

THE IMPACT OF PERCEIVED OVER-QUALIFICATION ON JOB ATTITUDE THE MODERATING ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how feeling overqualified for a job affects employees' attitudes and well-being, with a particular emphasis on the role of psychological empowerment as a moderating factor. Utilizing a cross-sectional survey of $n=267$ employees from various industries in Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan, the research investigates the relationship between the perception of being overqualified and outcomes like job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and psychological stress. The findings indicate that a sense of overqualification is significantly linked to increased psychological distress. However, when employees experience higher levels of psychological empowerment, the negative impact of perceived overqualification on job attitudes and well-being is lessened. The results suggest that fostering psychological empowerment within organizations can help counteract the adverse effects of perceived overqualification, leading to improved job satisfaction and reduced psychological distress. The study highlights the importance of organizational strategies aimed at enhancing psychological empowerment to better support employees who feel overqualified. Limitations of the research include its cross-sectional nature and focus on a specific geographic area, which may limit the applicability of the findings. Future studies could use longitudinal approaches and more diverse samples to further validate these conclusions.

Keywords Overqualification, psychological empowerment, job attitudes, organizational commitment, employee well-being

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly complex and competitive global job market, the issue of perceived over-qualification has garnered significant attention in organizational psychology and management studies. Over-qualification refers to a situation where employees possess qualifications, skills, or experience that exceed the requirements of their job roles. This phenomenon has been observed across various industries and demographics, with a significant portion of the workforce feeling that their jobs do

not fully utilize their capabilities. Understanding the implications of perceived over-qualification is crucial, as it can influence employee job attitudes, well-being, and organizational outcomes (Chen et al., 2021).

Perceived Over-Qualification

Refers to an employee's belief that they possess more education, experience, or skills than required for their current job role. This perception can lead to feelings of being underutilized or undervalued in the workplace, which may

manifest as frustration, dissatisfaction, and a sense of being mismatched with one's job (Erdogan, 2021). The concept of perceived over-qualification is distinct from objective over-qualification, as it is based on the individual's subjective assessment of their situation rather than an external evaluation of qualifications. It is typically measured through self-report surveys that assess the extent to which employees perceive a discrepancy between their qualifications and the requirements of their job (Yaşar, 2024).

Job Attitude

Encompass employees' evaluations and emotional responses toward their job, which can significantly influence their behavior and overall well-being. In this study, job attitudes include affective commitment and job satisfaction. Affective commitment refers to the emotional attachment and identification an employee has with their organization, reflecting their genuine desire to continue working there (Gong et al., 2020). High emotional commitment is connected with positive results for instance increased job performance, lower turnover intentions, and greater organizational citizenship behaviors.

Well-Being

In the workplace context refers to an employee's mental and emotional health, as well as their overall life satisfaction. It includes a range of factors such as psychological well-being, stress levels, and general happiness. Psychological well-being refers to the existence of positive psychological states and the deficiency of negative states, encompassing factors like emotional stability, self-esteem, and life satisfaction (Sharma, et al., 2020).

Psychological Empowerment

Is a motivational construct that reflects an employee's perception of their ability to influence their work environment, their competence in performing their job, and the meaningfulness and impact of their work. It consists of four dimensions meaning, competence, independence, and crash (Tian, 2020). Meaning refers to the degree to which employees find their work personally significant and aligned with their values. Competence involves employees' confidence of their capability to perform their work tasks efficiently. Self-determination reflects the sense of autonomy

and control employees feel over how they conduct their work. Impact pertains to the extent to which employees believe they can influence organizational outcomes through their work.

In this study, psychological empowerment is proposed to moderate the connection between perceive over-qualification and well being. This implies that the effect of perceived over-qualification on these results might fluctuate relying upon the degree of mental strengthening experienced by the employee. For instance, employees who feel empowered may be better able to cope with the negative effects of perceived over-qualification, potentially reducing the likelihood of negative job attitudes and poor well-being. Conversely, employees who feel disempowered may experience exacerbated negative effects from perceived over-qualification, leading to lower job satisfaction, reduced commitment, and poorer overall well-being. (Yang, 2021). This moderating effect highlights the importance of fostering a psychologically empowering work environment to mitigate the adverse impacts of perceived over-qualification.

Contextual Foundation

The idea of over-qualification is frequently connected to underemployment, where people are utilized in places that don't match their degree of training, experience, or abilities (Kawa et al., 2020). This bungle can prompt negative mental and social results, including decreased work fulfilment, lower job satisfaction, and expanded goals to leave the organization. Several theoretical frameworks provide insights into these outcomes, including Person-Environment Fit (P-E Fit) theory and Deprivation theory. P-E Fit theory posits that a good fit between an individual's abilities and job requirements leads to positive work outcomes, while a poor fit, such as over-qualification, results in negative consequences. Deprivation theory suggests that overqualified individuals may feel deprived of the opportunity to utilize their skills fully, leading to dissatisfaction and disengagement (Aslam, et al., 2022).

Rationale

While the negative consequences of perceived over-qualification are well-documented, there is limited research on potential moderators that could alleviate these effects. One

promising moderator is psychological empowerment, a construct that refers to employees' intrinsic motivation and their perception of autonomy, competence, and impact in their roles. Psychological empowerment has been shown to enhance job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance (Bochoridou et al., 2024). It is hypothesized that psychological empowerment may buffer the negative effects of perceived over-qualification by providing employees with a sense of control and significance in their roles, even if they feel overqualified.

This study addresses the gap in the literature by exploring the moderating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between perceived over-qualification and job attitudes and well-being. The research seeks to determine whether empowered employees are less likely to experience negative outcomes associated with over-qualification, such as decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover intentions (Skivington et al., 2021).

Objectives

1. To examine the direct relationship between perceived over-qualification and job attitudes, including job satisfaction and organizational commitment.
2. To assess the impact of perceived over-qualification on employee well-being, including psychological distress and overall job-related stress.
3. To explore the moderating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between perceived over-qualification and the aforementioned outcomes.
4. To provide practical insights for organizations on how to manage and support overqualified employees to enhance their job satisfaction and well-being.

Scope

The study focuses on employees in various industries who perceive themselves as overqualified for their current job roles. The research does not limit itself to a specific sector or geographic region, allowing for a broader understanding of the phenomena across different contexts. However, it does not include self-employed individuals or those in temporary or

contract positions, as their experiences of over-qualification may differ significantly.

Significance

The study's findings are usual to contribute significantly to understanding of perceived over-qualification. Theoretically, it extends the literature on over-qualification by identifying psychological empowerment as a potential buffer against its negative consequences. This insight can inform future research on employee attitudes and behaviors in the context of job-qualification mismatches (Campbell, 2022).

Practically, the study provides actionable recommendations for organizations and HR practitioners on how to manage overqualified employees. By fostering an environment that promotes psychological empowerment, organizations may mitigate the negative effects of over-qualification, thereby enhancing employee satisfaction, commitment, and overall well-being. This is particularly important in today's rapidly changing job market, where mismatches between employee qualifications and job requirements are increasingly common (Aguinis, 2020).

Underpinning Theory

Person-Environment Fit Theory

Person-Environment Fit (P-E Fit) Theory is a psychological framework that examines the alignment between individuals' characteristics and the stipulates or resources of their work surroundings (Xiong, 2022). This theory is particularly relevant in understanding how mismatches between an employee's qualifications and their job requirements can lead to various negative outcomes. According to the theory, when employees perceive that their skills and abilities are underutilized such as when they are overqualified for their positions—they may experience feelings of deprivation and dissatisfaction (Armitage et al., 2021). This misalignment between their potential and their actual job demands can result in a sense of frustration, decreased motivation, and diminished job satisfaction (Guan, 2021).

Hypothesis Development

On the previous literature following are the hypothesis developed.

H1: Perceived over-qualification negatively impacts job satisfaction and affective commitment.
H2: Perceived over-qualification negatively affects overall well-being.

H3: Psychological empowerment weakens the negative impact of perceived over-qualification on job satisfaction and affective commitment.
H4: Psychological empowerment reduces the negative effect of perceived over-qualification on overall well-being.

Research Framework

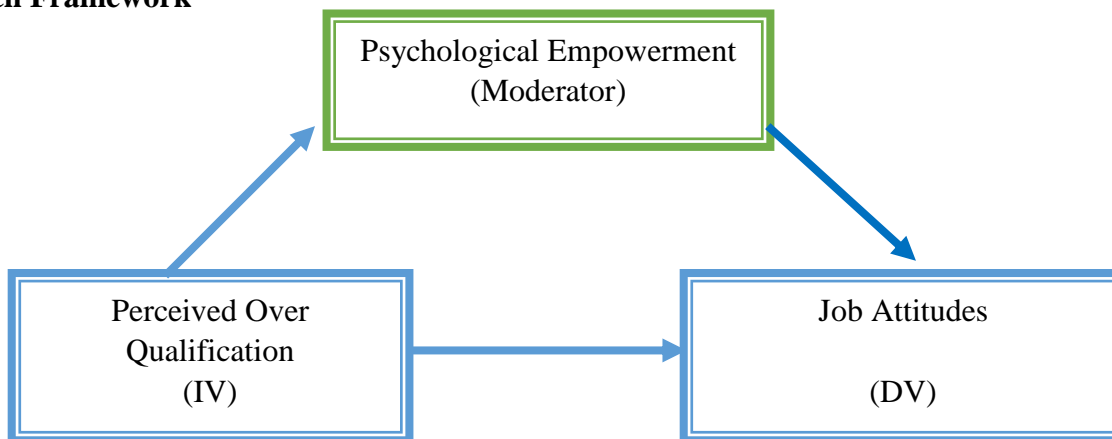


Figure 1: Research Framework of the Study

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study utilizes a quantitative research plan to examine the impact of perceived over-qualification on job attitudes and well-being, with a focus on the rational role of psychological empowerment. The design involves collecting data through surveys to analyze the relationships between the variables of interest and to test the proposed hypotheses. A cross-sectional survey approach is used, which allows for the assessment of these relationships at a single point in time.

Sample Size

The target population for this study comprises employees from various organizations in about sample size is n=267 from Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan. A convenience sampling technique used to choose members in light of their accessibility and eagerness to partake.

Data Collection Methods

Data is collected using structured surveys distributed to participants. The survey includes

standardized questionnaires to measure perceived over-qualification, job attitudes (affective commitment and job satisfaction), psychological empowerment, and well-being. The surveys are administered in both physical and digital formats to ensure comprehensive participation.

Measurement

Perceived overqualification. Measured using a 7-item scale from Maynard and Joseph’s (2006) Perceived Over-Qualification questionnaire. The scale measure the extent to which employees feel their qualifications exceed job requirements.

Job Attitudes

Affective commitment. Measured with a 6-item scale from Allen and Meyer’s (1993) questionnaire. This scale assesses employees’ emotional attachment to their organization with reliability 0.83.

Job satisfaction. Evaluated using items from a well-established job satisfaction scale,

although specific items are not detailed in the provided text.

Psychological empowerment. Assessed using a 9-item scale from Spreitzer’s (1995), questionnaire, which measures intrinsic motivation and orientation toward work roles. Responses are recorded on a 7-point Likert scale.
Procedures

Participant recruitment. Participants are recruited through organizational contacts in Sargodha. They are provided with information about the study and asked to voluntarily complete the survey.

Data collection. Surveys are distributed and collected over a period of several weeks to allow sufficient time for responses. For those completing online surveys, reminders are sent to ensure a high response rate.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting this research, we adhered to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the protection and well-being of all participants.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, the study uses established and validated measurement

instruments. Reliability is assessed through Cronbach’s alpha for each scale, with acceptable levels indicating the consistency of the measures. The study also includes checks for response accuracy and consistency.

Limitations

Potential limitations include

Self-report bias. Participants may provide socially desirable responses or inaccurately assess their own perceptions.

Cross-sectional design. The study’s design limits the ability to infer causality between variables. Longitudinal studies are suggested for future research to assess changes over time.

Results

This part examines the discoveries of the information examination. Clear insights for all factors under study are additionally given. Measurable Package for sociologies (SPSS) is applied in evaluating the outcome and the internal construction model.

Table 1
Percentages and Frequency of Respondents n=267

Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents		<i>n</i>	%
Work Type	Full-Time	159	59.6%
	Part-Time	108	40.4%
Industry	Education	139	52.1%
	Others	128	47.9%
Age	18-24years	147	55.1%
	25-34years	68	25.5%
	35-44years	52	19.5%
Gender	Male	147	55.1%
	Female	120	44.9%

Table 1 shows frequency and percentage of employees with respect to work type gender, industry and age. Male employees (*f* = 147, 55.1%) were greater in number as compared to

female teachers (*f* = 120, 44.9%). Employees belonging to full time job (*f* = 159, 59.6%) are greater in number as compared to part time job (*f* = 108, 40.4%). Similarly employees having age

18 to 24 years are greater in numbers ($f=147$, 55.1%) as compared to employees having age 25

to 34 years ($f=68$, 25.5%) and having age 35 to 44 years or more ($f=52$, 19.5%).

Table 2
 Descriptive Statistics, Person Correlation $n=267$

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Perceived Over qualification	48.9	4.5			
2. Job Attitude	18.1	4.1	.018**		
3. Psychological Empowerment	42.2	5.4	-.227**	0.18*	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2 Indicates, study found that perceived over-qualification ($M = 48.9$, $SD = 4.5$) had a very weak positive correlation with affective commitment ($M = 18.1$, $SD = 4.1$), indicated by a correlation coefficient of ($r = .018$, $p > .01$), suggesting minimal practical significance. Conversely, perceived over-qualification was weakly negatively correlated with psychological empowerment ($M = 42.2$, $SD = 5.4$), with a coefficient of ($r = -.227$, $p < .01$), indicating that individuals who feel overqualified

tend to feel less empowered. Additionally, there was a moderately positive and non-significant relationship between perceived over-qualification and job attitude ($r = .018$, $p > .01$). There was a significant negative relationship between perceived over-qualification and psychological empowerment ($r = -.227$, $p < .01$), and a significant positive relationship between affective commitment and psychological empowerment ($r = .18$, $p < .05$).

Table 3
 Moderation of Psychological Empowerment between Over-Qualification and Job Attitude

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	β	SE	B	β	SE
Constant	18.04		.22	18.11		.23
Over Qualification	.54	.13	.23	4.91	.12	.23
Psychological Empowerment	1.75	.43	.23	1.88	.46	.25
Over Qualification Psychological Empowerment	3.55	.54	.27	.25	.09	.17
R^2	.17	-	-	-	.17	-

Table 3 shows the moderation of psychological empowerment between over qualification and affective commitment. **Model 1** showed that Over Qualification ($B = 0.54$, $\beta = 0.13$, $SE = 0.23$) and Psychological Empowerment ($B = 1.75$, $\beta = 0.43$, $SE = 0.23$) significantly predicted the dependent variable, with an R^2 of 0.17, indicating that 17% of the variance was explained by these predictors. **Model 2**, which included an interaction term between Over Qualification and Psychological Empowerment ($B = 0.25$, $\beta = 0.09$, $SE = 0.17$),

also showed that the main effects were significant, with coefficients of $B = 4.91$ ($\beta = 0.12$, $SE = 0.23$) for Over Qualification and $B = 1.88$ ($\beta = 0.46$, $SE = 0.25$) for Psychological Empowerment. The interaction term suggested that the effect of Over Qualification on the dependent variable increased as Psychological Empowerment increased, but the model's explanatory power remained the same with an R^2 of 0.17 and a negligible ΔR^2 of 0.007, indicating minimal additional variance explained by the interaction term.

Discussion

The study's findings offer significant insights into the impacts of perceived over-qualification on job attitudes and employee well-being, alongside the moderating role of psychological empowerment. The hypothesis was also supported, revealing that perceived over-qualification contributes to higher levels of psychological distress and job-related stress. This underscores the detrimental impact of feeling underutilized on overall well-being. The moderating role of psychological empowerment was confirmed, indicating that employees with high psychological empowerment experienced less negative impact on job satisfaction, affective commitment, and overall well-being from perceived over-qualification. These findings suggest that psychological empowerment can buffer the adverse effects associated with over-qualification, enhancing job attitudes and well-being. The study endeavors to explore the multifaceted effects of perceived over-qualification on job attitudes and employee well-being. Specifically, the first objective is to assess the direct impact of perceived over-qualification on job satisfaction and affective commitment, hypothesizing those overqualified employees will experience reduced job satisfaction and weaker organizational commitment. The second objective focuses on evaluating how perceived over-qualification affects overall well-being, with the hypothesis that it will lead to higher levels of psychological distress and job-related stress. To address the restrained position of psychological empowerment, the third objective explores whether it can mitigate the negative impacts of supposed over-qualification on job satisfaction and affective assurance. Finally, the study seeks to provide practical insights for organizations on supporting overqualified employees, hypothesizing that psychological. This approach aims to enhance understanding of how perceived over-qualification interacts with psychological empowerment to influence both job attitudes and employee well-being, offering actionable strategies for organizational practice.

Similar findings were reported by McKee-Ryan and Harvey (2011), who noted that over-qualification, was linked to decrease job satisfaction and increased turnover intentions. The current study extends this literature by

demonstrating that psychological empowerment can moderate these effects, supporting findings that empowerment can mitigate the negative product of perceived over-qualification. Furthermore, the study's results regarding the impact on overall well-being align with the work of Maynard and Feldman (2011), which identified increased psychological distress among overqualified employees.

Implications for Practice

From a practical perspective, organizations should recognize the challenges faced by overqualified employees and implement strategies to enhance their job satisfaction and well-being. Providing opportunities for skill utilization, offering meaningful work, and fostering a supportive work environment can help address feelings of underutilization. Psychological empowerment should be a focal point in organizational development, as it appears to buffer the negative effects of perceived over-qualification. Organizations might consider initiatives such as leadership development programs, autonomy in job roles, and recognition of employee contributions to enhance psychological empowerment.

Implications for Theory

The study contributes to theoretical advancements by validating the restrained role of psychological empowerment in the association between professed over-qualification and job-related outcomes. This supports and extends the Person-Environment Fit Theory, which posits that alignment between individual attributes and job demands influences job attitudes and well-being. By incorporating psychological empowerment into this theoretical framework, the study highlights its role in moderating the effects of over-qualification, offering a more nuanced understanding of how organizational factors can mitigate the adverse impacts of perceived over-qualification.

Limitations

The cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the relationships between perceived over-qualification, psychological empowerment, and job outcomes. Additionally, the study relies on

self-reported measures, which may introduce bias. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to assess causal relationships and incorporate multiple data sources to enhance reliability.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the detrimental impact of perceived over-qualification on job satisfaction, affective commitment, and overall well-being. It demonstrates that psychological empowerment can serve as a significant moderating factor in these relationships. Specifically, the findings suggest that while over-qualification generally has negative effects on employees, these effects can be mitigated when employees feel psychologically empowered. This underscores the importance of not only recognizing and addressing over-qualification in the workplace but also implementing strategies to enhance psychological empowerment among employees. By fostering a sense of autonomy, competence, and purpose, organizations can buffer the negative consequences of over-qualification. This dual approach can lead to improved job attitudes, greater affective commitment, and enhanced overall well-being among overqualified employees. Ultimately, such efforts can result in a more engaged, motivated, and satisfied workforce, which is beneficial for both employees and the organization as a whole.

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