ISSN: 2582 - 6379
IJISEA Publications
International Journal for Interdisciplinary Sciences and Engineering Applications
IJISEA - An International Peer- Reviewed Journal
2025, Volume 6 Issue 2
www.ijisea.org

Review on Improving Work-Life Balance (WLB) In Higher Education- A Human Resource Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In the evolving landscape of higher education, the role of Human Resource Management (HRM) extends beyond recruitment and payroll to include fostering a supportive and sustainable work environment. One of the most critical components of this environment is achieving an optimal work-life balance among academic and administrative staff. This research explores the significance, challenges, and strategic HR interventions related to work-life balance within universities. It examines how the equilibrium between professional responsibilities and personal commitments affects job satisfaction, employee well-being, productivity, and institutional loyalty. By focusing on time, energy, and commitment allocation across various life domains, the study investigates the direct and indirect impacts of work-life conflict on academic performance, mental health, and organizational culture. The research proposes evidence-based HR strategies—including flexible work arrangements, wellness programs, and inclusive policies—that can mitigate stress and foster a positive work environment. Using a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys across multiple university departments, the study contributes to the development of human-centric HR models. The expected outcome is a framework that higher education institutions can adopt to promote sustainable employee engagement and long-term organizational success. This study aligns with global HRM trends emphasizing well-being, diversity, and institutional effectiveness through employee-centered strategies.

Keywords: HRM, HR Strtagies, HR interventions

I. INTRODUCTION

The role of higher education institutions is increasingly expanding beyond traditional academic excellence to creating environments where staff and faculty can thrive both professionally and personally. Work-life balance (WLB) has emerged as a key human resource concern, reflecting the need to support employees in managing the demands of their work and personal lives effectively Baker, J.et.al(2024).

Human Resource Management (HRM) in universities must recognize WLB as a strategic imperative. The academic profession often entails intense workloads, tight deadlines, research pressures, and long hours, which can lead to stress and burnout if not managed properly. The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these challenges by blurring the boundaries between work and home. This review paper explores WLB as a strategic HR goal within higher education, synthesizing recent research findings (up to June 2025) and proposing actionable frameworks for HR departments. It focuses on how WLB influences productivity, satisfaction, retention, and overall institutional success.

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II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Work-life balance is commonly defined as a state of equilibrium in which demands from the work and personal domains are equally met. Li,H.,Zhao,Y.(2023) Several theoretical models underpin WLB studies:

- Spillover Theory: Emphasizes the influence of one domain (e.g., work) spilling into another (e.g., home).
- Work-Family Border Theory: Suggests that individuals navigate borders between work and home with varying degrees of permeability and flexibility.
- Conservation of Resources Theory (COR): Indicates that people strive to maintain and protect resources (time, energy, attention), which are often depleted by overwork.

In higher education, where both academic and administrative personnel face diverse demands, understanding WLB through these theoretical lenses helps HR teams develop effective interventions.

III. RECENT TRENDS AND CHALLENGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

3.1. Post-COVID Impact

Remote and hybrid work arrangements surged during the pandemic, leading to both benefits and drawbacks. While some employees enjoyed flexibility, others experienced isolation, increased workloads, and burnout.

3.2. Gender Disparities

Female academics, especially those with care giving responsibilities, faced disproportionate burdens. Studies (Baker et al., 2024; Li & Zhao, 2023) revealed that women spent more hours on household responsibilities, impacting their academic productivity.

3.3. Role Conflict

Administrative staff often face strict in-office schedules and limited flexibility, leading to dissatisfaction. Conversely, faculty members may enjoy flexible schedules but struggle with unregulated workloads, such as research deadlines and student advising.

3.4. Institutional Culture

Many universities lack a cohesive culture that supports WLB. Inconsistent communication, inadequate mental health support, and rigid policies contribute to dissatisfaction Sharma, R.et.al (2024).

IV. HUMAN RESOURCE INTERVENTIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

To address WLB issues, HR departments in universities are implementing various evidence-based strategies, Nisa.et.al(2023):

4.1. Flexible Work Arrangements

- Telecommuting, job-sharing, compressed work weeks, and part-time roles allow employees to manage time better.

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- A study from the University of Melbourne (2023) found a 20% increase in employee satisfaction after implementing a four-day work week pilot.

4.2. Wellness and Mental Health Programs

- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), counseling services, and mindfulness workshops have become more common.
- Institutions like the University of Toronto reported reduced absenteeism after launching digital mental health support tools.

4.3. Family-Friendly Policies

- Paid parental leave, on-campus childcare, and eldercare resources help staff balance responsibilities.
- Such policies have improved retention and recruitment, especially among mid-career professionals.

4.4. Training and Supportive Leadership

- Supervisors trained in emotional intelligence and employee engagement foster a supportive atmosphere.
- Harvard's Faculty Development Office initiated leadership training that reduced burnout metrics by 15% within a year.

V. MIXED-METHOD RESEARCH AND GLOBAL CASE STUDIES,(WORLD HR FEDERATION REPORT (2025).

5.1. India (Rajasthan)

A study by Sharma & Gupta (2024) assessed faculty across public and private universities. Findings showed better WLB satisfaction in institutions with flexible attendance systems and digital workflow tools.

5.2. Indonesia (Palembang)

A qualitative study by Nisa et al. (2023) identified cultural values (collectivism, harmony) influencing WLB perceptions. University leadership promoting these values saw improved faculty morale.

5.3. Kenya

Research using Spillover Theory revealed that lecturers with poor WLB experienced decreased teaching effectiveness. Government universities struggled more than private ones due to policy rigidity.

5.4. China

Work-family culture was found to be a strong mediator of satisfaction. Institutions with transparent communication and family-inclusive policies reported higher staff engagement.

VI. STRATEGIC HR FRAMEWORK FOR UNIVERSITIES

To institutionalize work-life balance, the following framework is proposed **Adams, L et.al (2023)**:

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Table 1 : Shows Objectives and Impacts

HR Strategy	Objective	Impact
Flexible Work Schedules	Reduce rigid work hours	Improved satisfaction, less stress
Wellness Programs	Enhance physical/mental well-being	Lower absenteeism, higher morale
Managerial Training	Build empathy, promote fairness	Better leadership, reduced conflicts
Family Support Policies	Address caregiving burdens	Higher retention, gender equity
Feedback Systems	Collect insights on WLB challenges	Data-driven policy improvements

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the review of current literature and practices Kumar, P et.al,2024):

- **Institution-wide Flexibility**: Standardize flexible work policies across departments to eliminate disparities.
- **Wellness Infrastructure**: Invest in long-term wellness services beyond one-time programs.
- **Leadership Accountability**: Hold academic heads accountable for employee well-being metrics.
- **WLB in Performance Appraisals**: Encourage managers to consider WLB initiatives in performance reviews.
- **Data Monitoring**: Conduct regular surveys to measure employee satisfaction and burnout levels.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Work-life balance is no longer a peripheral concern but a central HR strategy for institutional effectiveness in higher education. By integrating WLB into HR practices, universities can improve employee satisfaction, reduce turnover, and enhance academic performance. This review reveals that successful implementation requires a systemic approach involving flexible policies, wellness programs, and inclusive leadership. While some universities are leading the way, others must catch up by adopting a proactive, evidence-based framework. Future research should focus on long-term impacts, cost-benefit analyses, and WLB practices in emerging markets. As higher education evolves, HR must continue to champion strategies that prioritize the holistic well-being of its workforce.

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