the Social Support construct was 0.949, Job Satisfaction was 0.964, Job Stress was 0.983, and Work-Life Balance was 0.962. All of these values are above the minimum limit of 0.70, indicating that the indicators used in each construct have adequate internal consistency. In PLS-SEM evaluations, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability measures are used to assess the internal consistency of constructs, with values above 0.70 generally indicating an acceptable level of reliability (J. Hair & Alamer, n.d.). The test results also showed that the composite reliability (rho_c) values for all constructs were above 0.70. The rho_c value for Social Support was 0.961, Job Satisfaction was 0.969, Job Stress was 0.987, and Work-Life Balance was 0.971. These results reinforce the finding that the indicators for each construct consistently represent the latent construct being measured. A high composite reliability

value indicates that variations in indicator scores reflect the construct being measured more than measurement error (J. Hair et al., 2022; J. Hair & Alamer, n.d.).

In addition to rho_c, the composite reliability (rho_a) values also showed adequate results. The rho_a values for each construct were 0.954 for Social Support, 0.976 for Job Satisfaction, 0.984 for Job Stress, and 0.964 for Work-Life Balance. All of these values exceeded the minimum criteria used in construct reliability evaluation. Thus, the results of reliability testing using three measures, namely Cronbach's alpha, rho_a, and rho_c, consistently showed that the measurement model had strong internal consistency. In terms of convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs were also above the minimum value of 0.50. The AVE value for Social Support was 0.833, Job Satisfaction was 0.756, Job Stress was 0.951, and Work-Life Balance was 0.869. This value indicates that each construct is able to explain more than 50% of the variance in its indicators. Thus, the indicators used have an adequate level of correlation with the latent constructs they represent. Hair et al. (2022) explained that an AVE value of at least 0.50 indicates that a construct is able to explain at least half of the variance in its indicators, thus meeting the criteria for convergent validity.

The highest AVE value is found in the Job Stress construct, which is 0.951. This indicates that the construct is able to explain a very large proportion of the variance of its constituent indicators. Meanwhile, the lowest AVE value is found in the Job Satisfaction construct, which is 0.756, but this value is still far above the minimum limit of 0.50. Therefore, there is no indication of convergent validity problems in the four research constructs. The evaluation results in Table 4.3.1 show that Social Support, Job Satisfaction, Job Stress, and Work-Life Balance have met the criteria for internal reliability and convergent validity. By meeting these criteria, the constructs used can proceed to the evaluation stage of discriminant validity and structural model. These results provide an empirical basis that the research instrument has adequate measurement quality to test the relationship between Work-Life Balance, Social Support, Job Stress, and Job Satisfaction of PAUD teachers.

Table 4 Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Construct Pair	HTMT
Job Satisfaction ↔ Social Support	0,149
Job Stress ↔ Social Support	0,222
Job Stress ↔ Job Satisfaction	0,451
Work-life balance ↔ Social support	0,117
Work-life balance ↔ Job Satisfaction	0,434
Work-life balance ↔ Work stress	0,232

Source: SmartPLS 4.1 analysis, 2024

These results indicate that the constructs in the model have adequate empirical distinguishability. Next, discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). This test aims to ensure that each construct in the model truly has distinct empirical characteristics and does not measure excessively overlapping concepts. Based on the analysis results, all HTMT values between constructs are below the 0.85 threshold. These results indicate that there is adequate empirical distinguishability between the constructs of Work-Life Balance, Social Support, Job Stress, and Job Satisfaction. The lowest HTMT value was found in the relationship between Work-Life Balance and Social Support, which was 0.117, while the highest value was found in the relationship between Job Stress and Job Satisfaction, which was 0.451. Although Job Stress has a fairly close conceptual relationship with Job Satisfaction, the HTMT value of 0.451 is still far below the 0.85 threshold. This indicates that the two constructs can still be distinguished empirically. Thus, the results of the discriminant validity test show that each construct in this study has adequate distinctiveness. This means that Work-Life Balance is not identical to Social Support, Job Stress is not identical to Job Satisfaction, and the relationship between the other constructs is similar. This is important because the research model positions the four constructs as distinct variables with their respective theoretical functions. Therefore, the results of the HTMT evaluation provide support for the use of these constructs simultaneously in testing structural models using PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2022).

Collinearity and Explanatory Power of the Model

The VIF values of all structural relationships were well below the limit of 5, so no significant collinearity problems were found.

Table 5 Collinearity Between Structural Paths (VIF)

Connection	VIF
Social Support → Job Satisfaction	1,053
Social Support → Work Stress	1,013
Job Stress ↔ Job Satisfaction	1,096
Work-life balance ↔ Job Satisfaction	1,059
Work-life balance → Work stress	1,013

Source: SmartPLS 4.1 analysis, 2024

The R^2 value for job satisfaction was 0.320 and for job stress, 0.088. This means that the constructs in the model explain 32.0% of the variation in job satisfaction and 8.8% of the variation in job stress. These findings also indicate that the model has considerable room for expansion in future research, particularly in explaining job stress.

Hypothesis Testing

The results of the direct relationship test are shown in Table 5.

Table 6 Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Connection	B	T	P	Results
H1	WLB → Job Satisfaction	0,328	6,888	< .001	Supported
H2	Social Support → Job Satisfaction	0,116	2,141	.016	Supported
H3	Job Stress → Job Satisfaction	-0,335	7,661	< .001	Supported
H4	WLB → Work Stress	-0,152	2,733	.003	Supported
H5	Social Support → Work Stress	-0,318	7,022	< .001	Supported

Source: SmartPLS 4.1 analysis, 2024

All hypothesized direct relationships received empirical support.

Indirect Influence

Testing of indirect effects shows that job stress mediates the relationship between work-life balance and social support and job satisfaction.

Table 7 Indirect Effects

Hypothesis	Mediation Path	B	T	P	Results
H6	WLB → Job Stress → Job Satisfaction	0,051	2,449	.007	Supported
H7	Social Support → Job Stress → Job Satisfaction	0,107	5,825	< .001	Supported

Source: SmartPLS 4.1 analysis, 2024

Thus, all seven research hypotheses are supported.

Work-life balance and job satisfaction

The results showed that work-life balance was positively and significantly related to job satisfaction among early childhood education (ECE) teachers ($\beta = 0.328$; $t = 6.888$; $p < .001$). This finding suggests that the better the experience of work-life balance, the more likely teachers are to evaluate their work positively. These results are consistent with the literature on the relationship between work and non-work life. Several meta-analyses support this finding, including the study by Allen et al. (2020), which demonstrated a consistent relationship between work-family conflict and job outcomes across various national contexts (Allen et al., 2020). In the context of early childhood education teachers, this relationship can be understood from the nature of work, which demands emotional and interpersonal involvement. Teachers need opportunities for psychological recovery after facing work demands. When work life does not excessively interfere with personal life, teachers are more likely to

maintain positive evaluations of their work. Interestingly, work-life balance was a stronger direct predictor of job satisfaction than social support in this model. This indicates that, in the context of the study sample, how teachers experience the relationship between work and personal life may be a more significant determinant of job satisfaction evaluations than direct social support.

Social Support and Job Satisfaction

Social support also had a positive and significant relationship with job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.116$; $t = 2.141$; $p = .016$). However, the direct coefficient was relatively small compared to the relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction. This finding remains important because it indicates that social support contributes to job satisfaction even when other constructs are included simultaneously. Harris et al. (2007) showed that workplace support is related to job satisfaction. Conceptually, social support can provide a sense of appreciation, assistance when facing difficulties, and resources to meet job demands (Harris et al., 2007). However, the results of this study provide more interesting clues when viewed in conjunction with the mediation results. The direct effect of social support on job satisfaction was relatively small, but the indirect effect through job stress was much larger, at $\beta = 0.107$. This means that social support's contribution to job satisfaction is more visible through its ability to reduce stress than through its direct pathway. This is one of the article's key findings.

Job Stress and Job Satisfaction

Job stress has a negative and significant relationship with job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.335$; $t = 7.661$; $p < .001$). The large coefficient indicates that job stress is one of the strongest direct pathways in the model. As stress levels increase, job satisfaction tends to decrease. This finding aligns with the logic of the health impairment process in the JD-R. Demands that continuously drain psychological resources can have negative consequences for an individual's condition (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In the context of early childhood education teachers, job stress can reduce the psychological capacity to enjoy work, interact positively, and evaluate the work environment favorably. Therefore, efforts to increase job satisfaction cannot be simply done by adding positive factors; reducing sources of stress also needs to be part of the organizational strategy.

Work-life balance and Work Stress

Work-life balance was negatively and significantly related to job stress ($\beta = -0.152$; $t = 2.733$; $p = .003$). These results indicate that teachers who experience better work-life balance tend to experience lower job stress. This finding is consistent with the argument that cross-domain imbalance can generate additional stress. Michel et al. (2011) showed that time demands, role conflict, and job stressors are important factors in the work-family relationship (Michel et al., 2011). In the context of early childhood education, the ability to separate and manage work demands from personal life can provide opportunities for recovery. Thus, work-life balance is not only relevant as a predictor of job satisfaction but also as a condition related to the psychological process of stress.

Social Support and Work Stress

Social support showed a relatively strong negative relationship with job stress ($\beta = -0.318$; $t = 7.022$; $p < .001$). This finding is significant because the coefficient is larger than the direct relationship between social support and job satisfaction. In other words, social support in this study appears to operate primarily through psychological pathways. The support teachers receive can help reduce the stress they feel when facing job demands. This aligns with the JD-R perspective, which positions support as a resource that helps individuals cope with demands. When teachers do not feel they are facing demands alone, job stress can become more manageable.

Job Stress as a Mediating Mechanism

The most important finding in this study is the results of the indirect effect test. Job stress was proven to mediate the relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction with an indirect coefficient of 0.051 ($t = 2.449$; $p = .007$). These results indicate that part of the relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction occurs through job stress. In other words, work-life balance is not only directly related to job satisfaction, but also related to satisfaction because it is related to the level of stress experienced by teachers. A stronger effect is seen in the relationship between social support and job satisfaction. The indirect effect through job stress is 0.107 ($t = 5.825$; $p < .001$), greater than the direct coefficient of social support on job satisfaction of 0.116. This finding provides important insights into the mechanism of the relationship between variables. Social support not only

works as a source of interpersonal comfort that directly increases satisfaction, but also is related to the reduction of job stress, which then contributes to job satisfaction.

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several contributions. First, it integrates work-life balance, social support, job stress, and job satisfaction into a single model in the context of early childhood education (ECE) teachers. Second, it demonstrates that the relationship between resources and job satisfaction cannot be understood solely through a direct pathway. Job stress is a significant mechanism in explaining this relationship. Third, the results reveal differences in patterns between the two resources studied. Work-life balance has a stronger direct relationship with job satisfaction, while social support has a relatively stronger relationship with job stress. These differences imply that the two resources do not operate entirely through the same mechanisms.

The research findings have several implications for early childhood education (PAUD) administrators. First, improving teacher job satisfaction should not be solely focused on compensation or rewards. Administrators need to consider the balance between work demands and teachers' personal lives. Second, social support needs to be built into the work environment. Support from the principal and colleagues can be an important resource when teachers face job demands. Third, stress management should not be solely the responsibility of teachers as an individual. Organizations need to identify sources of stress that can be reduced or managed. Fourth, because job stress is a mediator, interventions that solely aim to increase job satisfaction without reducing sources of stress may be suboptimal. Therefore, a more appropriate approach is to improve work-life balance + strengthen social support + reduce sources of stress → increase job satisfaction.

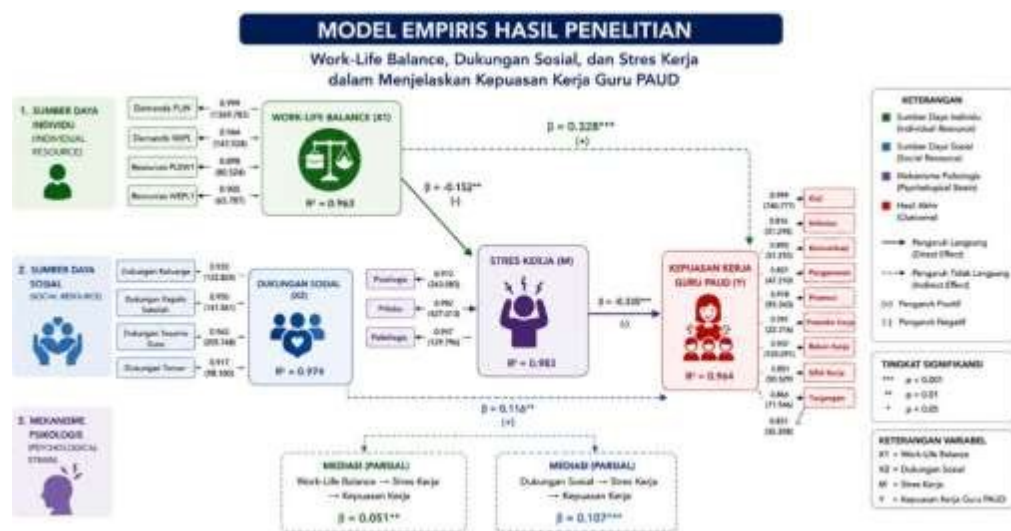


Figure 2 Empirical Model

This study explains the job satisfaction of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers through the relationship between Work-Life Balance, Social Support, and Job Stress in Labuhanbatu Regency, North Sumatra. The empirical model shows that Work-Life Balance and Social Support act as resources that increase job satisfaction and reduce job stress, while job stress acts as a psychological mechanism that decreases job satisfaction. In addition to their direct influence, job stress also mediates the relationship between Work-Life Balance and Social Support and job satisfaction. This pattern indicates that PAUD teacher job satisfaction is not solely the result of favorable working conditions, but is formed through the interaction between personal, relational, and psychological resources of teachers. This perspective aligns with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, which explains that resources can help individuals cope with job demands and protect psychological conditions from the negative consequences of job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Lesener et al., 2019).

These findings provide a basis for understanding job satisfaction through the resource-strain-satisfaction mechanism. Within this mechanism, Work-Life Balance represents a teacher's ability to maintain a balance between work and non-work demands, while Social Support represents relational resources available through family, the principal, fellow teachers, and friends. Both resources help manage psychological strain

reflected in work stress, which ultimately determines how teachers evaluate their work. Thus, this study's empirical model demonstrates that resources not only have a motivational function but also a protective function against work stress. Research on teachers also indicates that social support and psychological resources play a significant role in explaining teacher satisfaction and professional well-being (Marcionetti & Castelli, 2023).

The positive relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction suggests that work-life balance is an important resource for early childhood education (ECE) teachers. This finding needs to be understood in light of the characteristics of early childhood education (ECE) work, which demands emotional engagement, sustained attention to children, communication with parents, lesson preparation, and administrative work. Early childhood education (ECE) teachers face various job demands, including workload, stressful working conditions, challenging child behavior, and special needs, all of which can impact teacher job satisfaction (Yang et al., 2022). Under these circumstances, the ability to maintain a balance between work and non-work life demands allows teachers to achieve psychological recovery and maintain energy to carry out their professional roles. Previous research findings support this positive relationship. Kumar et al. found that work-life balance was positively related to job satisfaction and simultaneously negatively related to job stress. Research on teachers also shows a positive relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction. Anggraeni and Mulyana, for example, found a positive and significant relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction in high school teachers, while Mathews et al. shows that Work-Life Balance characteristics are related to the level of teacher job satisfaction (Aruldoss et al., 2022; Mathews, 2022; Mulyana, 2026).

The Work-Life Balance dimension in this study shows that the experience of balance is not only related to work interference with personal life (demands WIPL), but also the involvement of personal life in work (demands PLIW) and the availability of resources that enable work and personal life roles to support each other (resources PLEW and resources WEPL). This is important because work-life balance is not appropriately understood simply as the ability to manage time. Its essence is the ability to manage demands and resources across roles so that one domain does not excessively drain the capacity of the other. Polat and Özdemir's research shows that the characteristics of teachers' jobs are related to the experience of Work-Life Balance, so that balance cannot be separated from the characteristics of the work carried out by teachers (Polat & Özdemir, 2020).

In the context of early childhood education (ECE) teachers, this capability allows them to carry out their work without compromising their ability to meet family and personal needs. Thus, work-life balance can be understood as a condition that connects work and non-work domains more adaptively. This perspective is important because teachers' work has the potential to extend beyond formal timeframes through lesson preparation, communication with parents, administration, and the emotional demands that accompany interactions with children. The finding that work-life balance is also negatively related to work stress reinforces this interpretation. Work-life balance serves as a protective mechanism against the accumulation of stress. When work does not continuously consume personal energy, attention, and time, teachers have space to recover. Conversely, when work demands continually spill over into personal life, the recovery process is limited and psychological distress accumulates more easily. The results of research by Kumar et al. (2021) directly support this pattern by showing that work-life balance is negatively related to job stress and positively to job satisfaction. Therefore, the influence of work-life balance on job satisfaction stems not only from the positive experiences it generates but also from its ability to prevent the formation of work stress (Aruldoss et al., 2022).

However, these findings should not be interpreted individually. Work-life balance is not entirely within teachers' self-management capabilities. Job structure, administrative burden, task allocation, organizational demands, and expectations of teachers all contribute to determining whether such balance can be achieved. Research by Polat and Özdemir (2021) shows that teacher job characteristics are related to work-life balance, so the issue of balance needs to be placed within the context of job design and characteristics, not just the teacher's personal abilities. Therefore, if early childhood education institutions want to improve job satisfaction through work-life balance, interventions should not simply consist of time management or self-management training, but rather address job design that allows teachers to have reasonable work boundaries (Polat & Özdemir, 2020). Findings regarding social support offer a different but complementary perspective. Social support is positively related to job satisfaction and negatively to job stress. However, the pattern of these relationships suggests that social support functions more strongly as a stress-buffering resource than simply as a factor directly contributing to satisfaction. The findings of Yang et al. (2022) on 617 kindergarten teachers

provide strong empirical support for this relationship. The study showed that social support was positively related to kindergarten teachers' job satisfaction and that this relationship could occur through psychological mechanisms in the form of positive coping (Yang et al., 2022).

Teachers who receive support from their families, principals, fellow teachers, and friends do not necessarily face fewer work demands. What changes is their capacity and perceptions in dealing with these demands. In the context of early childhood education (ECE), social support is crucial because teachers' work is interpersonal. Teachers deal with children who require attention and emotional regulation, parents who have expectations for their children's development, principals who direct their work, and fellow teachers who become partners in the learning process. Yang et al. (2022) also emphasized that kindergarten teachers face various responsibilities, workloads, stressful working conditions, and challenges with children's behavior, making social support a crucial resource for their work experience (Yang et al., 2022).

Principal support, for example, serves not only an administrative function but also provides legitimacy, recognition, direction, and a sense of professional security. Support from fellow teachers allows for the exchange of experiences and practical assistance when facing learning challenges. Family support enables teachers to maintain their personal functioning when work demands increase. Thus, social support forms a social resource system that expands teachers' capacity to cope with job demands. Research by Yang et al. (2022) specifically shows that support from family, friends, leaders, and colleagues is associated with job satisfaction among kindergarten teachers. This finding also explains why social support has a stronger relationship with reduced stress than directly increasing job satisfaction. Social support does not necessarily change job characteristics, but it can mitigate the psychological consequences of the work. Teachers still face demands, but they do not face them in isolation. From the JD-R perspective, this condition reflects the function of job resources, which can help individuals cope with demands and mitigate their negative impact on psychological health (Lesener et al., 2019). Research on teachers also shows that social support is an important part of the psychosocial resources associated with teacher job satisfaction and well-being (Marcionetti & Castelli, 2023).

The negative relationship between work stress and job satisfaction further clarifies this mechanism. In this study, work stress is reflected not only in psychological conditions but also in physiological and behavioral dimensions. This means that stress is an experience that affects teachers more comprehensively. In early childhood education (ECE) work, the consequences are significant because the quality of work depends heavily on the teacher's capacity to maintain patience, attention, emotional regulation, and responsiveness to children. Research by Yang et al. (2022) shows that kindergarten teachers face a variety of stressful working conditions and demands that can impact their work experience. When work pressure persists, teachers' psychological energy is depleted, so that work that was previously perceived as meaningful can begin to be viewed as a burden. Under these conditions, job satisfaction declines not solely because the objective characteristics of the job change, but because teachers' psychological capacity to derive positive experiences from the work becomes increasingly limited. Research by Padmanabhanunni and Pretorius also demonstrates the importance of stress and job satisfaction in understanding teacher psychological well-being, particularly when teachers face high role demands (Effendi et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2022). Thus, job stress is an important bridge between working conditions and teachers' subjective evaluations of their work.

The position of job stress as a mediator provides a more important theoretical contribution than simply its negative relationship with job satisfaction. The results show that the influence of Work-Life Balance and Social Support on job satisfaction is not entirely direct. Part of the effect operates through reduced job stress. In other words, teachers with better work-life balance and social support not only feel more satisfied due to positive experiences but also because they experience lower psychological distress. This mediation is partial. This means that although job stress is an important mechanism, Work-Life Balance and Social Support still contribute directly to job satisfaction. This finding is theoretically important because it suggests that teacher job satisfaction cannot be reduced to a mere consequence of low stress. Teachers can have relatively manageable stress levels but not necessarily be satisfied if they lack a good work-life balance or experience social support. Conversely, the experience of balance and feeling supported can directly lead to satisfaction even if job stress is not completely eliminated. This pattern aligns with the JD-R framework, which distinguishes between health impairment and motivational pathways in explaining the relationship between job characteristics and individual outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Lesener et al., 2019). Thus, two processes operate simultaneously. The first is a protective process, where work-life balance and social support reduce job stress. The second is a motivational process, where these two resources directly create a more

positive work experience. The integration of these two processes explains why this study's empirical model is more informative than models that only view job satisfaction as a direct consequence of several predictors.

These findings also indicate functional differences between Work-Life Balance and Social Support. Work-Life Balance is more closely linked to teachers' personal capacity to manage cross-life demands, while Social Support operates primarily through interpersonal relationships that provide emotional and instrumental support. This distinction suggests that teacher well-being requires more than one type of resource. Personal resources cannot completely replace social support, nor can social support completely address work-life imbalance. The findings of Yang et al. (2022) reinforce the importance of social support as a resource related to job satisfaction in kindergarten teachers, while research by Kumar et al. (2021) indicates that Work-Life Balance is related to job satisfaction and stress (Aruldoss et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2022).

This perspective is crucial in the context of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers in Labuhanbatu Regency. Most of the teachers in this study were at a stage in their lives where professional demands could overlap with family responsibilities. This situation makes work-life balance not merely a matter of convenience, but also an integral part of teachers' continued professional capacity. At the same time, support from family and the school environment becomes increasingly important when organizational resources are insufficient to fully meet all job demands. Therefore, PAUD teacher job satisfaction should not be understood solely through extrinsic aspects such as salary, rewards, promotions, or work facilities. The dimensions of job satisfaction in the research model do encompass these aspects, but structural findings suggest that the experience of satisfaction extends beyond material rewards. Satisfaction also relates to communication, supervision, work procedures, relationships with coworkers, the nature of the work, and benefits. In other words, teachers assess their work through a combination of what they receive from the job, how they are treated, how the work is carried out, and how it integrates with their lives. Findings by Yang et al. (2022) indicate that kindergarten teachers' job satisfaction is closely related to the social support they receive from their social environment (Yang et al., 2022).

This interpretation has important implications for early childhood education (PAUD) management. If the organization's sole goal is to increase job satisfaction through incentives, some of the mechanisms identified in this study will be overlooked. Improving teacher well-being needs to be directed at simultaneously strengthening resources and reducing sources of stress. Administrative workload management, proportional task allocation, clear work procedures, supportive communication, and opportunities for recovery should be considered as part of teacher well-being policies. This approach is consistent with the JD-R perspective, which positions job resources as a factor that can support motivation and help cope with job demands (Lesener et al., 2019). The principal holds a strategic position within this mechanism. Principal support is not only a form of interpersonal relationship but also part of the work environment design. Supportive leadership can strengthen teachers' perceptions of resourcefulness when facing demands. Conversely, poor communication, overly stressful supervision, or inequitable work distribution can diminish the function of social support and increase psychological distress. Research on kindergarten teachers indicates that support from leaders and the social environment is related to teacher job satisfaction.

Theoretically, the research findings reinforce the JD-R perspective that occupational well-being is shaped by the interaction of demands and resources. However, this study extends its application to early childhood education (ECE) teachers by demonstrating that relevant resources derive not only from work but also from the ability to manage personal life and social networks outside the organization. Thus, teacher well-being is a cross-domain phenomenon that cannot be fully explained by school characteristics. At the same time, the research model needs to be read critically. The ability of Work-Life Balance and Social Support to explain job stress is relatively limited compared to its ability to explain job satisfaction. This suggests that ECE teacher stress is a more complex phenomenon and is likely influenced by other demands not yet included in the model, such as workload, emotional demands, leadership, job security, compensation, class size, child behavior, parental involvement, and the condition of school facilities. This finding is important because it prevents the overly simplistic conclusion that strengthening work-life balance and social support will alone resolve teacher stress. Research on kindergarten teachers also suggests that various job demands can contribute to experiences of stress and job satisfaction.

These limitations also point to directions for future research. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine the temporal sequence between resources, stress, and satisfaction. Future research could also incorporate organizational characteristics and job demands as additional variables, or employ a multilevel design to differentiate the influence of individual teacher characteristics and those of early childhood education

institutions. A qualitative approach also has the potential to deepen how teachers interpret the support of family, principals, and colleagues in their daily work experiences. This research yields the understanding that early childhood education teacher job satisfaction is an outcome of the balance between teachers' resources and the psychological stress they experience. Work-Life Balance provides personal capacity to maintain the continuity of various life roles, Social Support provides relational resources to cope with work demands, and Job Stress serves as a mechanism that translates the presence or lack of these resources into experiences of job satisfaction. Partial mediation suggests that both resources operate through two pathways: directly building positive work experiences and indirectly through stress reduction. This pattern is consistent with recent findings that place work and social resources as important factors in teacher satisfaction and well-being (Marcionetti & Castelli, 2023).

Thus, the main contribution of this study is not merely to prove the relationship between Work-Life Balance, Social Support, Job Stress, and Job Satisfaction, but also to explain the psychosocial mechanisms underlying these relationships among PAUD teachers in Labuhanbatu Regency. This empirical model confirms that increasing job satisfaction is not simply achieved by increasing motivational factors, but must be accompanied by efforts to maintain teacher life balance, strengthen social support, and reduce sources of work stress. From a broader perspective, PAUD teacher well-being is not simply a matter of individual satisfaction, but rather part of the conditions that enable teachers to maintain the quality of professional engagement and the sustainability of early childhood education services.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that work-life balance and social support are positively related to job satisfaction for early childhood education teachers, while job stress is negatively related to job satisfaction. Work-life balance and social support are also negatively related to job stress. Job stress has been shown to mediate the relationship between work-life balance and social support and job satisfaction. Thus, job satisfaction for early childhood education teachers is not only related to the presence of positive conditions such as work-life balance and social support, but also to the level of psychological distress experienced by teachers. The most important finding is that social support has a relatively small direct relationship with job satisfaction, but its indirect relationship through job stress is quite significant. This suggests that the function of social support in the context of early childhood education teachers is likely more powerful as a resource that helps reduce psychological distress than simply directly increasing satisfaction. Practically, improving job satisfaction for early childhood education teachers needs to be done through a more comprehensive approach that takes into account work-life balance, strengthening social support, and reducing sources of work stress.

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