

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL AND JOB SATISFACTION: A CASE STUDY OF ECONOMICS LECTURERS AT PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract: The study aimed to explore the relationship between psychographic capital and job satisfaction among economics lecturers at private universities. Data were collected from 375 lecturers at private universities in Hanoi. Quantitative research methods were used to test research hypotheses through a linear regression model. The results showed that four dimensions of psychological capital influence the job satisfaction of economics lecturers at private universities: self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Hope had the strongest positive relationship, while optimism had the weakest positive relationship with job satisfaction among economics lecturers at private universities. Based on these findings, some recommendations are proposed to enhance the job satisfaction of economics lecturers in the future.

Keywords: Psychological capital, job satisfaction, economics lecturers, private universities, Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

As Vietnam's higher education system undergoes significant transformation towards increased autonomy, integration, and international competition, the quality of lecturers has become a key factor in determining the prestige, training effectiveness, and sustainable development of universities, especially private ones. Beyond professional factors, pedagogical skills and working conditions, positive psychological factors among faculty members also play a crucial role in maintaining motivation, performance, and professional engagement. Psychological capital (PsyCap) is an internal resource that is positive and includes four dimensions: self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Luthans et al., 2007). Many studies confirm that PsyCap can be developed through training programs and positively affect workers' attitudes, behaviors, and job performance.

Job satisfaction is a positive emotional state that results from evaluating one's job or work experience (Locke, 1976). It is a key indicator of employee contentment with their work and directly influences teaching effectiveness, organizational commitment, and long-term engagement of lecturers. According to Avey et al. (2011), PsyCap has a strong positive relationship with job satisfaction, as individuals with high PsyCap levels tend to maintain a more positive attitude, adaptability, and satisfaction toward their jobs.

Many international studies show that psychological capital has a significant positive relationship with attitudes and work outcomes, with job satisfaction being a recurring outcome. Meta-analyses and empirical research confirm that psychological capital is positively linked to satisfaction, commitment, and performance. However, much of the available evidence is gathered in corporate or public institutional settings (Nguyen & Ngo, 2020; Nguyen & Drink, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2024), with little research focusing on specific lecturers, especially those at private universities in Vietnam, where the pressure of teaching, remuneration policies, and recruitment mechanisms differ significantly from those in public institutions. It limits the ability to generalize based on existing theories. Additionally, the PsyCap scale was primarily developed in developed countries and needs to be tested for reliability and cultural suitability when applied in Vietnam.

Moreover, in private universities, especially in the field of economics, lecturers often face significant pressure related to teaching load, scientific publications, business connections, and income based on lecture hours. However, human resource management strategies aimed at developing PsyCap, such as coaching, training, or psychological capacity development programs, have received little attention. Therefore, researching and developing PsyCap is essential to enhance job satisfaction, which can improve work efficiency and faculty retention.

Therefore, this study should be conducted to analyze the relationship between psychological capital and job satisfaction of lecturers in economics at private universities in Vietnam. This study contributes to adding empirical evidence on the impact of PsyCap in the context of higher education in Vietnam. Additionally, this research provides a foundation for university administrators to develop policies for faculty development in an effective and sustainable way.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Psychological capital

Psychological capital is a key aspect of positive psychology and positive organizational behavior (Ngwenya & Pelser, 2020). It refers to a positive psychological state within individuals, representing the essence of their existence and development, and is examined through the framework of organizational behavior theory (Avey et al., 2009). Psychological capital addresses questions about who you are and what you can achieve in terms of positive growth (Avolio & Luthans, 2006). It is a state characterized by positive emotions and includes four dimensions: self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resiliency.

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's own ability and effort to accomplish tasks successfully in all situations (Wood et al., 2022). Self-efficacy provides individuals with determination and willingness to overcome challenges at work. When faced with difficult situations, self-belief helps employees stay committed, adapt, and persevere to achieve success (Nguyen & Uong, 2022).

Hope is the combination and interaction of two factors that determine the direction of a goal and the process for achieving that goal (Snyder et al., 1991). Hope can motivate each person to try to accomplish what they want in different ways, even when faced with obstacles, unlike dreaming, which merely motivates the individual to set a goal (Nguyen & Uong, 2022).

Optimism is a state of expecting the best results to come to us (Scheier et al., 2001). It explains why we interpret negative and positive situations that have happened, are happening, or are about to happen. People with high levels of optimism often have a positive attitude toward life, believe in themselves, and can easily overcome negative situations (Nguyen & Uong, 2022).

Resiliency shows a strong belief in self-improvement, finding purpose in life, and responding appropriately to necessary changes (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Resiliency is the ability of individuals to recover after negative experiences, adapt to changes, and handle pressures in life. People who are persistent are better equipped to cope with the challenges of an ever-changing work environment (Nguyen & Uong, 2022).

2.2. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a positive emotional state that results from a person's attachment to their job or work experience (Ellickson & Logsdon, 2001). They noted that this definition combines both perception (thought) and emotion. Additionally, Agyepong et al. (2004) define job satisfaction as a set of emotions that an individual experiences. A person with high job satisfaction will have positive feelings about work, while someone who is dissatisfied with their job will experience negative thoughts, which can negatively affect their work. According to Nguyen and Uong (2022), job satisfaction is the overall attitude of employees that includes various aspects of the job. Research by Nguyen and Tran (2021) shows that job satisfaction reflects the emotional state resulting from employees' evaluations and attitudes during work or based on work outcomes. If employees feel satisfied, they will be content with their results, and higher satisfaction can motivate employees to perform tasks more effectively, thereby increasing organizational productivity (Chang & Lee, 2007). Thus, the job satisfaction of economics lecturers is the positive emotional state and overall contentment with aspects of teaching, research, and service work in higher education, which results from comparing personal expectations to the actual professional experiences.

2.3. Analytical framework

This study employs foundational theories, including positive organizational behavior and the two-factor theory. Positive organizational behavior, developed by Luthans et al. (2007), emphasizes harnessing and developing positive psychological states within the organization. Psychological capital is identified as a resource that can be measured, developed, and used to enhance employee performance, attitudes, and positive behaviors.

Complementing positive organizational behavior is the two-factor theory developed by Herzberg (1959). This theory suggests that two groups of factors influence job satisfaction. The motivators include achievements, recognition, the nature of work, responsibilities, and opportunities for promotion. Hygiene factors include policies, working conditions, income, and relationships with colleagues and superiors. Psychological capital is regarded as an intrinsic resource that can impact both groups of factors, helping lecturers feel more positive about their work, increasing endogenous motivation, and reducing the negative influence of hygiene factors (Luthans et al., 2007). Figure 1 shows the analysis framework as follows:

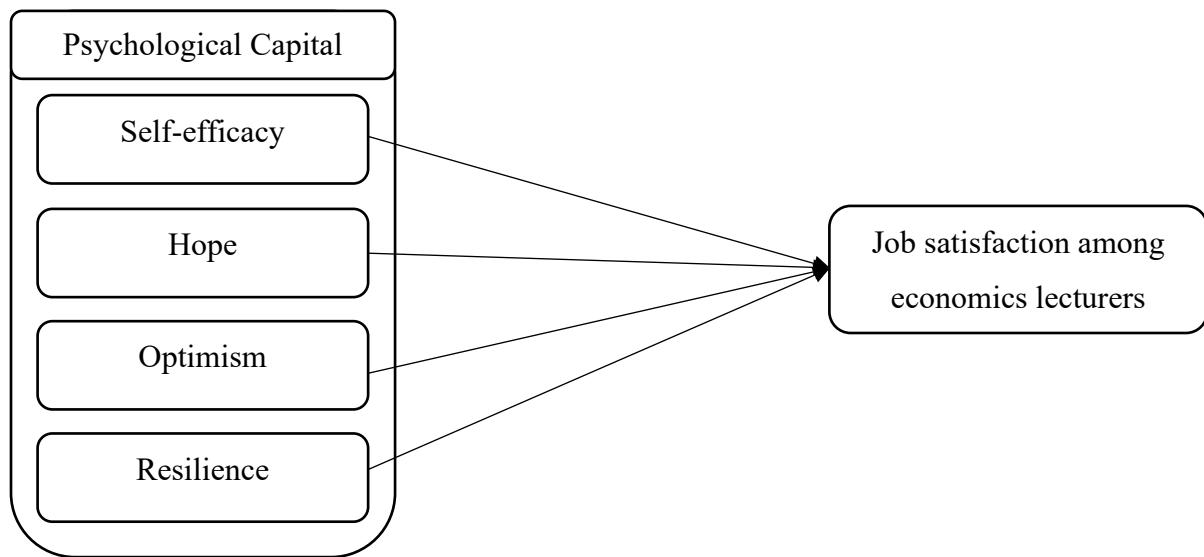


Figure 1: Analytical framework

Source: Proposed by the authors

2.4. Hypothesis development

In an academic setting, faculty with a high level of confidence will trust in their ability to teach, research, and manage the classroom. When they believe they can complete their tasks and achieve good results, they feel a sense of self-worth and professional success (Nguyen & Uong, 2022). According to Luthans et al. (2007), individuals with high levels of self-efficacy tend to set higher goals, exert more effort, and stay more motivated, which directly improves job satisfaction. For economics lecturers at private universities, where research capacity, the ability to innovate teaching methods, and high competitive pressure are required, self-efficacy is a key factor that helps them maintain positive emotions and reduce professional stress. Based on the above arguments, the research hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H1: Self-efficacy will be positively related to job satisfaction among economics lecturers.

According to Snyder et al. (2002), hope reflects the ability to set goals, find ways to reach those goals, and stay motivated when facing obstacles. Lecturers with high levels of hope often see difficulties at work as impossible challenges, rather than as barriers. They tend to create multiple strategies to achieve their teaching or research goals while keeping a positive mental state during the process. In private education, where opportunities for advancement and pay can vary based on performance, faculty with strong hopes will have a clearer sense of their purpose and career prospects. Studies by Peterson and Byron (2008) and Nguyen and Uong (2022) show that hope helps employees maintain a sense of control and look forward to the future, which improves their current job satisfaction. Based on the above arguments, the research hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H2: Hope will be positively related to job satisfaction among economics lecturers.

Optimism is the tendency to expect positive results in the present and future (Carver & Scheier, 2014). Optimists tend to see failure as temporary and manageable, thus maintaining a positive attitude even in high-pressure environments. In teaching and research, optimism helps faculty stay motivated, believe in the value of their efforts, and recover quickly from negative experiences such as students not being interested or research topics being rejected. Research by Luthans et al. (2007), Nguyen and Uong (2022) shows that people with high levels of optimism are more satisfied with their jobs because they can interpret situations positively and maintain a sense of control. For economics lecturers, an optimistic attitude also helps them easily adapt to changes in the training program and the need to innovate teaching methods. Based on the above arguments, the research hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H3: Optimism will be positively related to job satisfaction among economics lecturers.

In a private university setting, lecturers face high workload pressures, teaching innovations, scientific research, and internal competition. Highly resilient faculty members often view failure as an opportunity to learn and grow, rather than as a reason for discouragement or burnout. Research by Tugade and Fredrickson (2004), Nguyen and Uong (2022), confirms that individuals with strong resilience not only handle negative emotions effectively but also stay optimistic, which enhances their job satisfaction. Therefore, in the context of economics lecturers at private universities, resilience functions as a "psychological shield," helping them overcome career pressures and sustain job satisfaction. Based on the above arguments, the research hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H4: Resilience will be positively related to job satisfaction among economics lecturers.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Measurement scales

According to the research model presented by the authors in Figure 1, the 5-level Likert scale was used to assess the level of consent among the lecturer participants in the survey. The scale references dimensions of psychological capital from the study by Nguyen and Uong (2022). The job satisfaction scale is based on research by Nguyen and Uong (2023). The items of the scale are detailed in Table 1.

3.2. Data collection

The author conducted a survey of economics lecturers at private universities in Hanoi using a convenient Google Form survey. Regarding sample size, based on Hair et al.'s (2010) criteria for exploratory factor analysis, the ratio of observations to measurement variables should be at least 5:1, and ideally 10:1. Therefore, the authors used a convenient sampling method with a minimum sample size of 140 and an ideal sample size of 280. However, to reduce the average standard error, they increased the sample size by distributing the questionnaire to 750 economics lecturers. The study was carried out from May to August 2025, involving 435 lecturers who participated in the survey. The respondents' participation was voluntary. After screening, 375 response sheets were suitable for analysis, representing an 86.2% response rate. Among the respondents, 66.67% were female, while men made up only 33.33%. Regarding education levels, 6.67% of respondents held a master's degree, 77.33% had a doctoral degree, and 16.00% possessed an associate professor or professor degree.

3.3. Data analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS 26, including descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha, exploratory factor analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Cronbach's Alpha and exploratory factor analysis

The results of Cronbach's Alpha test in Table 1 show that the scales are above 0.7 and that none of the observed variables have a corrected item-total correlation coefficient below 0.3. Therefore, all scales meet the requirements of Cronbach's Alpha reliability and have been included in the factor analysis (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 1: The results of Cronbach's Alpha

| Scales | Sign | Items | Cronbach's Alpha | Corrected item-total correlation |
|---------------|------|---|------------------|----------------------------------|
| Self-efficacy | S1 | I am confident to find solutions to long-standing work problems. | 0.807 | 0.699 |
| | S2 | I am confident to present my work to the leader. | | 0.584 |
| | S3 | I am confident to discuss work with colleagues. | | 0.607 |
| | S4 | I am confident to set work goals for myself. | | 0.712 |
| | S5 | I am confident to discuss and contribute ideas to complete my work tasks. | | 0.668 |
| | S6 | I am confident to exchange and contact people. | | 0.654 |
| Hope | H1 | I have many ways to deal with difficult situations at work. | 0.811 | 0.636 |
| | H2 | I actively pursue work goals. | | 0.655 |
| | H3 | I think there are many ways to solve a problem. | | 0.700 |
| | H4 | I feel myself quite successful at work. | | 0.707 |
| | H5 | I have many ways to achieve work goals. | | 0.616 |
| | H6 | I achieve my work goals. | | 0.632 |
| Optimism | O1 | I always expect good things if work is not good. | 0.809 | 0.658 |
| | O2 | I am always optimistic about my work. | | 0.689 |
| | O3 | I am optimistic about my future as it relates to my work. | | 0.536 |
| | O4 | I always think that mistakes at work are inevitable. | | 0.602 |
| | O5 | I love my job because it brings many things to contribute to society. | | 0.618 |

| Scales | Sign | Items | Cronbach's Alpha | Corrected item-total correlation |
|------------------|------|--|------------------|----------------------------------|
| | O6 | I am always optimistic about unlucky things happening at work. | | 0.600 |
| Resilience | R1 | I can do many things at the same time. | 0.821 | 0.482 |
| | R2 | I have many ways to overcome all difficulties at work. | | 0.505 |
| | R3 | I can overcome the pressure at work. | | 0.611 |
| | R4 | I overcome difficulties thanks to my experiences. | | 0.629 |
| | R5 | I always give my best effort to overcome all difficulties at work. | | 0.589 |
| | R6 | I always complete all the assigned tasks. | | 0.571 |
| Job satisfaction | JS1 | I love my current job. | 0.799 | 0.682 |
| | JS2 | I have found a suitable job. | | 0.661 |
| | JS3 | I feel satisfied when working at the university. | | 0.613 |
| | JS4 | I feel my work very interesting. | | 0.579 |

Source: Analysis results from SPSS 26

The factor analysis of the independent variables, conducted with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of 0.854 (exceeding the threshold of 0.5) and a Bartlett's test significance value (Sig) of 0.000 (less than 0.05), indicates suitability for analysis. The eigenvalues surpass 1, the factor loadings exceed 0.5, and the 24 observed variables have been initially grouped into four factors: resilience, hope, self-efficacy, and optimism. Furthermore, the total variance explained by these factors is 67.49%, exceeding the minimum criterion of 50%, indicating that these four factors account for 67.49% of the data variability (see Table 2) (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 2: EFA of independent variables

| KMO = 0.854 | | | | |
|-----------------|--------|--------------------|-------|----------|
| Bartlett's Test | | Approx. Chi-square | | 1839.380 |
| | | df | | 689 |
| | | Sig. | | 0.000 |
| Items | Factor | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| R1 | 0.894 | | | 4 |
| R4 | 0.887 | | | |
| R5 | 0.863 | | | |
| R3 | 0.855 | | | |
| R2 | 0.847 | | | |
| R6 | 0.833 | | | |
| H1 | | 0.897 | | |
| H4 | | 0.883 | | |
| H3 | | 0.879 | | |
| H2 | | 0.860 | | |
| H6 | | 0.851 | | |
| H5 | | 0.845 | | |
| S3 | | | 0.893 | |
| S1 | | | 0.888 | |
| S4 | | | 0.872 | |
| S2 | | | 0.867 | |
| S5 | | | 0.850 | |
| S6 | | | 0.842 | |
| O2 | | | | 0.895 |
| O4 | | | | 0.881 |
| O5 | | | | 0.870 |
| O1 | | | | 0.861 |
| O3 | | | | 0.849 |
| O6 | | | | 0.830 |

Eigenvalue = 1.893, % of Variance = 67.49%

Source: Analysis results from SPSS 26

The results of the exploratory factor analysis of the dependent variable show that the KMO of 0.762 exceeds 0.5, and the Sig of Bartlett's test is 0.000, which is less than 0.05, indicating that the factor analysis is appropriate. One factor was extracted with an Eigenvalue greater than 1, and the total variance explained is 67.83%, which is above 50%. Therefore, this factor accounts for 67.83% of the variance in the data of the four observed variables (see Table 3) (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 3: EFA of the dependent variable

| KMO = 0.854 | | |
|------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Bartlett's Test | Approx. Chi-square | 1839.380 |
| | df | 689 |
| | Sig. | 0.000 |
| Scale | Items | Loadings |
| Job satisfaction | JS2 | 0.898 |
| | JS1 | 0.882 |
| | JS3 | 0.875 |
| | JS4 | 0.860 |

Source: Analysis results from SPSS 26

4.2. Correlation and regression analysis

The results of the correlation analysis showed that the significance level between the independent and dependent variables was 0.05. Therefore, there is a linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Self-efficacy has the highest correlation ($r = 0.573$), and optimism has the lowest correlation ($r = 0.516$). Thus, the research scales are satisfactory for inclusion in regression analysis. Additionally, there is a linear correlation among the independent variables, so multicollinearity will be tested in the regression analysis (Table 4).

Table 4: Correlation analysis

| | JS | S | H | O | R |
|----|----------|----------|----------|----------|---|
| JS | 1 | | | | |
| S | 0.573*** | 1 | | | |
| H | 0.535*** | 0.413*** | 1 | | |
| O | 0.516*** | 0.425** | 0.512** | 1 | |
| R | 0.520*** | 0.501*** | 0.489*** | 0.500*** | 1 |

***significant at $p < 0.001$, **significant at $p < 0.01$

Notes: JS = Job satisfaction, S = Self-efficacy, H = Hope, O = Optimism, R = Resilience

Source: Analysis results from SPSS 26

The results of the regression analysis showed that R^2 was 0.683 and the adjusted R^2 was 0.655, indicating that 65.5% of the variability in job satisfaction among economics lecturers at private universities was explained by the independent variables in the model. Additionally, the Durbin-Watson coefficient of 1.682 is within the range of 1.5 to 2.5, so the result does not violate the assumption of first-order autocorrelation (see Table 5).

Table 5: Summary Model

| Model | R | R ² | Adjusted R ² | Std. Error of the Estimate | Durbin-Watson |
|-------|-------|----------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | 0.726 | 0.683 | 0.655 | 0.322 | 1.682 |

Source: Analysis results from SPSS 26

The F test indicates that the Sig value of 0.000 is below 0.05, confirming the regression model's suitability (see Table 6).

Table 6: ANOVA

| Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------|----------------|---------|-------------|--------|---------|
| 1 | Regression | 76.291 | 4 | 11.921 | 103.289 |
| | Residual | 38.011 | 370 | 0.982 | |
| | Total | 114.302 | 374 | | |

Source: Analysis results from SPSS 26

The analysis results in Table 7 show that VIF is less than 10, indicating no multicollinearity issue. Additionally, the significance (Sig) of the t-test for the four independent variables is below 0.05, meaning these variables are statistically significant and affect the dependent variable. Furthermore, the regression coefficients of the independent variables are positive, suggesting a positive impact on the dependent variable. Therefore, the four research hypotheses from H1 to H4 are accepted.

Table 7: The results of regression model

| Model | Unstandardized coefficients | | Standardized coefficients Beta | t | Sig. | Collinearity statistics | |
|-------|-----------------------------|-------|-----------------------------------|-------|-------|-------------------------|-------|
| | B | SD | | | | Tolerance | VIF |
| 1 | (Constant) | 0.382 | 0.182 | 2.911 | 0.002 | | |
| | S | 0.316 | 0.067 | 3.821 | 0.012 | 0.738 | 1.739 |
| | H | 0.321 | 0.056 | 3.271 | 0.003 | 0.717 | 1.802 |
| | O | 0.222 | 0.048 | 2.901 | 0.011 | 0.702 | 1.831 |
| | R | 0.311 | 0.059 | 2.912 | 0.004 | 0.690 | 1.792 |

a. Dependent Variable: JS

Notes: JS = Job satisfaction, S = Self-efficacy, H = Hope, O = Optimism, R = Resilience

Source: Analysis results from SPSS 26

The regression equation can be expressed as follows from the regression coefficients:

$$JS = 0.413H + 0.401S + 0.378R + 0.302O$$

5. DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the regression results, the authors confirmed that four aspects of psychological capital have a positive relationship with the job satisfaction of economics lecturers at private universities in Vietnam: self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Compared to previous studies, the findings of this study are similar to Nguyen and Uong (2022), as both emphasize the importance of psychological capital in determining job satisfaction. This indicates that individuals with high levels of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience tend to stay motivated, manage negative emotions well, see challenges as opportunities for growth, and maintain higher job satisfaction. Our findings are also consistent with the theoretical framework of positive organizational behavior by Luthans et al. (2007), which highlights the role of positive psychological competencies in shaping individual and organizational effectiveness.

This study theoretically advances the application of positive organizational behavior theory within the context of private higher education in Vietnam, an area that has received less research compared to the public sector. The findings confirm that the psychological capital model can effectively explain faculty job satisfaction and provide additional empirical support for previous international studies.

Practically, the study results offer valuable insights for the leadership of private universities to recognize psychological capital as a key resource for developing lecturers. Based on these findings, the following implications are suggested:

Firstly, hope acts as the strongest internal motivator to guide faculty toward long-term career goals. Therefore, schools should establish clear goal systems, promote career development roadmaps, and highlight promotion opportunities so that lecturers have a specific direction for their future. Creating mentoring programs between experienced and new lecturers is also an effective way to help them maintain faith and hope during their work. Additionally, fostering an open academic environment that encourages and supports innovative ideas will help faculty feel a sense of sustainable growth for both themselves and the organization.

Secondly, private universities need to focus on developing training programs to enhance the professional skills, modern teaching techniques, and research capabilities of economics lecturers. Organizing training courses on active learning methods, the use of information technology, and innovative training approaches helps lecturers strengthen their confidence in their abilities. Additionally, recognizing achievements through mechanisms such as rewarding, honoring, and empowering initiatives at work will foster trust from leaders, thereby increasing self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

Thirdly, private universities need to foster a positive organizational culture, encouraging cooperation, recognition, and mutual respect internally. A friendly work environment, where information is clearly communicated and feedback is constructive, will help teachers maintain a healthy mental state. Extracurricular activities, team-building programs, or experience-sharing workshops also help reduce stress and create a space that promotes an optimistic attitude. When faculty members trust in the school's development and feel secure about their careers, they tend to be more satisfied with their current jobs.

Finally, given that economics lecturers often face high pressure from teaching, research, and accreditation, building resilience is crucial. Schools should offer training courses on stress management, work-life balance, and establish psychological support systems for lecturers. Additionally, fostering a supportive and cohesive work environment where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities will help educators overcome challenges and sustain career motivation. When they develop strong resilience, lecturers not only experience greater job satisfaction but also contribute more effectively to the overall growth of the school.

6. CONCLUSION

The study identified dimensions of psychological capital that influence job satisfaction among economics lecturers at private universities: self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Hope has the strongest positive correlation with job satisfaction, followed by self-efficacy, resilience, and finally optimism. Although some findings have been obtained, the study has limitations, such as restricting the sample to private universities in a single city. Therefore, future research should broaden the scope to include other provinces and cities in Vietnam to enhance representativeness. Additionally, the criteria used to measure job satisfaction are predominantly based on traditional scales from the field of organizational behavior, which may not fully capture the unique aspects of the higher education environment, where lecturers' work includes teaching, research, community service, and professional development. Future studies should create a dedicated scale better suited to the specific professional characteristics of lecturers.

Ethical approval and informed consent

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the thanh Dong University campus ethics committee, under reference number 113/QD-DHTD. Verbal consent was acquired from all participants involved in the study before conducting structured interviews and a survey. Participants were informed verbally about the study's purpose, the nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Verbal consent was considered appropriate due to the study population's literacy levels and cultural context. the enumerators meticulously documented the consent process through detailed notes taken during the interviews. Verbal consent transcripts were created based on these notes from the participants' interviews. this approach ensured that participants were adequately informed and had provided consent for their participation.

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Data availability statement

The corresponding author can readily provide the datasets created and analyzed for this work. therefore, inquiries regarding the data that is available in this paper should be directed to the corresponding author.

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