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Validation of the Educator-Targeted Bullying Measurement

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Abstract: Previous research and practitioners typically concentrate on a limited operational definition of bullying when examining educators' experiences with bullying in higher educational institutions (HEIs). This study employs the term Educator-Targeted Bullying (ETB) to denote a more precise variable, owing to the narrow definition of academic bullying. This study aims to validate a 47-item instrument that assesses three forms of bullying-related stress among academics in higher education institutions. Upon reviewing previous literature on educator bullying, three prevalent forms are identified: workplace bullying, cyberbullying, and teacher-targeted bullying. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to evaluate factorial structures based on a total of 210 survey responses. This study categorizes seven dimensions of ETB: student direct bullying, devaluation bullying, indirect private bullying, pictorial cyberbullying, task bullying, relational cyberbullying, and student physical bullying. Consequently, the factors significantly influence the operational definitions of educator bullying.

Keywords: *Educator-Targeted Bullying (ETB), Measurement, Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs).*

1. Introduction and Background

Workplace bullying has been associated with various negative mental health outcomes and behaviours. Manuel et al. (2023) indicated that 84% of the members of higher education institutions (HEIs) in a global survey experienced academic bullying. Educators are likely to experience bullying at a rate three times higher than that of other professions (Jacobs & de Wet, 2018). Research on academic bullying predominantly focuses on adolescents, as educational institutions significantly influence future generations' preparation (e.g., Adewusi, 2021). However, little attention has been directed towards educators positioned between the superiors and students (Asio, 2019). In examining academic bullying among educators, diverse and inconsistent dimensions or measurements for workplace bullying are employed. For example, Wei et al. (2013) concentrated exclusively on class size, while Winding et al. (2022) highlighted students' aggressive behaviour, and Asio (2019) surveyed students' perceptions of bullying towards educators. Several tools for assessing different bullying have been described and developed. Building on the gaps, this study aims to validate the operational definitions of academic bullying among educators in higher education institutions to establish a multifaceted measurement. Studies conducted in Malaysia have brought attention to the prevalence of workplace bullying in higher education institutions. For instance, Malaysian university staff reported verbal abuse and intimidation from superiors and colleagues, which had an impact on their psychological health and job satisfaction, according to Rahman et al. (2020). Likewise, Abdul Halim et al. (2023) pointed out that bullying at work is a common but underreported problem in Malaysian academics, frequently connected to power struggles and a lack of institutional support. These results highlight the necessity of localizing bullying concepts and creating reliable assessments that are suitable for Malaysian educators.

Given the importance of educators in national growth and the cultivation of future talent, there is an urgent necessity for the validation of academic bullying measurement to provide a comprehensive and accurate assessment. This study contributes to the body of knowledge by validating various workplace bullying measurements from past studies for educators. Additionally, research on academic bullying can assist university administrators in creating healthier working environments and educators' well-being.

2. Literature Review

Workplace bullying occurs when an employee is systematically and constantly targeted for unfavourable

actions, either work-related or personal (Van den Brande et al., 2016). De Wet (2011) explained that three principal components are present in the definitions of workplace bullying: the impact on the victim, negative consequences, and persistence. Workplace bullying develops when a power disparity exists between the victim and the perpetrator, creating a victim unable to defend themselves over an extended duration (Farley et al., 2023). Adewusi (2021) argued that the disruptive behaviour may not be consistently repeated but is merely identified as bullying. The theory of humiliation has been adopted by Adewusi (2021) to explain the behaviour of bullying. The theory posits that humiliation arises when a more dominant individual publicly highlights the deficiencies of a victim who perceives the treatment as unjust. Therefore, bullying victimisation is considered a form of humiliation that can occur in any context. For the study of Oksanen et al. (2021), the social identity theory (SIT) was used. SIT explains the tendency for individuals to exhibit greater empathy toward in-group members compared to out-group members, whereas harassers focus their aggressive behaviour on those considered out-group members.

The term academic bullying widely refers to a teacher as the perpetrator and students as the victims. Therefore, Burns et al. (2020) refined the term to "teacher-targeted bullying," referring to the harassment behaviour that educators face from students and parents. Blase et al. (2007) referred to all negative behaviour, including bullying, as workplace mistreatment or abuse. The study of teacher-targeted bullying is intricate and unclear, as educators are presumed to occupy a position of power. To have a more generalisable term that can be applied to educators in HEIs, this study expands the concept to educator-targeted bullying (ETB). Based on the review of past literature, ETB is defined as any form of mistreatment directed against educators that jeopardises their well-being.

Collie and Mansfield (2022) found three sources of educator stress: workload, student behaviour, and expectation-related stress. Two sources of stress pertain to external factors, while expectation stress is linked to the educator's expectations. Unlike the study of Burns et al. (2020), students and parents are the sources of bullying. Additionally, De Wet (2011) and Blase et al. (2007) have explored leadership and institutions as a source of bullying. Oksanen et al. (2021) stated that offline bullying often occurs in university settings; however, the necessity for online engagement has led to an increase in online victimisation. Table 1 illustrates the studies that focused on various types of bullying related to educators. Collectively, prior literature offers insights into many forms of bullying for educators. Nevertheless, the literature has concentrated on a diverse range of bullying forms that have led to confusion. Three major forms of bullying related to educators are workplace bullying (De Wet, 2010; Wei et al., 2013), ETB (Asio, 2019; Adewusi et al., 2021; Burns et al., 2020; Winding et al., 2022), and cyberbullying (Oksanen et al., 2021; Tolentino, 2016).

Table 1: Literature on Educators' Bullying

Citations	Types of bullying	Country	Respondent	Research Design
Kauppi & Porholo (2012)	Teachers bullied by students (direct and indirect)	Finland	Primary and lower secondary school teachers	Survey
Wei et al. (2013)	Work-related (Physical assault, Nonphysical violence)	US	Kindergarten teachers	Survey
Tolentino (2016)	Emotional, verbal, physical, and cyberbullying	Philippines	School teachers	Phenomenological
Asio (2019)	A student bullying the teacher	Philippines	Students of HEI	Survey
Burns et al. (2020)	Teacher-targeted bullying	Australia	-	Literature Review
Adewusi (2021)	Teacher-targeted bullying by learners (written, verbal, physical, electronic)	South Africa	Secondary school teachers	Phenomenological

Oksanen et al. (2021)	Online harassment	Finland	Researchers and teachers of HEI	Survey
Winding et al. (2022)	Pupil's aggressive behaviour (harassment, threats, and violence)	Denmark	Primary and lower secondary school teachers	Survey
Gul et al. (2022)	Teacher-targeted bullying	Lahore	Teachers of tertiary education institutions	Survey
Al Ali et al. (2025)	Bullying victimisation	Jordan	Grade 7 and 8 students of public schools	Survey

3. Research Methodology

A cross-sectional convenience sampling was used to collect the data. This study randomly collected academicians' email addresses from various university directories to ensure the representativeness of the sample. An email with a cover letter that explicitly delineates the aim of this survey, assures confidentiality and anonymity of responses, and includes the questionnaire link has been sent. This study's full analysis set, after removing outliers, was 210. Hair et al. (2019) suggested a sample size of 200 or larger according to the number of variables. Harman's single-factor test, which accounts for only 31.34% of the total variation, suggests that common method bias (CMB) is not a significant issue. The participant profiles are presented in Table 2.

A total of 210 academicians from different higher education institutions (HEIs) around Malaysia made up the final sample. The majority of participants (80.5%) were female, with only 19.5% being male. The largest age group of respondents (25.7%) was between the ages of 36 and 40, while the majority of respondents (48.6%) were between the ages of 36 and 45. In terms of the income distribution, 63.3% of participants were in the M40 income range (RM4360–RM9619), followed by the T20 group (24.3%) and the B40 group (12.4%). The largest percentage of respondents (32.4%) had between 10 and 15 years of work experience, followed by those with 5 to 10 years (21.9%) and more than 20 years (21.4%). 33.3% of participants were from private universities, whilst the bulk (66.7%) were from public ones. These traits point to a varied and knowledgeable population, which bolsters the findings' applicability in the context of Malaysian higher education.

Table 2: Participant Profile

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	41	19.5
	Female	169	80.5
Age	26 to 30	3	1.4
	31 to 35	38	18.1
	36 to 40	54	25.7
	41 to 45	48	22.9
	46 to 50	37	17.6
	51 to 55	14	6.7
	56 to 60	11	5.2
	Above 61	5	2.4
Income	RM4360 and below (B40)	26	12.4
	RM4360 – RM9619 (M40)	133	63.3
	RM9619 and above (T20)	51	24.3
Experience	Below 1 year	1	0.5
	1 to 5 years	22	10.5
	5 – 10 years	46	21.9
	10 – 15 years	68	32.4
	15 – 20 years	28	13.3
	Above 20 years	45	21.4

Types of HEI	Public	140	66.7
	Private	70	33.3

This study developed a questionnaire that includes three types of bullying: workplace bullying, cyberbullying victimisation, and ETB. A total of 47 items were used to measure the various forms of bullying (Table 3). The respondent was asked to rate a five-point Likert scale, ranging from never to always, to indicate how often they have experienced the following during the last year. This study calculated Cronbach's alpha before performing the exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The 12 items were adopted from Said and Tanova's (2021) study, which yielded a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.92. The 15 items of cyberbullying victimisation adopted from Wong and McBride (2018) were used in measuring cyberbullying among secondary schools and showed a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.70. Kauppi and Porhola (2012) developed the 20 items for ETB for school teachers, and the Cronbach's alpha for this study was 0.92.

Table 3: Measurement

Variable	Citation	Dimensions	No. of Items	Cronbach's alpha
Workplace bullying	Said & Tanova (2021)	-	12	0.92
Cyberbullying victimisation	Wong & McBride (2018)	Relational Pictorial Verbal Extortion	15	0.85
ETB	Kauppi & Porholo (2012)	Direct verbal Direct nonverbal Physical Indirect private Indirect public	20	0.92

4. Results

EFA was performed to discover the underlying patterns for a large number of variables. Eigenvalues larger than 1 would be used to interpret the number of factors in the data set. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test indicated the value of 0.89 exceeded the 0.60 threshold; the Bartlett's test was significant, $p<0.001$, which determines the factorability of the dataset. The results from EFA confirmed that all items in the measurement were loaded into 10 factors (eigenvalue larger than 1), with a cut-off of loadings greater than 0.60. Table 3 shows that 14 items were loading below the cut-off of 0.60.

The 14 items had factor loadings below the suggested cut-off value of 0.60, according to the EFA results (Hair et al., 2019). These items were removed from additional analysis in order to guarantee a strong measurement structure. Since keeping poorly loaded items could jeopardise construct validity and increase measurement error, this step is in line with psychometric norms. In order to assess the model fit and construct validity, only the remaining items with appropriate loadings (≥ 0.60) were kept and employed in the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

Table 4: Pattern Factor Loadings for EFA of Stressors (N=210)

	Eigenvalue	14.78	4.15	3.33	2.23	1.87	1.65	1.48	1.23	1.17	1.13
Item	Statements/Factor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
WB1	Being given tasks with clearly unreasonable targets or deadlines					.70					
WB2	Being exposed to an unmanageable workload					.77					
WB3	Systematically being required to carry out tasks that clearly fall outside your job description.					.73					
WB4	Being assigned a different role against your will					.73					
WB5	Persistent, unreasonable criticism of your work and effort		.77								

WB6	Inappropriate attempts to find fault with your work	.78						
WB7	Repeated reminders of your errors and mistakes	.81						
WB8	Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work	.82						
WB9	Being the subject of excessive teasing or sarcasm	.69						
WB10	Being the target of practical jokes carried out by people you do not get along with	.62						
WB11	Offensive remarks or behavior with reference to your race or ethnicity							
WB12	Unwanted sexual attention					.60		
CB1	Some delete or block you purposefully and ask others to do the same to you.							
CB2	Some put you through a “public trial” or “public shaming”							
CB3	Some isolate or boycott you on the internet.				.73			
CB4	Some blacklisted you				.67			
CB5	Some make insulting/unflattering edits to your photos and post them onto the internet.			.78				
CB6	Some make insulting/unflattering videos of you and upload them onto the internet.			.86				
CB7	Some take unflattering videos or photos of you and upload them to the internet to insult you.							.74
CB8	Some share insulting/unflattering edited photos of you on the internet.						.75	
CB9	Some write insulting posts to offend you.							.67
CB10	Some curses or swear at you							
CB11	Some bombard you with senseless or offensive messages							
CB12	Some send you personal attacks, e.g., abusive remarks about your body type or intelligence.							
CB13	Some make and post unflattering screen captures of you to make fun of/insult you.							
CB14	Some steal or hack into your account.							
CB15	Some people post their private photos or conversations on the internet.							
SB1	Obscene or inappropriate comments		.65					
SB2	Refusal to cooperate		.75					
SB3	Repeated lying		.76					
SB4	Making fun of or laughing at you		.63					
SB5	Denouncing or name-calling							
SB6	Insulting gestures							
SB7	Hiding or repeatedly coming late to class		.77					
SB8	Unjust disparagement of your professional skills		.71					
SB9	Mimicking your characteristic features							
SB10	Repeated disregard of your presence		.60					
SB11	Threatening			.67				
SB12	Violation of physical integrity							
SB13	Damaging or stealing of property			.66				
SB14	Subjecting you to inappropriate attention in public places			.77				
SB15	Spreading unfounded gossip			.64				
SB16	Improper insinuation about the teacher’s private matters			.68				
SB17	Physical violence					.74		
SB18	Making unfounded reports or complaints against you							

SB19	Irritating sexually tinged remarks or propositions		.78
SB20	Violation of personal space or improper touching	.75	

Table 5: Standardized Factor Loadings

Item	Statement	Factor	Factor Loading
SB1	Obscene or inappropriate comments	F1	0.71
SB2	Refusal to cooperate	F1	0.71
SB4	Making fun of or laughing at you	F1	0.75
SB8	Unjust disparagement of your professional skills	F1	0.84
SB10	Repeated disregard of your presence	F1	0.72
WB5	Persistent, unreasonable criticism of your work and effort	F2	0.87
WB6	Inappropriate attempts to find fault with your work	F2	0.88
WB7	Repeated reminders of your errors and mistakes	F2	0.77
WB8	Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work	F2	0.86
WB9	Being the subject of excessive teasing or sarcasm	F2	0.75
WB10	Being the target of practical jokes carried out by people you do not get along with	F2	0.67
SB11	Threatening	F3	0.77
SB13	Damaging or stealing of property	F3	0.70
SB14	Subjecting you to inappropriate attention in public places	F3	0.74
SB15	Spreading unfounded gossip	F3	0.88
SB16	Improper insinuation about the teacher's private matters	F3	0.88
CB5	Some make insulting/unflattering edits to your photos and post them onto the internet	F4	0.83
CB6	Some make insulting/unflattering videos of you and upload them onto the internet	F4	0.93
WB1	Being given tasks with clearly unreasonable targets or deadlines	F5	0.72
WB2	Being exposed to an unmanageable workload	F5	0.80
WB3	Systematically being required to carry out tasks that clearly fall outside your job description	F5	0.82
WB4	Being assigned a different role against your will	F5	0.90
CB3	Some isolate or boycott you on the internet	F6	0.70
CB4	Some blacklisted you	F6	0.79
SB17	Physical violence	F7	0.61
SB19	Irritating sexually tinged remarks or propositions	F7	0.82

Table 6 illustrates the discriminant validity of the factors. All the factors have excellent convergent validity, as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values are above 0.50. The values of Composite Reliability (CR) indicate that the internal consistency is reliable, as all values are above the threshold of 0.70, except for Factor 7, which is slightly below 0.70. The AVE is above 0.50, which supports Factor 7. The matrix shows the correlation coefficient (r) between the factors. The discriminant validity of the factors is supported because the squared root of AVE is larger than the correlation coefficient (r). This study uses the correlation matrix to assess the nomological validity. The relationship between all the factors should be positive. However, a negative r was found between Factor 4 and Factor 7, but the relationship is not significant. The consistency of the other relationships renders this single outlier insignificant (Hair et al., 2019). Thus, the result supports nomological validity.

Figure 1: CFA for Educator-Targeted Bullying

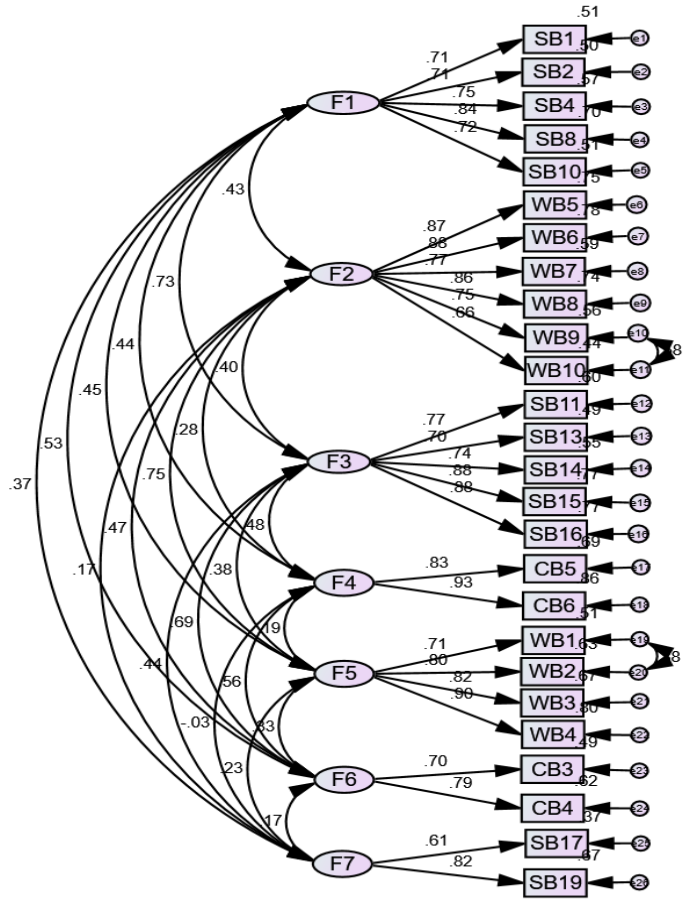

Table 6: Discriminant Validity of the Factors

Factor	CR	AVE	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7
F1	0.89	0.66	**0.81**						
F2	0.94	0.65	0.43**	**0.81**					
F3	0.86	0.56	0.65**	0.38**	**0.75**				
F4	0.90	0.64	0.33**	0.27**	0.40**	**0.80**			
F5	0.87	0.78	0.40**	0.68**	0.33**	0.18*	**0.88**		
F6	0.71	0.56	0.42**	0.41**	0.54**	0.45**	0.26**	**0.75**	
F7	0.68	0.52	0.29**	0.14*	0.36**	-0.03	0.16*	0.13	**0.72**

Note: *<0.05, **<0.01; the bold is square root of AVE

Based on the loading of the items, the factors are named as follows. Student-directed bullying is the name given to Factor 1, comprising five items (SB1, SB2, SB4, SB8, SB10) associated with the negative feedback and criticism from students. Factor 2 is designated as devaluation bullying, encompassing six items (WB5 – WB10) related to adverse treatment and harm over job execution. Student indirect private bullying is named for Factor 3, five items (SB11, SB13, SB14, SB15, SB16) about student behaviours that undermine the educator in a public setting. Factor 4 illustrates pictorial cyberbullying, comprising two items (CB5, CB6) that involve the humiliation of educators through images or videos online. Task bullying is the name given to Factor 5, which encompasses the four workload-related items (WB1 – WB4). This study designates Factor 6 as relational cyberbullying; the two items (CB3, CB4) reflect the erosion of an educator's online reputation. Student physical

bullying is the name given to Factor 7, comprising items SB17 and SB19, indicating unpleasant behaviour associated with physicality.

Discussion

This study validates a 47-item scale measuring three forms of bullying-related stressors among academics in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This study tested the dimensions of ETB by measuring workplace bullying, cyberbullying, and teacher-targeted bullying. Past literature has separately examined the measurement of three forms of bullying to understand how bullying influences stress. Thus, this study tested the factorial structure of three bullying instruments used by past literature (Said & Tanova, 2021; Wong & McBride, 2018; Kauppi & Porholo, 2012). The items used in the three forms of bullying may be redundant and repetitive due to one measure related to work, one to online, and one to students. The EFA and CFA showed that seven factors are to be used as measurements of ETB. The overall reliability and validity of the 26 items were adequate. This study found seven dimensions of ETB, namely, student direct bullying, devaluation bullying, student indirect private bullying, pictorial cyberbullying, task bullying, relational cyberbullying, and student physical bullying. Two dimensions relate to workplace bullying, as Said and Tanova (2021) suggested. Said and Tanova (2021) suggested a unidimensional view of workplace bullying, but this study found the measurement divided into two dimensions (task bullying and devaluation bullying). This study supports two dimensions suggested by Wong and McBride (2018), namely pictorial cyberbullying and relational cyberbullying. For the five dimensions of bullying from the students (Kauppi & Porholo, 2012), this study confirms three dimensions: student direct bullying, student indirect private bullying, and student physical bullying. This study offers a new insight into designing a measurement on ETB covering three bullying types.

5. Conclusion

This study presents multiple implications for both practice and future research. Researchers who are interested in studying educator bullying must ensure their measurements account for its multifaceted nature. For example, a previous study has investigated a particular type of bullying in isolation. Future research should investigate ETB through a multifaceted approach to enhance the study's accuracy. Human resource departments at higher education institutions should formulate a comprehensive strategy and policy to address bullying behavior within the organization. A healthy working environment should address a complete range of strategies and policies, including workplace, as well as student interactions, and the cyber environment. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. This study aimed to include a larger number of participants from both public and private higher education institutions to conduct an advanced comparative analysis. The diverse characteristics of public and private higher education institutions necessitate a larger sample to facilitate comparative analysis and establish a measure of generality. To conduct CFA for two distinct respondents, a larger dataset is required to produce a robust and precise model fit evaluation. Therefore, we must carefully assess the population's representativeness, and we can only apply the study's findings to a population that shares similar cultural and characteristic traits.

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