


**THE CHALLENGES AND ISSUES FACED BY THE NEW APPOINTED ACADEMIC STAFFS OF THE UNIVERSITY IN THE EMERGING MARKET**

Muhamad Ali Imran Kamarudin<sup>A</sup>, Nur Nadia Adjrina Kamarruddin<sup>B</sup>, Azahari Ramli<sup>C</sup>, Safwan Marwin Abdul Murad<sup>D</sup>



ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article history:</b></p> <p>Received 21 November 2022</p> <p>Accepted 30 January 2023</p>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> The aim of this research is to explore the issues and challenges faced by the new appointed academic staffs of a public university in Malaysia.</p>
<p><b>Keywords:</b></p> <p>Academic Staffs; University; Higher Educational Institution (HEI); Issue and Challenges; Key Performance Indicators (KPIs); Staff Development.</p>	<p><b>Theoretical framework:</b> The appointment of the new academic staffs in the university offers a whole new paradigm and dynamic while could be beneficial for the universities' ecosystem entirely. Among the benefits are contributing new ideas and implementation for improvement as well as fostering positive attitude within the environment. However, the staffs could encounter with various issues and challenges at the entry stage which could deter his or her development further.</p> <p><b>Design/methodology/approach:</b> A qualitative approach is employed in this research where the academic staffs with less than 3 years' working experience were interviewed in order to understanding the obstacles faced. The data gathered is analyzed using NVivo12 software.</p>
	<p><b>Findings:</b> The findings of this research revealed that issues pertaining Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), teaching and learning which involved unfamiliar subjects and issue surrounding online classes, difficulties in publication and research component due to lack in knowledge, skills and experience, allyship in academic working environment as well as juggling between the demanding workload of teaching and administrative works with completion of the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education Learning and Teaching (PGDHILT) course.</p> <p><b>Research, Practical &amp; Social implications:</b> This research offers some practical significances particularly to the university's management and the newly appointed academic staffs on board. The identification of issue and challenges among newly appointed staffs is significant in finding solutions.</p> <p><b>Originality/value:</b> As a practical implication, this research paper sheds new light for both the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) Malaysia and the university's management to formulate a handful and effective training and development program to smoothen the transition process of the new appointed academic staffs into the academic world in the university.</p> <p>Doi: <a href="https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2023.v8i1.1158">https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2023.v8i1.1158</a></p>

<sup>A</sup>Senior Lecturer, School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia.

E-mail: [aliimran@uum.edu.my](mailto:aliimran@uum.edu.my) Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2157-237X>

<sup>B</sup>Senior Lecturer, School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia.

E-mail: [adjrina@uum.edu.my](mailto:adjrina@uum.edu.my) Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6413-410X>

<sup>C</sup>Senior Lecturer, School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia.

E-mail: [arie@uum.edu.my](mailto:arie@uum.edu.my) Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3293-6909>

<sup>D</sup>Senior Lecturer, School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia.

E-mail: [marwin@uum.edu.my](mailto:marwin@uum.edu.my) Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0763-4976>

## OS DESAFIOS E QUESTÕES ENFRENTADOS PELOS NOVOS CARGOS ACADÊMICOS NOMEADOS DA UNIVERSIDADE NO MERCADO EMERGENTE

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** O objetivo desta pesquisa é explorar as questões e desafios enfrentados pelos novos funcionários acadêmicos nomeados de uma universidade pública na Malásia.

**Estrutura teórica:** A nomeação do novo pessoal acadêmico na universidade oferece um paradigma totalmente novo e dinâmico, ao mesmo tempo em que poderia ser totalmente benéfico para o ecossistema da universidade. Entre os benefícios estão a contribuição de novas idéias e a implementação de melhorias, assim como a promoção de uma atitude positiva dentro do ambiente. Entretanto, os funcionários poderiam se deparar com várias questões e desafios na fase de entrada, o que poderia deter seu desenvolvimento ainda mais.

**Design/metodologia/abordagem:** Uma abordagem qualitativa é empregada nesta pesquisa onde os funcionários acadêmicos com menos de 3 anos de experiência de trabalho foram entrevistados a fim de compreender os obstáculos enfrentados. Os dados coletados são analisados utilizando o software NVivo12.

**Descobertas:** Os resultados desta pesquisa revelaram que questões relativas aos Indicadores de Desempenho Chave (KPIs), ensino e aprendizagem que envolviam assuntos não familiares e questões relativas às aulas on-line, dificuldades na publicação e componente de pesquisa devido à falta de conhecimento, habilidades e experiência, alianças no ambiente de trabalho acadêmico, bem como malabarismos entre a carga de trabalho exigente do ensino e trabalhos administrativos com a conclusão do curso de Pós-Graduação em Ensino Superior de Aprendizagem e Ensino (PGDHELT).

**Pesquisa, implicações práticas e sociais:** Esta pesquisa oferece alguns significados práticos particularmente para a administração da universidade e para o pessoal acadêmico recém-nomeado a bordo. A identificação de problemas e desafios entre o pessoal recém-nomeado é significativa na busca de soluções.

**Originalidade/valor:** Como uma implicação prática, este trabalho de pesquisa lança uma nova luz tanto para o Ministério de Educação Superior (MOHE) da Malásia quanto para a administração da universidade para formular um programa de treinamento e desenvolvimento eficaz para facilitar o processo de transição do novo pessoal acadêmico nomeado para o mundo acadêmico da universidade.

**Palavras-chave:** Pessoal Acadêmico, Universidade, Instituição de Ensino Superior (IES), Questão e Desafios, Indicadores-Chave de Desempenho (KPIs), Desenvolvimento do Pessoal.

## RETOS Y DESAFÍOS A LOS QUE SE ENFRENTA EL PERSONAL ACADÉMICO RECIÉN NOMBRADO DE LA UNIVERSIDAD EN EL MERCADO EMERGENTE

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** El objetivo de esta investigación es explorar los problemas y retos a los que se enfrenta el personal académico recién nombrado de una universidad pública de Malasia.

**Marco teórico:** El nombramiento de nuevo personal académico en la universidad ofrece un paradigma y una dinámica totalmente nuevos, al tiempo que podría ser beneficioso para el ecosistema universitario en su totalidad. Entre los beneficios se encuentran la aportación de nuevas ideas y la puesta en práctica de mejoras, así como el fomento de una actitud positiva en el entorno. Sin embargo, el personal podría encontrarse con diversos problemas y retos en la fase de entrada que podrían frenar su desarrollo posterior.

**Diseño/metodología/enfoque:** En esta investigación se emplea un enfoque cualitativo y se entrevista al personal académico con menos de tres años de experiencia laboral para conocer los obstáculos a los que se enfrenta. Los datos recogidos se analizan con el programa NVivo12.

**Resultados:** Los resultados de esta investigación revelaron que los problemas relativos a los Indicadores Clave de Rendimiento (KPI), la enseñanza y el aprendizaje que implican temas desconocidos y la cuestión en torno a las clases en línea, las dificultades en la publicación y el componente de investigación debido a la falta de conocimientos, habilidades y experiencia, alianzas en el entorno de trabajo académico, así como hacer malabares entre la exigente carga de trabajo de la enseñanza y los trabajos administrativos con la realización del Diploma de Postgrado en Educación Superior Aprendizaje y Enseñanza (PGDHELT) curso.

**Investigación, implicaciones prácticas y sociales:** Esta investigación ofrece algunas implicaciones prácticas, en particular para la dirección de la universidad y el personal académico recién nombrado. La identificación de problemas y retos entre el personal recién nombrado es importante para encontrar soluciones.

**Originalidad/valor:** Como implicación práctica, este trabajo de investigación arroja nueva luz para que tanto el Ministerio de Educación Superior (MOHE) de Malasia como la dirección de la universidad formulen un programa de formación y desarrollo útil y eficaz para facilitar el proceso de transición del personal académico recién nombrado al mundo académico de la universidad.

**Palabras clave:** Personal Académico, Universidad, Institución de Educación Superior (IES), Problemas y Desafíos, Indicadores Clave de Rendimiento (KPI), Desarrollo del Personal.

## INTRODUCTION

The university's lecturers hold a significant role in pursuing the institutional and the national agenda. The roles include developing, educating and equipping the students with knowledge, skills, values and also personal development (Wong & Chiu, 2019). Indeed, the role of the university lecturer is not limited to the teaching and learning only, but it also covers the aspects of research, supervision., management, administration and many others (Han, Yin, Wang, & Zhang, 2020; Bexley, James & Arkoudis, 2011).

The appointment of the new academic staff is one of the mechanisms used by the university in their recruitment process. The appointment allows fresh perspectives to be injected in the system while could help in contributing new ideas and implementation as well as able to foster positive attitude within the environment (Ali, A'tikah, Panatik & Zainal Badri, 2020). Moreover, Ali et al. (2020) posited that it is crucial for the university to have such appointment to facilitate and share the aspiration in supporting the tertiary education agenda at the national level set by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE).

Since its inception in 16 February 1984, the Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) has served the country in producing future talents within community for nearly 40 years ([www.uum.edu.my](http://www.uum.edu.my)). UUM has its own procedure in recruiting their academic staffs where they apply two approaches, i) the appointment of an academic staff through fellowship program named 'Tutor Without Scheme', and ii) direct recruitment of the external candidates through screening and interviewing process. Both appointments will be granted to the senior lecturer of DS51 upon successfully met the criteria.

Upon the appointment, the staff will be placed under probation within one (1) to three (3) years and they will need to fulfil the number of requirements as stated in the offer letter issued by the Registrar Office. Such requirements could prove to be difficult and demanding at certain point where these new appointed academic staffs might lack in various areas of teaching experience, professional experiences and exposure to the academic world in the university.

Problem Statement is the the appointment of the new academic staff in the university is significant to allow new fresh ideas while injecting positive working culture within the university's environment (Ali et al., 2020). However, these new staffs could face with various issues and challenges in carrying their role as a lecturer, thus affecting their performance (Subarto, Solihin & Qurbani, 2021; Flux, Hassett & Callanan, 2020). According to Subarto et

al. (2021), from the external perspective, the issues pertaining to the working environment, the faculty's leadership as well the organizational culture are among the challenges faced by the university's academic staffs.

In a study conducted by Han et al. (2020), it is posited that the academic staffs are bound to be a multi-dimensional tasker which involved teaching, students' supervision, publication, research and development as well as administrative works. Thus, according to Bexley et al. (2011), the task to become a competent academic staff is rather challenging due to lack of knowledge, skills, exposure as well as experiences in the academic world. Such issues and challenges have a significant impact towards the staff's productivity as well as job satisfaction (Chan, 2018; Bexley et al., 2011).

Moreover, the global health issue of the Covid-19 pandemic has shaped a dramatic change in the global university's teaching and learning landscape (Knight et al., 2021; Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Malik et al., 2017). According to Adedoyin and Soykan (2020), such changes including the implementation of full online learning session where the academic staffs of the universities and HEIs need to conduct their classes online using various channels and platforms. Thus, it could give extra pressure among the new academic staffs to familiar with the stuffs while adapting to the new environment (Knight et al., 2021).

Based on the discussion over various issues and challenges faced by the academician especially among new appointed academic staffs in the university, it is worthwhile to understand the real issues and problems faced by them. From there, the relevant and practical solutions could be recommended to address the issues attentively.

Background of the Study is Universities or Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in all countries are responsible for producing future leaders as well as providing future direction to the nation. However, the institutions face multi-perspectives changes which challenging the current practices and organizational structures (Malik, Bjorkqvist & Osterman, 2017). This work is justified by providing the challenges and issues faced by the new academic staff of the university.

Research objectives for this research are to understand the issues and challenges faced by the new appointed academic staffs of Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). To propose recommendation based on the findings gathered on the issues and challenges faced by the new appointed academic staffs of UUM.

Research questions for this research are: 1. What are the issues and challenges faced by the new appointed academic staffs of UUM?

What is the propose recommendation based on the findings gathered on the issues and challenges faced by the new appointed academic staffs of UUM?

Significance of the Research: From the policy perspective, the current human resource policy specifically in the recruitment of the new academic staffs in university less emphasizing on the holistic development. The early struggles faced by the new appointed academic staffs need to be acknowledged and addressed accordingly. This will help to set up a conducive working environment while increasing the staffs' motivation and productivity in supporting the aspiration of the national's higher education. Therefore, this research offers a significant meaning for the government (MOHE) to review the current policy for the future benefits.

Moreover, this research offers some practical significances particularly to the university's management and the newly appointed academic staffs on board. The identification of issue and challenges among newly appointed staffs is significant in finding solutions. From the, proactive actions and solutions can be done, for instance the implementation of buddy system program as proposed by studies by Thalluri et al., 2014, and Andrews and Clark (2011) to be introduced in the university in order to facilitate the transition stage of the newly appointed academic staffs.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Early Struggles at The Workplace**

Past studies reported that various issues and challenges faced by the newly appointed staff at the workplace across fields and industries. The challenges and issues ranging from the staffs' emotions, work adaptation, supervisors' expectations, to the job demands and working environment (Flux, Hassett & Callanan, 2020; Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2020; Liang, Lin & Wu, 2018; Sabagh, Hall & Saroyan, 2018; Tadic Vujcic, Oerlemans & Bakker, 2017; Burgess, 2016; Reina & Reina, 2006). Indeed, these challenges could affect the staffs' motivation and productivity which might hinder their job performance and be the cause of the staff's turnover eventually (Chan, 2018).

It is an understandable fact that starting a new job in a new working environment offers series of challenges and issues to an individual regardless of their previous experience. There is no exception in the higher education institutions (HEIs) sector, as the new staffs have to deal with all those sorts of challenges and issues in performing their job (Khan & Anwar, 2012; Chan, 2018; Ghasemy et al., 2018; Remmik & Karm, 2012; Bexley, James & Arkoudis, 2011). Remmik and Karm (2012) claimed that the life of new appointed academic staff in university often starts without any formal preparation either for

teaching, administration work or even for research works. It somehow affects the smooth transition of the new staff into which is expected to produce a steady and stable working environment in the university.

While according to Ghasemy et al., (2018), the globalization and multimedia explosion which requires constant changes and renewal in many aspects of life from time to time makes the role of academics even more challenging. Ghasemy et al., (2018) added that academicians are expected to work harder to meet the high demand in education while being observant of the latest developments in management, leadership, educational goals and resource management.

In most of the university cases, the new academic staff are expected to immediately carry out the academic tasks given in terms of academic teaching, student supervision, conducting research, administering the examination, and other administrative tasks within the university (Anijaobi-Idem & Archibong, 2012). However, Anijaobi-Idem and Archibong (2012) highlighted that there are few big questions pondered on the new academic recruits in terms of the capability in carrying out such assignments and whether they are adequately prepared and well-equipped considering their different background and previous experiences.

Furthermore, the challenges faced by academics in tertiary education is exemplified in regards to the roles expected in academic teaching, research and administration (Ehido, Halim, & Awang, 2019; Bexley et al., 2011). A study conducted by Bexley et al., (2011) claimed that there is only a small number of academics believed that they could balance meet the expectation of the demanding task of academic teaching, research and administration roles to the level that is expected from their respective institutions. Bexley et al. (2011) used a strong word of not manageable in describing the workload of almost half the respondents of the study which is among academic staff.

This scenario could be worse should the new academics appointed are either new to the academic line or even fresh graduates with lacking in knowledge, skills and experience. They are not only at a disadvantage position to complete the multi-tasks given, also creating loose conditions in providing quality education (Rusmin, 2017). From here, it indicates a tough way awaits the new academic staff coming into the picture in supporting the national tertiary education agenda and a little support from peers or colleagues is certainly helpful to facilitate their development at the early stage of their career (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2020; Cross & Rigden, 2002).

## **Issues and Challenges Among New Academic Staffs in Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM)**

A preliminary study conducted among new academic staffs of DS51 revealed that there are few issues and challenges faced at the early stage of their career. Such difficulties in carrying their roles and responsibilities which somehow affecting their productivity and performance subsequently (Dayagbil, Palompon, Garcia & Olvido, 2021; Ehido et al., 2019; Rusmin, 2017; Basarudin, Yeon, Yaacob & Abd Rahman, 2016).

Issue on teaching and learning are surfaced especially when it comes to the staffs without prior teaching experience prior to the appointment in the university (Almaiah, Al-Khasawneh & Althunibat, 2020; Yunus et al., 2020; Sawarkar, Scherz-shouval, Denzel & Saarikangas, 2019). Undeniably, some of the new staffs are relatively young and fresh graduates from their undergraduate, postgraduate and doctorate studies. It is noteworthy to note that they have almost zero-working experience, let alone experience in the education and teaching line. The staffs are not sure on how teaching and learning session should be carried out and what is the most effective way in delivering his or her the class (Almaiah et al., 2020).

Furthermore, another major issue faced by the new academia is relating to research and publication (Fauzi, Nya-Ling, Thursamy & Ojo, 2019; Ghabban, Selamat & Ibrahim, 2018; Dhillon, Ibrahim & Selamat, 2015). Studies by Fauzi et al., (2019) and Ghabban et al., (2018) posited that both elements are crucial not only for obtaining the confirmation in service, but also serves as a dissemination and advanced the knowledge and its application to others in particular field. Indeed, publication and research come with a set of specific skills including academic writing skills, analytical skills, problem solving skills and leadership skills which needs to be acquired by an academician (Mwesigwa, Tusiime & Ssekiziyivu, 2020; Salleh, Amin & Mamat, 2017). Unfortunately, at this juncture, the exposure for the new staffs is rather limited which makes it tough for them to produce the outcomes as expected. In fact, the application process of any research grants available could be a difficult task to be completed by them without any guidance and helps from a senior member in the faculty.

Last but not least, the supervision element in the academic staff's roles posed a rather unique challenge to the new appointed staffs (Gruzdev, Terentev & Dzhafarova, 2020; Roberts & Seaman, 2018). A study conducted by Roberts and Seaman (2018) posited that as an academic supervisor, the staffs are required to help, guide and monitoring the progress of the students (supervisees) till completion. Besides, this task involves the dynamic of

relationship between supervisor-supervisee relationship which needs to be dealt carefully in order to reach the final destination of completion of studies (Gruzdev et al., 2020). However, as a new staff, it is rather difficult to acquire such quality at the early stage of their career and it certainly helpful should there are exposure and guidance given through the process for them to learn and grow.

### **The Post-Graduate in Higher Education Learning and Teaching (PGDHELT) as An Additional Requirement**

Specifically, for Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), all junior academicians with no teaching experiences would need to undergo the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education Learning and Teaching (PGDHELT). The program is designed in a trimester or three semesters in a year and took 4 semesters to complete the program ([www.uum.edu.my](http://www.uum.edu.my)). The objective of the PGDHELT program is to enhance teaching skills and knowledge for the junior academicians. Even though the objective of the PGDHELT program is good, it is considered as another dimension or 'multi-tasking' element which to be fulfilled by the academic staffs (Ehido et al., 2019; Ghasemy et al., 2018), which could be an additional burden for the junior academicians.

From the academic structure perspective, there would be two to three subjects that need to be enrolled in each semester. Each of these subjects consists of multiple assignments and tasks every week. In order to complete the assignments and the tasks given, a reasonable amount of time is needed. However, it is noteworthy to highlight that the academic staffs in the university were lacking in resources including time and money (Ghasemy et al., 2018). According to Ghasemy et al., (2018), considering multiple tasks (publication, teaching, research, conferences, training and development activities) need to be completed (Kamarudin et al., 2021). Thus, most of the new academic staffs feel stressed and exhausted to cope with all the tasks in hand (Rusmin, 2017; Remmik & Karm, 2012; Bexley et al., 2011).

While the newly appointed academicians in the UUM need to fulfil and complete all the components of KPIs such as teaching and learning, research, consultation, supervision, community service, administration post, conference, and publication to obtain at least 85 per cent overall KPIs marks, they also need to complete the PGDHELT program. All these requirements are needed for the junior academicians in UUM to be appointed to a permanent post or status as specified in the offer letter issued by the UUM's Registrar Office. Junior academicians are struggles with time management due to little working experience (Yunus



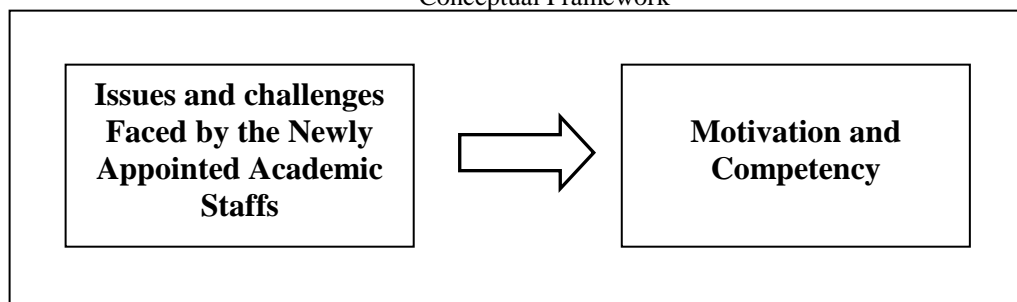
et al., 2020; Sawarkar., 2019). These have put further pressure on UUM's junior academicians to maintain a high KPIs mark at the same time need to complete the PGDHELT program.

### Conceptual Framework and The Underpinning Theory

In this research, the achievement goal theory is employed as one of the underpinning theories. The theory suggested that an individual could use such orientation as a guide in interpreting and react over the achievement-relevant information (Laine & Gegenfurtner, 2013; Senko, Hulleman & Harackiewicz, 2011). A study conducted by Laine and Gegenfurtner (2013) highlighted that the achievement goal theory can be defined as tendencies in which individuals engage in task-related behavior.

From the institutional learning perspective, the theory could be explained as the approach adopted by an individual over his or her adaptive response pattern. Subsequently, such response could lead towards persistence and determination (motivation) towards specific achievement (Senko et al., 2011). Furthermore, past literatures indicated that the achievement goal theory is well described in synthesizing the growing body of empirical evidence on how achievement goal orientations inspire learning or knowledge transfer (Laine & Gegenfurtner, 2013). Figure 2.1 represents the conceptual framework upholds in this research.

Figure **Erro! Nenhum texto com o estilo especificado foi encontrado no documento..1:** Research Conceptual Framework



Source: Prepared by the authors (2022)

### MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

This research employed in-depth one-on-one interviews with the newly appointed academic staff or those who have been appointed in the past three years and has yet received a confirmation of tenure from one of the local public universities, Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) Kedah, Malaysia.

A total of six participants were invited to share their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and stories regarding the challenges they faced after being appointed as an academic staff. These participants were snowballed and purposefully selected based on their experience handling multiple tasks. They were newly appointed, have less than five years of lecturing experience, are doctorate holders and are willing to share their personal experience relating to their current position. The age range of participants is between 30 to 43 years old (See Table 1). Participants belong to different Schools within the same University.

The data were collected virtually using Cisco WebEx in September 2021. One-on-one in-depth virtual interviews with the elements of phenomenology, which lasted around 40 to 80 minutes each, were employed to reach deeper into participants' own lived stories and experiences. Given the topic's sensitivity, the Covid-19 situation, and the staff's flexibility at the time, a virtual platform is deemed a natural medium for both researchers and participants. In-depth interviews are also argued to be a suitable method for gaining a deeper understanding of people's experiences (Kvale & Brinkman, 2015) and exploring sensitive issues (Jafari, Dunnett, Hamilton & Downey, 2013; Ger & Sandikci, 2006).

All six in-depth interviews resulted in nearly 400 minutes of video recording were obtained. The video data were then transcribed and analysed through six steps of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2013, 2006). The analysis was assisted using NVivo12 and spreadsheets. An inductive process of analysis was utilised whereby the coding and themes are derived from the participants' own words and views. The coding and themes generation were conducted iteratively by going through the data and video recording simultaneously. The saturation of the data is evident when there is no additional data were found to develops the attributes of each theme (Saunders et al., 2018; Charmaz, 2006).

Table 1. Participant's Summary

Details	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Home Location	Appointment Date	School
Participant 1	43	Female	Married	Kangar, Perlis	May 2021	School of International Studies
Participant 2	30	Male	Married	UUM, Kedah	November 2020	School of Economics, Finance and Banking
Participant 3	37	Female	Married	UUM, Kedah	September 2019	School of Business Management
Participant 4	36	Female	Married	Changlun, Kedah	November 2020	School of Business Management
Participant 5	36	Female	Single	Alor Setar, Kedah	September 2020	School of Technology, Management and Logistics
Participant 6	37	Male	Single	Jitra, Kedah	April 2020	School of Governance

Source: Prepared by the authors (2022)

### **Universiti Utara Malaysia as the Research Context**

In this research, Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) is chosen as the context in exploring challenges faced by the newly appointed academic staff during the Covid-19 situation due to several reasons.

First, it is one of the emerging or developing young university that strives to be amongst the reputable management university in the world (QS World Ranking, 2022). The university was established in 1984 and managed to position themselves between 81-90 for 'QS World University Rankings under fifty years old' in 2022. Thus, it is interesting to learn how the newly appointed staff within young and developing higher education's organisation views their position as an educator and senior lecturer facing the challenging position of being an educator on top of the Covid-19 situation.

Second, UUM is situated at a remote area in the Northern of Malaysia, Kedah. Surrounded by different ethnicities, religion, and living in a society far from the modernised urban area or big cities. The whole university practices and believes in a set of values that resonates well with the local culture. At the same time, striving positioning the university at a global level. It is interesting to learn the challenges faced by the newly appointed academic staff within this context and how they maneuverer through it.

Third, it is reported that UUM is practicing a special program or course named the Post-Graduate in Higher Education Learning and Teaching (PGDHELT) on their newly appointed academic staffs. The program is meant to elevate the new staffs' knowledge and skills on the learning and teaching aspects within the higher education landscape. Thus, knowing the nature of the academic profession of multi-dimensional (Han et al., 2020; Ghasemy et al., 2018; Bexley et al., 2011), it is viable to understand the phenomenon considering the additional requirement puts up by the university.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

By adopting a thematic approach to explore the challenges faced by the newly appointed staff at a young public university's environment, the findings will be presented according to the emergent themes and supported by exemplar quotations.

### **Lost in the Pile of Different Tasks**

*“It was a very good experience of being appointed but [pause], hmm, but, at the same time, I think I have more workload that I don’t understand.”  
(P1)*

From the excerpt above, it is apparent that the participants are unaware or lost in understanding the different tasks assigned to the newly appointed academic staff. Despite being grateful and excited to start a new career, the participants mentioned how they felt lost in the pile of different tasks assigned to new academic staff. The biggest struggle mentioned throughout the interviews is in term of managing these different tasks. Coming from different working backgrounds, some of the participants has had some informal to no experience in lecturing or teaching before entering the position. To these participants, the number of workloads expected from a lecturer is rather surprising. All the participants discussed the different tasks that they must fulfill at the same time namely teaching and evaluation; managing administrative tasks; publishing in reputable journals, SCOPUS, or WOS; securing grants; supervising undergraduate and postgraduate students; and fulfilling a Postgraduate Diploma of Higher Education in Teaching and Learning (PGDHELT). Each task is outlined with their own challenges.

### **Teaching and learning tasks**

To these participants, managing the teaching and learning tasks is considered as an ‘amanah’ or ‘trust’ that have been entrusted to them by the university and student. They believe that this ‘amanah’ need to be fulfilled properly to gain a ‘barakah rezeki’ or blessed sustenance. Therefore, teaching and learning has become one of the main prioritised tasks to them as it involved students. However, teaching and learning is not an easy task even to those who has had an experience in teaching. The challenges that are associated with teaching and learning includes:

### **Learning new subjects**

All participants are assigned with courses according to their respective School’s need. Usually, the courses will be allocated based on the staff’s educational or industrial background. For these participants, most of them must deliver principle or introductory courses to undergraduates. Additionally, most of them shared how they need to recalled or re-study the course assigned as they undertook it during their bachelor’s degree. However, there are also instances where the participants are assigned with courses that goes beyond their expertise or PhD’s discipline. For instance, P1 shared how she has to start learning from scratch since she has never come across her course during her formal education.

*“Yeah, yeah, I was the only one teaching cargo insurance. I took it from senior. So, everything I have to start it from scratch. I have to study more than the student, of course. I have to study more and then I have to prepare my own slides according to the syllabus given.” (P1)*

Nevertheless, some of the participants are considered as ‘fortunate’ to be assigned with courses related to their interest and PhD. P2, P4 and P5 shared how they enjoys teaching and the courses that they are managing relates to their prior formal education.

*“But, actually, when it comes to teaching, I truly enjoy it.” (P2)*

*“I got this subject Management Information System which is on my area...so, in term of teaching I would say I not having too much problem for that one” (P4)*

*“I got subject...production and operation management and also statistics. Production and operation management is actually my favourite subject”. (P5)*

### **Managing students**

Another challenge in teaching and learning is the struggles of managing students. All participants are assigned between 70 to 203 undergraduate students within a semester. The participants expressed that even though they managed two courses, but the number of students that are enrolled in each course differ according to the semester. For instance, principle or introductory subjects are typically involves with a big number of students. Moreover, some of the participants mentioned that there are also distance learning students to manage on top of their regular undergraduates. P2 expressed her surprise when she has to manage around 100 distance learning students on top of her regular 150 full time undergraduate students. That means she has to work during the weekends to teach the distance learning students.

*“I don’t teach distance student this October semester. But the last semester, I have to teach them. The number is not bad! One class is over 100! Since they combined three or four centres. I teach UUM Sintok, Johor Bahru, Langkawi and Kota Bharu” (P2)*

Working hours are among the struggles that these new academic staff must balance out. The number of workloads that need to be fulfilled requires academics to work at odd hours and weekends. This is not a new practice in the world of academia (Palumbo, 2020; Sarbu, 2018). P1, P2, P4 and P6 expressed how their life has changed after being appointed as an academic staff.

*“I have no weekend like usual [laughed]. Because I have to prepare for my classes and the new course that has been given to me. So, I have to prepare*

*slides, I have to prepare for whatever questions that the students might ask, and then everything under the sun, you know I have to find what relevant things that I can share in my class to make my class more interesting” (P1)*

*“Weekend or holidays or weekdays, for sure we will reply all the messages from students, right?” (P2)*

*“I would say that I don’t have time even the weekend to spend with my family. And most weekdays I have to work until 2 to 3 am to settle the tasks. Luckily my husband is around to look after the kids” (P4)*

*“For me, usually during weekend, I can’t really sit still. Usually I’ll use the time that I have to write or mark papers. Because I know that on Sunday, I may not have time to do it” (P6)*

The thin line between life and work in academia especially among these newly appointed staff who are transitioning into this new role seems to be blurred out. To some extent, work are the only thing that these participants are thinking even at home. P2 shared how she struggles to ‘shut off’ from work even at home.

*“it’s just that [pause] sometimes there are messages coming in from the students. But, it is just the way I am, I will reply all the messages [pause] haa..that’s when my husband will say arghh that’s enough right, no need to look at the phone” (P2)*

### **Online teaching and learning as a challenge**

Being appointed during the Covid-19 situation provided additional challenges to these newly appointed staff. With little to no experience of managing teaching and learning, the participants are needed to manage the students’ learning process. From preparing the teaching materials, teaching delivery, and managing the expectations from students and the management itself is challenging. Participants shared that the real struggle in teaching is to provide an engaging and interactive learning experience. Provided with online platform, they struggle to have an interactive session with the students. P1 and P5 exemplifies this when they shared the difficulties in engaging with the students.

*“Because we are doing online class, so I prefer to have an interactive class where there is an interaction between me and my student. But sometimes but not sometimes, most of the time the students will just keep quiet and by the time it is the end of the class, you know, all said ‘thank you’, ‘have a good day’, ‘thank you’ that’s it.” (P1)*

*“The challenge is more of how we are going to tackle the students. Hah. It’s standard when it comes to online classes. Aaa... for calculation, it is easier to attract the students. We can give exercise and then call their names. Haa. So, like it or not, they will stay focused in class. But for theory, haa. It is a bit difficult. Sometimes we call their name, but nobody answered right. Aah.. krik-krik. Just silence” (P5)*

### Administrative tasks

Another task that are found challenging to these new academic staff is managing the administrative tasks. It is a surprise to these participants that apart of settling down to preparing and delivering the teaching and learning process, they also need to fill up various teaching and evaluation related documents. For example, lecturers need to fill up e-portfolio, AOL, SOW, Assessment table. Learning these new things are not an issue to them, the struggles is more of not having a proper assistance on how to fill up the documents. It is usually up to each school on their own effort to provide a suitable transition process to newcomers. Some of them who enters a month before the semester starts will have to prepare themselves to submit the teaching and learning documents before the semester started. Thus, provide only a brief of time to understand and prepare the documents. P1 exemplifies this when she shared how she struggled in completing the relevant documents.

*“all my administrative work, and recently came out with the, ermm.. E-portfolio, I did attend the workshop, but it didn't really help me because I think I prefer to have a face-to-face workshop or anything that can help me to ease the burden. At the same time, I have to prepare AOL, SOW that I didn't really have proper assistance as seniors are also busy. And I just want to get what they have done before, and erm.. I just have to follow accordingly to suit whatever subject I'm teaching.” (P1)*

*“Um like and keeping our SOW, AOL, I don't have a proper guideline on that. So, I have to refer to the seniors on what they have already done. It's like copy copy paste [both laughed] yes yes yes we can have something [pause] We did have workshop on AOL but the time. The time is so short.” (P1)*

To other participants, the struggles of completing the documents become worst when she is being called upon due to her mistakes in completing the documents.

*“At the first time I have been called up to meet her inside her you know office, her room. I was so embarrassed because it shows how incompetent I am, but I try to do it, you know when I try to put my commitment to do it but I don't know that the document that I prepared is not the correct one. So yeah, for the first time I felt so useless” (P4)*

Additionally, participants are also given the task to hold at least one administrative position in the school. From becoming a committee member which has minimal workload to holding secretary, course coordinator, program coordinator or committee director position. To some of them, having to manage almost all the mentioned positions at the same time.

*“I jadi setiausaha I masuk2 masa 2019 tu tak da apa lagi bayangkan masa PGDHELT tu I dua setiausaha...pengerusi untuk 3 committee school haa itu pun jadi macam dalam masa yg sama I pegang setiausaha, jadi penyelarar,*

*penyelaras pun I penyelaras untuk course tu la kan course jadi masa kita jadi penyelaras kita terkontang-kanting OBE, kita tak tahu benda2 tu la sebenarnya dalam PGDHELT pun dia tak ajar sangat benda2 tu OBE, benda2 tu yg kita nak tahu table 4, table 4 tu sebenarnya benda baru jangan kata junior senior pun masih lagi masih nak tengah belajar kan haa jadi tu yg jadi macam kita lagi lah hah macam tak tahu apa, PLO CLO apa dia!"*

P2 further added that she was appointed without any prior knowledge or consent.

*"Tak tau lah ya Allah. . tak da siapa nak tanya I nak tak jawatan ni maksudnya macam tak tanya persetujuan I tau2 macam I appointed jer haa macam tu haa terus macam tu satu lagi kat SBM tu kalau MC panggil I jugak" (P2)*

Similarly, P6 mentioned his experience entering the position where he was assigned to eleven positions namely, program coordinator, secretary of research and various committee members. To him, this serves as one of his biggest challenges in managing the different administrative tasks and understanding the university's teaching and learning systems.

*"Oh, saya disamping program coordinator, di samping lecturer, di samping pelajar PGDHELT, saya juga ada sebelas member of jawatankuasa, dan salah satunya setiausaha untuk research. So, [giggle] saya tak tahu lah tangan saya mai kot mana. Saya pun tak tahu macam mana, ada peringkat tu kan, awal-awal tahun sekejab2 dapat surat lantikan. Sebab bila kita jadi penjawat ni, automatic kita akan jadi ahli jawatankuasa ijazah lanjutan, ahli jawatankuasa eksekutif school dan jatankuasa2 lain. Pada peringkat awal tahun oleh kata setiap minggu ada ja surat lantikan masuk. Peringkat awal tu rasa terbeban jugak sebab kita kena fikir, KPI individu kita kena fikir, and then, KPI school kena fikir juga, and then tugas hakiki kita kena fikir, tugas admin kita kena fikir. PGDHELT lagi, assignment bukan satu dua, banyak assignment [giggle]" (P6)*

### **Publish in reputable journals, SCOPUS-indexed or Web of Science (WOS) Indexed**

Publishing in reputable journals is now a must among academia to contribute further to the knowledge as well as their own yearly performance. Publications serves as a currency to develop an academia within their field of expertise. For these participants, in order to confirm their tenure, they need to have at least two publications within three years. However, there are also another set individual performance indicator of how many articles they should publish within a year. It is also a requirement from the university to publish in SCOPUS or WOS to have a credible merit. On top of teaching and administrative, these participants are expected to produce certain numbers of publication each year. This is a challenge yet to these participants given the limited time and resources they have in managing other tasks. P2 and P5 shared their struggles of publishing articles.



*“Uh because of the workload and also, I do not have the capacity in academic writing. Yeah that is why I'm struggling.” (P2)*

*“Bukannya macam dulu dia kena ada dua research dah sekarang, dua Scopus everything is two dah sekarang bukan one okay haa” (P5)*

### **Securing research grants**

Additionally, the participants are required to secure research grants every year. This also serves as a contributor to their individual performance and confirmation. The university has set certain marks on research grants to be fulfilled every year. Most of the time, to get a complete mark requires more than one research grants. P2 shared her struggles of making time to write for proposals and securing the grant.

*“I yg masalah sekarang ialah research, research I takdak sebab kita bila kita sibuk admin pun banyak kerja kan jadi macam kita punya idea nak menulis tu I buat paper tapi research la research grant I pernah mintak grant 2020 tapi campur dengan PGDHELT kan kita sibuk kan setahun tu 2020 memang full sibuk campur pulak dengan PKP kan kita nak adapt dengan online kan haa yg tu pun” (P2)*

### **Supervise undergraduate and postgraduate students**

The second last tasks that are commonly discussed by these participants are in term of supervision. All of them have to supervise either undergraduates, postgraduates or both. Again, they expressed their concerns on the time that they have to spend for supervision and the limited training or resources available for new academic staff in managing supervision. P1, P4 and P5 shared their supervision experiences.

*“I ada lah supervise students. Dah berapa semester dah. Practicum ada, supervision pun ada. PhD ada satu, Err I tak jadi main. Master baru habis satu. Practicum macam biasa lah. Err..9 orang satu semester.” (P1)*

*“Ya currently aa . . I have been appointed as a second supervisor for PhD student, I just. . and then . . last I think last semester I have one master student by research, and she just, she already completed her master. . in term of supervision ya! I need to find a time to you know. . to consult with my student in between of PGDHELT in between of teaching itself so it's very hard it's not to mention that I also have fourteen practicum student last semester” (P4)*

*“Alhamdulillah saya dah dapat untuk PhD saya dapat satu. yg ni pun memang school saya jugak lah dia punya PG punya coordinator memang dia akan cari lecturer2 yg tak ada lagi dia akan pair lah dengan ni dia memang atur dia memang haa dia sangat.” (P5)*

### **Fulfilling PGDHELT requirement**

The final task that are deemed challenging to these participants in addition to the existing tasks is fulfilling the PGDHELT. Despite agreeing on the benefits of going through the

one year and a half program on teaching and learning in higher education, the participants found that managing time and commitment between the different tasks after assuming the new academic role is rather challenging. Most of the participants agrees that PGDHELT helped them in managing their transitions along the way. P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 agrees that the curriculum in PGDHELT is current and useful especially for new academic staff.

*“Honestly bagi saya PGDHELT ni bagus” (P5)*

*“Aaa, I would say that 50% from the classes that I attend in PGDHELT course, ohh program! probably in term of the technology or digital part right, so in term of the application I never heard before that but after taking that class it open up my mind that I could use that one and could embedded in my teaching as well so in this semester I would say I integrate a lot of other applications aside from online learning so it help me in term of that one in term of the technology applying technology” (P4)*

*“To me, the aim of PGDHELT is really good and the courses there are also useful to us. But, too bad that we have so many other things to do and couldn't enjoy the learning process.” (P4)*

*“If I was given the choice of going through the PGDHELT or not, I will choose to go for PGDHELT. But if I don't it is just because of my existing workload. The program is good” (P3)*

Being a student, a lecturer, and holding several administrative positions limits the ability of these participants to truly enjoys learning about teaching in higher education. The struggles is apparent as the participants exhibits raised intonation, active hand gestures and long pauses to express their emotions and thoughts. Terms like ‘stress’, ‘tired’ ‘struggling’ are among the common words mentioned by these participants while expressing their thoughts. The challenge shared are mostly relating to the number of assignments given, and the expectations they received from the lecturers whereby they were expected to provide full commitment as full time instead of part time students. P4 and P5 exemplifies the struggles the participants are facing.

*“I don't know how to say this or finally telling the truth [pause]. but for me it's quite a burden especially for the newcomers. because like I said we are struggling to adjust ourselves for teaching and suddenly at the same time we need to learn, be a student as well so being a student is not an easy task to do because we need to pay attention 100% attention for our learning. Right? but I would say that I'm a person who cannot do multitasking I mean if I'm teaching, I need to do teaching, but I cannot learn at the same time attending a course, attending class and I'm a mother I'm a wife so it will be hard for me.” (P4)*

*“Honestly saya tak sempat sangat nak publish papers disebabkan PGDHELT punya assignment. class tak pa PGDHELT ni class dia tak pa. assignment dia tu melampau lampau! satu subject 7 assignment bayangkan at least burn okay, haa ada yg setiap minggu kena submit task, jadi Haa kalau. . tu baru 1 subject kalau setiap semester ada 2 subject 3 subject darab lah 3, 21 haa tu saya sangat stress saya memang sangat2 stress dengan PGDHELT saya cakap betul*

*saya tak stress dengan admin work dekat office saya tak stress dengan mengajar saya tak stress dengan ni tapi saya sangat stress dengan PGDHELT bagi saya” (P5)*

*“Honestly bagi saya PGDHELT ni bagus tapi dia sangat ambil masa dia sangat-sangat nak kita bagi 100% commitment on that particular. la PGDHELT tapi diaorang kena ingat yg kita masih mengajar kita masih diaorang tak bagi kita cuti belajar macam PhD okay, kalau PhD okay dia bagi kita cuti belajar that’s why kita boleh 100% commit on that PhD tapi PGDHELT ni kita hanya part time student tapi diaorang nak kita 100% commit jugak which is susah la memang sangat saya rasa honestly walaupun dia bagus tapi dia sangat tak tak bagus”(P5)*

### **Getting a Grasp of Different Task-Related Systems**

The second challenge that the participants repetitively mentioned is adapting to different task-related systems in the university. The participants expressed their concerns and anxiety when they are expected to know the different systems involved in different tasks within a short duration of time. This includes teaching-related systems, administrative systems, research grant related systems and performance related systems. P1, P2 and P4 exemplifies this when they shared how they are new to the system and overwhelmed by the various systems involved.

*“Before this I worked at UITM so I did not know what to expect in terms of the system here in UUM...it is hard for me to understand the system so what type of you know the in term of the online portal itself so I struggling on that one” (P4)*

*“daripada segi kita punya research sebab kita pernah buat PhD master kan semua yg research tu tak da masalah yg bahagian teaching tu la sebab bila kita masuk tu since teaching tu satu lah dia punya system-system tu kan” (P2)*

Additionally, P3 expressed his concern of not knowing what supposed to be known. The extent of working in isolation and not knowing what they are supposed to know worries him.

*“How can we do that if we do not know what we are supposed to know in the first place?” (P3)*

In line with the different tasks assigned to the participants, all of them agrees that the resources available for them specifically to start with each task are rather limited or unorganized.

### **Limited Task-Related Learning Resources**

Following the fast-moving Covid-19 situation, academics are forced to maneuverer the challenging process of teaching and learning without a clear direction. The different tasks and

systems involved while working remotely from the school and colleagues leaves academic staff feeling uncertain (Mahdzir et al., 2022), overwhelmed, unprepared and lonely. This is even more for new academic staff being appointed in the middle of the Covid-19. This forces each new staff to rely most on their self-learning efforts.

However, this works best for teaching and learning where the resources related to their subject are widely available online. Instead, all participants expressed their struggles as there are limited resources relating to their job-specific tasks. For instance, how to create e-portfolio? What are the systems that are required to be used by academics in the university? How to fill the different forms to submit a research grant? Most of the questions relates to the developmental self-learning resources available online for newcomers. P1 shared her struggles in getting a grasp of the different tasks due to limited resources available to her.

*“And I have to cope with the teaching as well. And there is no guideline for me to do like [pause] errr.. all my administrative work, and recently came out with the, ermm.. E-portfolio, I did attend the workshop, but it didn't really help me because I think I prefer to have a face-to face workshop or anything that can help me to ease the burden. At the same time, I have to prepare AOL, SOW that I didn't really have proper assistance as seniors are also busy. And I just want to get what they have done before, and erm.. I just have to follow accordingly to suit whatever subject I'm teaching” (P1)*

*“Um like and keeping our SOW, AOL, I don't have a proper guideline on that. So, I have to refer to the seniors on what they have already done. It's like copy copy paste [both laughed] yes yes yes we can have something [pause] We did have workshop on AOL but the time. The time is so short.” (P1)*

P2 further emphasise the limited resources for newcomers when she struggles even for simple thing like creating a QR code for online attendance purposes.

*“tapi sebenarnya tak ada siapa pun yg ajar yg kata masuk class kena aa. . kan kita okay macam punch card tu memang orang inform lah kan masa kita tu kan and then masuk class kena bukak QR Code macam kita belajar sendiri lah masa kat dalam group share tu kan hah kita tengok sendiri lah buat lah sendiri kan macam tu kita belajar sendiri je” (P2)*

Another aspect of resources that causes tensions is the relevancy of the available resources to them. Most of the participants searched around the university's website for subject-related resources and failed to find any. They have to opt for other outside online resources such as Coursera, Edx and Youtube to get them started. P1 exemplifies this when she argues that the existing webinars are designed for intermediate level and not for beginners like her.

*“OK what I can say most workshop that I attend. Umm. They are straight away for professional. it is not for beginner. It's like directly to intermediate like that. So there's no room for me, a beginner. So, for sure if I want to join any*

*workshop. I have to prepare first. Because they did not start from beginning. They assume that everyone is a intermediate. Already have some knowledge. Umm. A lot I learn from YouTube or depend on friends” (P1)*

### **The Cult of Individual Performance in Academia**

The moment an academic set foot in an academic career, they are prescribed with a list of targeted key performance indicators (KPI) that must be achieved every year. This includes a long list of different tasks as discussed earlier in addition with other indicators. Upon appointment, an academic is usually given an office, a list of courses to teach, an idea of publications and research grants that they need conduct to confirm their tenure. Other than that, academics are mostly independent and free to carry the tasks outlined to them. This flexibility and independency are among the appealing advantage of being an academic.

However, this advantage come with a price. It creates an individualistic culture where each academic will strive to achieve their targeted performance indicator within the school. As for these newly appointed staff, they often found that they are left working in isolation and dealing with the challenges in achieving their performance indicators by themselves. To some of these participants, understanding what to be achieved is still vague even after a year in service. P1 and P3 highlighted their unfamiliarity with the targeted performance indicators assigned to them.

*“One more thing about confirm is. I don’t understand. We have to be the leader or Principal Investigator, right? We have to be leader or ke and untuk publication dan research grants? That one is also not clear.” (P1)*

*“Dari segi syarat kenaikan pangkat pun saya masih struggling nak faham. Eh bukan, syarat kenaikan tu satu. Yang KPI tu. Saya sebenarnya tak faham juga sebenarnya. Bukan nak blame sesiapa but it is on me since I have to reach out to people. Saya tak faham jugak sebab saya rasa saya dah capai. Tapi bila hujung tahun eh?” (P3)*

The challenges of being an academic in a young and developing university is reflected by its dynamic and competitive culture in academia. All of the participants interviews involve discussion on the different components in their KPI. This reflects how they are centred around achieving the targeted KPI to move forward in their academic career. Within schools, they can see the rising of different cults of academic that are striving to achieve their KPIs.

For these participants, the cult of individual performance within their school has left them working in isolation. Additionally, with the Covid-19, this situation become worsen. P1 and P4 exemplifies how they are given total independency in their school to manage the tasks assigned.

*“At the same time, I have to prepare AOL, SOW that I didn't really have proper assistance as seniors are also busy. And I just want to get what they have done before, and erm.. I just have to follow accordingly to suit whatever subject I'm teaching.”(P1)*

*“just to be frank for the first time you know seeking for an advice is so easy because we know that all of the other lecturer which is my friend seniors, they have a busy time table busy schedule and to reach them is so difficult and then sometimes if I ask question to them it takes a week or a few days for them to reply” (P4)*

*“Ya ya because I don't know who should I refer so I just do it by myself and then try like try an error something like that and then if the document that I submit is not correct or not right so I been calling up by my coordinator and then she would explain back to me what are the things that I should do” (P4)*

P4 further emphasized the severity of working in isolation when she was not recognized by one of her own department colleagues, who are more senior than her.

*“I was given a task to supervise a student with another more senior lecturer in my department, and when I contacted him, it's funny and awkward because both of us doesn't know each other and he didn't even know if I am from his department” (P4)*

*Sometimes, when I go to the office, they will look at me are you staff? So, I have to explain. Oh lecturer baru ke? Oh no, I have been here for three semesters. [laugh] So, it's quite challenging especially during thios Covid-19 pandemic. (P4)*

It is understood that the seniors are also caught up within their own bubbles of KPIs to achieve and thus, limit the time they have to manage newcomers. The participants are then left with the expectations of being able to solve and manage their task by themselves. Contradict, P3 and P4 argues that the isolation is further worsen due to Covid-19 which forces and limits the interaction between colleagues and schools.

*“Lagi satu cabaran dia sebab online lah, saya masuk-masuk dah pandemic. So, basically semua pun duduk di rumah masing-masing. Nak bertanya pun susah. Kena tanya kat senior boleh tak nak buat Webex session. Haa.. Nak kena tanya satu-satu orang” (P3)*

*“It is very unfortunate to enter teaching during Covid-19 because not everyone in my school know me.” (P4)*

### **Allyship in Academia**

Another challenge that was apparent throughout the interviews is in term of allyship in academia. Although there is no agreed definition of what allyship is, the existing definitions are more or less carrying similar meaning. Among the earlier definition of allyship can be found in the work of (Washington & Evans, 1991) where they defined allyship as “a person who is a

member of the dominant or majority group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate for, the oppressed population.” (Washington and Evans, 1991, p.195). This same term emerged in LGBTQ+ research in recent years as a way to describe the actions of individuals who aim to end oppression on behalf of a marginalised group (Sabat, Martinez & Wessel, 2013).

Similar key concepts are applied and emerged in other fields as well in suggesting advocates, change agents, mentors or organisational catalysts (Madsen, Townsend & Scribner, 2020). Practically, the same concept of allyship exist in exploring the allyship between males to females (eg. Erskine and Bilimoria, 2019; Madsen, Townsend and Scribner, 2020), white people to People of Color (PoC) (eg. Craig, Badaan and Brown, 2020; Johnson and Pietri, 2020; Melaku et al., 2020) and heterosexual to non-heterosexual people (e.g., Wessel, 2017; Kamasak et al., 2019; Minei, Hastings and Warren, 2020). Although the concept of allyship has explained many behaviours in suggesting equality, this very concept of allyship remained vague within organisation context with little empirical evidence.

Although it is rather paradoxical to discuss allyship and involvement of academic staff in a cult of performance together. Both elements are interrelated to each other. The concept of allyship in this study refers to the practice or culture of including other colleagues whom they are familiar or trust to advance forward in achieving the targeted performance. This practice can have both positive and negative implications towards newcomers. Positively, it can help new academic staff to excel and survive the challenging phase of transition and meet the stipulated KPIs. For instance, P5 and P6 expressed their gratitude of having senior colleagues who are keen in adding their name into research grants and publications for the sake of helping new member to meet the KPIs. Regardless on the lack of experience and time P5 and P6 have, the senior colleagues, are more concern on providing an opportunity and room for them to learn and grow.

*“Okay saya research memang saya tak ada saya buat sendiri semua tu maksudnya aa. . research saya ni memang banyak la sangat2 saya memang berterima kasih dengan saya punya colleague dekat school saya lah diaorang la banyak invite saya untuk research” (P5)*

*“Yang untungnya saya sebab masa saya masuk tahun 2015, ada kenal beberapa orang senior, yang mana diorang treat saya sebagai kawan-kawan dan hubungan ni masih terjalin even selepas habis PhD. So, ada lah diorang ajak kita buat research sekali, kawan-kawan saya yang baru pun apply grant, invite saya join sekali. Saya pula apply grant, saya letak nama diorang pulak. So, daripada situlah. Peringkat awal ni, pensyarah-pensyarah senior nil ah yang banyak membantu yang Tarik, jom buat geran ni, geran ni. Daripada situlah kita Nampak sebenarnya, kita [pause] boleh*

*buat sebenarnya bukan tak boleh buat. Tetapi, peluang itu harus diberi kepada pensyarah” (P6)*

This practice is embedded within P5 and P6’s school’s culture where any new academic staff will be allied with a group of seniors in term of publications and securing research grants. However, P6 also highlight that this view of helping newcomers is only being practiced by minority of academics. While most academics are comfortable to select only an individual that they are close to or have a good relationship with.

*“cumanya [pause] ermm tak semua pensyarah senior yang nak pensyarah junior terlibat sama dalam mana-mana geran, dalam mana-mana research lain yang di dalam atau yang di luar. Saya takt ahu puncanya apa, tapi saya merasakan bahawa [pause] ermm. Tak tahu lah mungkin tak percaya ka, baru sangat nak involve dalam sesuatu research ka atau ada sebab-sebab lain. Ada pensyarah senior yang saya selesa bekerja Bersama, soal baru ka lama ka, dia tak pernah letakkan soal baru atau lama. So, dia akan tarik ja, jom kita buat yang tu, jom kita buat yang ni. Tapi hanya segelintir saja yang buat macam tu. Majoritinya, tak tahulah mungkin dia dah selesa buat dengan orang lain, so dia buat dengan orang lain.” (P6)*

As such, the practice of allyship also provides negative implications for these newcomers. Allies that have been formed within senior colleagues leave little room for newcomer to join in and become a part of their existing research groups. P1 and P2 exemplifies this when they shared how it is difficult for them to join the existing senior’s research group as they already have enough members amongst them.

*“They do they uh we do have here. We have a research team. But you know sometimes they are all busy. Seniors. So memang tak fit in.” (P1)*

*“tapi sebenarnya drpd segi research la research sebenarnya masa awal2 kalau kata ada buddy system yg bagusnya research, belajar research la kan mentor mantee ni kan macam haa boleh tarik masuk geran ke apa macam tu la. tapi I rasa sebenarnya bukan depa tak nak tarik masuk geran tapi kebetulan masa I masuk tu mungkin tak ada grant. depa pun [pause] tapi I tengok sebenarnya bukan depa tak nak ajak kadang2 tau depa pun struggle depa pun mungkin kadang-kadang macam biasa la kita macam buat paper jugak kan ada hutang2 tu haa masa time ni kita tumpang research orang pastu bila time kita nak buat research kita kena masuk nama orang tu la” (P2)*

Therefore, there are various challenges faced by new appointed academic staff within a young and developing university. Being appointed during the Covid-19 pandemic provides additional tensions to these new academic staffs.



## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, most of the respondents pointed out that they are struggled with both work-related and non-work related issues and challenges in starting their journey as an academician in the university. As per discussed in the past literature, the work-related aspects involving teaching and learning, supervision of the postgraduate students, publication in reputable indexed journals, securing research grant and consultation are the one which closely related to the individual performance target or KPIs (Khan & Anwar, 2021; Basarudin et al., 2016; Masron et al., 2012). While non-work related issues include performing administrative tasks, working environment or culture and fulfilling the additional requirement such as the completion of PGDHELT are discussed as challenges for the newly appointed academic staffs (Mgaiwa, 2021; Subarto et al., 2021; Han et al., 2020; Sabagh et al., 2018). The in-depth interview had been conducted has clarified that the newly appointed academic staffs struggled to clearly gauge their individual performance benchmarks or KPIs. The KPI can be described as a performance management system based on measurable aspects on organizational functions (Asih, Purba & Sitorus, 2020, p. 142). From the university or Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) perspective, Dhillon et al., (2015) highlighted that it is a measure to assess the quality of output produced by individual or organization (schools, institutes or departments) based on their planning and performance improvement.

Due to its significance, the KPI is an essential element toward institution's (university's) development (Asih et al., 2020; Basarudin et al., 2016). However, the process of delivering and comprehend each element of the KPI were missing from the staffs' development program. It is expected that the staffs to self-learn and being a multi-tasker (Han et al., 2020; Ehido et al., 2019; Rusmin, 2017), which enable them to understand each of the KPI element by themselves without much guidance from any parties. Such discrepancies leave the newly appointed staffs vulnerable towards achieving them, subsequently affect their contribute to the institutions' development. On the teaching and learning agenda, it is revealed that the newly appointed academic staffs are facing difficulties in learning new subject within their respective field. It is reported that the teaching course assignment is done in accordance to their respective School's need. Thus, they had to spend more time reading and studying the related materials before getting into the class. A study conducted by Rosen (2021), an individual may feel stress and frustration since the time that could have been spent performing valuable work tasks is wasted searching for answers. In this case, the staffs have to spend times to learn and understand the new subject given prior to the class session.

In addition, the newly appointed lecturers faced difficulties in managing a mass class with over 100 students in each class and the class have to be conducted through online teaching (Tomei, 2006). With limited teaching experience, they found it even tougher not only to deliver the courses in the best possible manner using unfamiliar tools and system. Such challenge is similar with a study conducted by Almaiah et al., (2020), which posited that due to the pandemic-19 hit, the teaching mode of online or hybrid (combination of combination of online and face-to-face) were introduced and presents its' own challenges to the academic staffs. The challenges include the delivery methods, assessment mechanism, internet access towards the class and so on (Dayagbil et al., 2021; Sarwarkar et al., 2019). Moreover, the difficulties of conducting the class in online or hybrid mode were compounded with large number of students in the class. According to Lowenthal, Nyland, Jung, Dunlap, and Kepka (2019), an online learning took a considerably longer time compared to traditional physical class. Furthermore, considering aspects like student learning outcome, faculty workload, student satisfaction and other related matters, Taft, Perkowski, and Martin (2011) posited that the ideal number of students in an online class is ranging between 20 – 30 students. This figure is supported by recent study by Lowenthal et al., (2019) which mentioned 21 – 30 students as the most ideal size of an online class. Therefore, looking at the size of class which over 100, it is justifiable for the 'young' academicians to raise such issue at their early path of being in academic.

Next, the issue relating to the supervision where these junior academicians were unsure how to supervise the postgraduate students effectively. The supervision involved guiding, assisting and coaching the students to walk through every learning process and reach the final destination of completion (Roberts & Seaman, 2018). It is further elaborate that the nature of supervisor-student relationship is dynamic and required specific skills to be carefully handled (Gruzdev et al., 2020). However, it is reported that these newly appointed academic staffs were unsure on how to carry out the task and lack in skills including coaching, supervising and consultation skills. It is unfortunate to note that this group of academic staffs also have issues with the publication where they found it difficult to publish an article in the reputable indexed journals. Generally, publication is one of the tools to disseminate and advanced the knowledge and its' application to people (Fauzi et al., 2019; Ghabban et al., 2018). However, publication requires an explicit skills and quality to be possessed by the author in realizing such knowledge advancement agenda. The skills which include academic writing skill, critical thinking skills, problem solving skills and leadership skills which needs to be acquired by an academician (Mwesigwa et al., 2020; Salleh et al., 2017). Therefore, it is understandable should the new academic staffs facing this issue with no concrete solution at all.

Furthermore, the newly appointed academics also struggled to secure research grant which also a common pre-requisite for the academic staff confirmation in service within university. It is said that the due to a hectic schedule and workloads, it is hard for the staff to find time writing up a proposal for research grant application. In explaining the hectic schedule and workloads Bexley et al., (2011) reiterated that it is not manageable for the academic staffs to attend the task given by their respective schools. Thus, although they are aware of the research grant availability, but do not have the capacity to come out with good proposal to apply for it. Next, the issues of performing administrative tasks which works interchangeably with other issues faced by the young academics. According to the respondents, performing the administrative task is a lot harder when you are still in the learning and familiarizing phase. From the university perspective, there are numerous abbreviations to familiar with and more importantly for them to understand each function such as SOW, CLO, PLO and Table 4 as per recorded from the interviews.

On the working environment, it is highlighted that the new appointed academic staffs can feel the heat on the current allyship environment within the school or faculty. In fact, such allyship practice also provides negative implications for these newcomers. Allies that have been formed within senior staffs or colleagues leave little room for the new staffs to join in and become a part of their existing research groups. Most importantly, it reduced the opportunity to learn from the experienced ones and grow steadily among newly appointed staffs. Such culture act as the factor which demote staffs' motivation and also learning attitude within the organization (Subarto et al., 2021). As such, this culture needs to be abolished and a more conducive learning platform need to be practiced in the school to encourage more involvement among newly appointed staffs and the experienced staffs. Lastly, the fulfilment of PGDHELT requirement is among the strongest concern among the newly appointed academic staffs DS51. Although the responses towards the opportunity to join this program is positive, yet the workloads in term of assignments and presentations are relatively burdening. Indeed, those tasks were another burden to be carried out by the newcomers on top of the existing workloads as an academician (Subarto et al., 2021; Ghasemy et al., 2018; Bexley et al., 2011). Those tasks were taking so much time of this junior academicians which have to fulfill other personal and school KPI. It is noteworthy to highlight that as much as the new knowledge and insights gained from the course, the new staffs felt stressful to learn that the course is a requirement for confirmation in service and leave them with no choice other than sit on it and complete it.

As a conclusion, it is important for the university's management and the Higher Education Ministry (MOHE) to understand the issues and challenges faced by the newly

appointed academic staffs in the university. Those issue and challenges need to be addressed deliberately in order to create a healthy working environment and achieve work-life balance and solve the apparent issues of burn-out among the university academics. Based on the discussion above, we could deduce that the early life of newly appointed academic staffs in the university is not a smooth sailing journey. There are number of issues and challenges faced by them in carrying out their tasks effectively. These issues and challenges need to be dealt comprehensively in or to create a more promising and enjoyable career. As such, future research could embark on exploring a possible solution for those issues and challenges faced by the newly appointed academic staffs in the university. From there, a practical and proactive measure can be implemented in solving this issue deliberately.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the sponsor, Persatuan Akademia Universiti Utara Malaysia (PERSATU) for granting a research fund for this research project. A special appreciation goes to my team members from the School of Business Management (SBM), namely, Associate Professor Dr. Azahari Ramli and Dr. Safwan Marwin Abdul Murad in completing this research project. A note of thanks also goes to my colleague from Marketing department, SBM, Dr. Nur Nadia Adjrina Kamarruddin in supporting this research from the qualitative perspective. Lastly, we extend our gratitude to the Research and Innovation Management Centre (RIMC), Universiti Utara Malaysia and all those who have supported us in any manner during the completion of this study.

### REFERENCES

- Adedoyin, O. B., & Soykan, E. (2020). Covid-19 pandemic and online learning: the challenges and opportunities. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 1-13.
- Ali, M., A'tikah, N., Panatik, S. A., & Zainal Badri, S. K. (2020). Impact of work values in promoting organizational citizenship behavior among academicians: The mediating roles of job satisfaction. *Pertanika Journal Social Science and Humanities*, 10(4), 617-632.
- Almaiah, M. A., Al-Khasawneh, A., & Althunibat, A. (2020). Exploring the critical challenges and factors influencing the E-learning system usage during COVID-19 pandemic. *Education and Information Technologies*, 25(6), 5261–5280. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-020-10219-y>
- Asih, I., Purba, H. H., & Sitorus, T. M. (2020). Key Performance Indicators: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of Strategy and Performance Management*, 8(4), 142-155.

- Basarudin, N. A., Yeon, A. L., Yaacob, N., & Abd Rahman, R. (2016). Transformation of higher education status: Issues on faculty workload. *The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioural Sciences*, 226-35.
- Bexley, E., James, R., & Arkoudis, S. (2011). The Australian academic profession in transition. *Canberra: Department of education, employment and workplace relations, commonwealth of Australia*.
- Chan, S. (2018). A review of twenty-first century higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 42(3), 327-338.
- Dayagbil, F. T., Palompon, D. R., Garcia, L. L., & Olvido, M. M. J. (2021). Teaching and Learning Continuity Amid and Beyond the Pandemic. *Frontiers in Education*, 6. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.678692>
- Dhillon, S. K., Ibrahim, R., & Selamat, A. (2015). Factors associated with scholarly publication productivity among academic staff: Case of a Malaysian public university. *Technology in Society*, 42, 160-166.
- Ehido, A., Halim, B. A., & Awang, Z. (2019). The influence of quality of work life (QWL) and organizational commitment on job performance among academics in the Malaysian public universities. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research*, 5(5), 71–76.
- Fauzi, M. A., Nya-Ling, C. T., Thursamy, R., & Ojo, A. O. (2019). Knowledge sharing: Role of academics towards research productivity in higher learning institution. *VINE Journal of Information and Knowledge Management Systems*. 49 (1), 136-159.
- Flux, L., Hassett, A., & Callanan, M. (2020). Grieving in the workplace: how do grieving employees perceive their experience of workplace support from management?. *Policy and Practice in Health and Safety*, 18(2), 186-195.
- Ghabban, F., Selamat, A., & Ibrahim, R. (2018). New model for encouraging academic staff in Saudi universities to use IT for knowledge sharing to improve scholarly publication performance. *Technology in Society*, 55, 92-99.
- Gruzdev, I., Terentev, E., & Dzhafarova, Z. (2020). Superhero or hands-off supervisor? An empirical categorization of PhD supervision styles and student satisfaction in Russian universities. *Higher Education*, 79(5), 773-789.
- Han, J., Yin, H., Wang, J., & Zhang, J. (2020). Job demands and resources as antecedents of university teachers' exhaustion, engagement and job satisfaction. *Educational Psychology*, 40(3), 318-335.
- Kamarudin, M.A.I., Afendi, N.A., Mohamad, M., Sufahani, (2021). Family-orientation training design in entrepreneurial training for family business small medium enterprises (SMEs): A measurement development. *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 22(5), 251–266.
- Khan, A., & Anwar, M. (2021). Higher Education in Peril: Challenges to Southeast Asian Academics. In *Higher Education Challenges in South-East Asia* (pp. 238-249). IGI Global.
- Knight, H., Carlisle, S., O'connor, M., Briggs, L., Fothergill, L., Al-Oraibi, A., ... & Blake, H. (2021). Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and self-isolation on students and staff in higher

education: A qualitative study. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(20), 10675.

Laine, E., & Gegenfurtner, A. (2013). Stability or change? Effects of training length and time lag on achievement goal orientations and transfer of training. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 61, 71-79.

Lowenthal, P. R., Nyland, R., Jung, E., Dunlap, J. C., & Kepka, J. (2019). Does class size matter? An exploration into faculty perceptions of teaching high-enrollment online courses. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 33(3), 152-168.

Malik, N. A. A., Björkqvist, K., & Österman, K. (2017). Factors associated with occupational stress among university teachers in Pakistan and Finland. *Journal of Educational, Health and Community Psychology*, 6(2), 1-14.

Masron, T. A., Ahmad, Z., & Rahim, N. B. (2012). Key performance indicators vs key intangible performance among academic staff: A case study of a public university in Malaysia. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 56, 494-503.

Mgaiwa, S. J. (2021). Academics' job satisfaction in Tanzania's higher education: The role of perceived work environment. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 4(1), 100143.

Mwesigwa, R., Tusiime, I., & Ssekiziyivu, B. (2020). Leadership styles, job satisfaction and organizational commitment among academic staff in public universities. *Journal of Management Development*.

Mahdzir, M. N., Ghani, R. A., & Yazid, Z. (2022). Faced With Obstacles and Uncertainty: a Thematic Review of Middle Managers in Higher Education. *International Journal of Professional Business Review*, 7(6), e01129.  
<https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2022.v7i6.1129>

Roberts, L. D., & Seaman, K. (2018). Good undergraduate dissertation supervision: perspectives of supervisors and dissertation coordinators. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 23(1), 28-40.

Sabagh, Z., Hall, N. C., & Saroyan, A. (2018). Antecedents, correlates and consequences of faculty burnout. *Educational Research*, 60(2), 131-156.

Salleh, N. S. N. M., Amin, W. A. A. W. M., & Mamat, I. (2017). Employee Readiness, Training Design and Work Environment in Influencing Training Transfer Among Academic Staffs of Uitm. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 7(10), 275-290.

Sawarkar, R., Scherz-shouval, R., Denzel, M. S., & Saarikangas, J. (2019). Chaperoning Junior Faculty. *EMBO Reports*, 20, 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.15252/embr.201847163>

Senko, C., Hulleman, C. S., & Harackiewicz, J. M. (2011). Achievement goal theory at the crossroads: Old controversies, current challenges, and new directions. *Educational psychologist*, 46(1), 26-47.

Subarto, S., Solihin, D., & Qurbani, D. (2021). Determinants of Job Satisfaction and Its Implications for the Lecturers Performance. *Jurnal Pendidikan Ekonomi Dan Bisnis (JPED)*, 9(2), 163-178.

Taft, S. H., Perkowski, T., & Martin, L. S. (2011). A framework for evaluating class size in online education. *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 12(3), 181.

Tomei, L. (2006). The impact of online teaching on faculty load: Computing the ideal class size for online courses. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 14(3), 531-541.

Wong, B., & Chiu, Y. L. T. (2019). Let me entertain you: The ambivalent role of university lecturers as educators and performers. *Educational Review*, 71(2), 218-233.

Yunus, A. S. M., Esa, N., Zakaria, M. H., Saari, N., Ismail, A., Noordin, N., ... & Whitsed, C. (2020). Comparison between the senior and junior academics' perceptions on criteria in measuring teaching effectiveness. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(3), 17-30.