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# Is work from home (WFH) feasible for university language educators in the post COVID-19 era?

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# Is work from home (WFH) feasible for university language educators in the post COVID-19 era?


## Abstract

This study investigated the effects of work from home (WFH) on language educators in Malaysian universities gauging specifically their perceptions on its advantages and disadvantages during the COVID-19 pandemic. A mixed-methods research design was employed involving 152 language educators. The results revealed that although the overall mean scores were rather neutral, language educators were more inclined toward positive effects of WFH, most notably in terms of saving communing time and being closer to family. However, the negative effects were missing colleagues and feeling glued to the computer. The results also shed interesting insights into Malaysian language educators' high confidence in focusing on their tasks and using tools to fulfill their teaching and work-related responsibilities. The outcome from this study is a guiding model that not only informs the literature on the feasibility of WFH in the higher education context but also highlights pertinent areas of concern for its future planning and implementation.


## Practitioner Notes

1. The study informs the literature on the work from home (WFH) policy and practices in the Malaysian higher education contexts which is similar to those within Southeast Asia.
2. The study ventures into an underrepresented domain by sampling university language educators during the COVID-19 pandemic to substantiate the feasibility of WFH beyond the pandemic.
3. The study provides university management with a viable WFH policy that can be folded into the fabric of institutional practice.
4. A model is proposed to guide university leaders/educators in planning, implementing, and continue assessing future WFH policy.
5. Future studies are encouraged to assess the effectiveness of the proposed model across different learning and cultural settings.


## Keywords

work from home (WFH), feasibility, university language educators, post COVID-19

# Introduction

As governments established required quarantines and social distancing procedures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, many sectors were experiencing unprecedented disruptions. Due to the outbreak, many employees and employers had to work remotely or work from home (WFH) for the first time and were not well-equipped (Galanti et al., 2021). In Malaysia, though not a full lockdown, the movement control order (MCO) introduced on March 18, 2020. Non-essential sectors including education in which schools, universities and colleges were required to close (Chuah & Mohamad, 2020; Toquero, 2020). The MCO was extended with different sets of requirements depending on the numbers of COVID-19 cases but in general, most students and educators were largely engaging in remote learning for almost two years. The escalated need for remote learning means that educators were required to WFH. Although the transition to remote teaching may appear more convenient for university educators, it is important to note that issues related to institutional support (Afrianty et al., 2022) and increased stress due to the challenges of remote teaching (Miguel et al., 2021) remain prevalent. This warrants a closer examination on the views of university educators with regards to the effects of WFH implementation, and this in turn helps inform the feasibility of WFH in the post COVID-19 era.

While WFH policy is applicable to many contexts of the teaching profession, language educators tend to encounter different scenarios due to their workload and roles (Brumen et al., 2022; Qi et al., 2021). Given that language teaching and learning is largely skills-based, teaching a language remotely requires a different adaptation as practical activities could not be done as effectively as in-person teaching (Ashadi et al., 2022). For example, the study by MacIntyre et al. (2020) involving 600 language teachers demonstrated how they were coping with stress during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly with regards to WFH implementation. Though majority of them were applying different coping strategies, one key point is that they were experiencing both positive and negative effects of WFH.

# Literature

Among the frameworks, models, or theories about WFH in the literature, the study by Ipsen et al. (2021) was selected because it exemplified one of the most robust WFH studies across disciplines. This study has provided valuable insights into the advantages and disadvantages of WFH from the European perspective. Advantages include work-life balance, work efficiency and work control while disadvantages include home office constraints, work uncertainties and inadequate tools. To contribute to the existing WFH literature from the Asian perspective, this study aims to address the research gap by investigating the specific challenges and concerns faced by language educators in Malaysian universities while working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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**Advantages of work from home**

Firstly, the concept of work-life balance (WLB) implies achieving a harmonious state between one's professional and personal spheres, where they mutually complement each other to bring about harmony in one's life (Clark, 2000). While various studies have shown that WFH resulted in varied outcomes in relation to WLB (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020; Irawanto et al., 2021; Nakrošienė et al., 2019), a more positive influence of WFH on WLB was found in the Malaysian context. For instance, Malaysian corporate employees were more inclined towards teleworking (Quoquab et al., 2013) and the family factor contributed a "large effect on the WLB" (Husin et al., 2018, p. 43) among lecturers. In this study, WLB refers to the extent to which the Malaysian language educators can enjoy the home atmosphere, change routines, and have more time for their family life during the compulsory WFH. This includes saving commuting time and spending it meaningfully with their loved ones. One item from the original survey, "I have a chance to break my old habits and change my routines" was excluded because it was less relevant in the sociocultural context of the study.

Secondly, with reference to Grzywacz and Carlson's (2007) role theories, WFH can flexibly reduce an individual's role conflict in performing different roles such as an employee and a parent. Hence, it is hypothesised that the work efficiency (WE) can be improved among individuals when they work from home. WE also encompasses achieving better concentration and getting more time to work (Wong et al., 2020). Not only could they be more focused on their professional tasks, but also be more efficient or productive because WFH helps employees to integrate their work better within their family lives. In more recent studies, family to work enrichment was positively related to work effectiveness (Othman et al., 2021) and functional flexibility of WFH had a positive effect on job satisfaction and work performance across industries (Zamani et al., 2021). (Husin et al., 2018) further reiterated that Malaysian lecturers performed their work well during WFH. Therefore, the WE of this study refers to the extent to which the language educators can focus on their tasks and work productively without interruptions during WFH. A related item, "I am more productive working at home", was added to the questionnaire to achieve an equal number for each construct.

Lastly, as emphasised by Madikizela-Madiya and Le Roux (2017), the contemporary higher education is preoccupied by the "culture of suspicion" (p. 190) whereby institutions relentlessly prescribe how lecturers should carry out their duties. More "control, supervision and accountability" (Nixon, 2015, p. 8) are still apparent in the Asian context. When WFH became inevitable, it is hence hypothesised that lecturers could then enjoy more work control (WC) over the day outside campus offices. Greater WC improves work efficiency (Ipsen et al., 2021), and remote workers exhibit greater work effort compared to office-bound employees (Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018). In the Malaysian context, an effective WFH could be associated with a greater control over work among lecturers (Othman et al., 2021) and freedom in making job-related decisions (Zamani et al., 2021), this would in turn lead to higher job satisfaction (Badri, 2019). Hence, WC of this study refers to the extent to which the language educators can have more control over the day during WFH. This not only includes freedom in deciding when to eat or rest, but also free from constant supervision. An item, "I can control my work efficiently", was added to the questionnaire to achieve an equal number for all constructs under study.

**Disadvantages of work from home**

During the pandemic, many individuals might have suffered from home office constraints (HOC), such as limited conceived, perceived, and lived spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) including limited communication with colleagues, disturbance by family members, and distraction by household chores (Wong et al., 2020) which could "constrain home working possibilities" (Doling & Arundel, 2020, p. 10). In terms of language teaching, HOC could result in poor class design with limited opportunities for meaningful interactions as not all teachers are comfortable with WFH (Moser et al., 2021). In this respect, related studies revealed that the HOC-related disadvantages of WFH were improper working space, a lack of social interaction with colleagues and feeling of isolation and disconnection with the company (Othman et al., 2021; Quoquab et al., 2013). Therefore, the establishment of a suitable working space at home should be considered as an important issue in the WFH implementation. In this study, HOC refers to the extent to which language educators have limited recreation and contact with people, are more glued to the computer and get disturbed by others at home during WFH. Several items from the original survey, such as "I miss the food or other benefits that we have at my workplace", were excluded because they were less relevant in the sociocultural context of the study.

Secondly, the issue of work uncertainties (WU) may arise as the length of WFH period remains fuzzy. According to Fonner and Roloff (2010, p. 342), "telework not only limits information exchange frequency, but it also may hinder the flow of timely and quality information". This may result in increased stress among employees (Irawanto et al., 2021) and, in turn, affect their job performance. Back et al. (2021) echoed similar concern in language teacher education in which the modified expectations from the management aggravated the confusion among the teacher trainees. In Malaysia, Othman et al. (2021) found that employees generally received clear instructions from the bosses during WFH. To verify this finding, WU should also be treated as another essential matter in the WFH arrangement. Therefore, in this study, WU refers to the extent to which the work situation is unclear for language educators and there are various uncertainties (e.g., workload, work type, nature of work and work quality) during WFH. All items for WU were obtained from Ipsen et al. (2021) except "It is a financial problem for my work that I cannot be at the workplace" which was considered less appropriate for the research context.

Another prominent challenge for WFH is the tools or resources required to perform the tasks at home. These resource constraints were found to reduce the effectiveness of WFH (Wong et al., 2020). Although online teaching and learning (OTL) tools are not new to most language educators, the emergency remote teaching has posed immense challenges especially for those who repeatedly asked for viable tools that could sustain the online learning (Maican & Cocoradă, 2021). Likewise, Quoquab et al. (2013) indicated that one of the disadvantages of WFH was a lack of infrastructure support to effectively carry out the job given, and Ibrahim et al. (2021) highlighted that the network and communication barriers affected the job performance of Malaysian employees. To verify if the Malaysian language educators have been provided adequate tools during WFH, inadequate tools (IT) of this study refers to the extent to which the language educators are deprived of the working tools required to perform their work adequately. A related item, "there are work-related tools that I do not know how to use", was added to the questionnaire not only to achieve an equal number for each construct, but also to verify the IT-related claims brought forward by various studies (e.g., Arumugam et al., 2021; Juhary, 2021).

Hence, the study aims to investigate the effects of WFH on language educators in Malaysian universities before its feasibility in the post COVID-19 era can be delineated. As a result, to fill the research gap and to achieve the research objective, the following research questions (RQ) were formulated:

RQ1: What are the overall effects of WFH on the university language educators during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2: How do the university language educators perceive the advantages of WFH?

RQ3: How do the university language educators perceive the disadvantages of WFH?

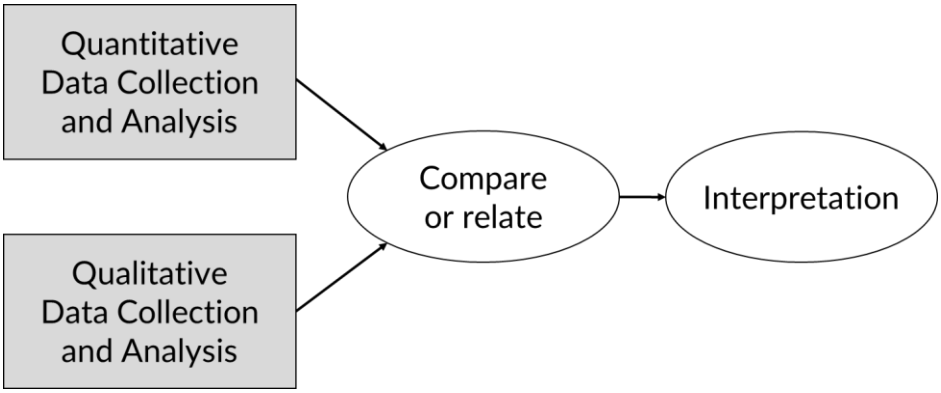
# Methods

## Research design

With reference to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), this study employed a convergent parallel mixed methods research design to obtain different but complementary data in a single phase to best understand the effects of WFH on language educators in Malaysian universities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This design was intended to triangulate the quantitative results with qualitative findings in searching for convergence, divergence, contradictions, or relationships between the two datasets for validation purposes. The notation of this design can be written as QUAN + QUAL = complete understanding as depicted graphically in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

**Convergent parallel mixed methods research design.**




*Note*. Adapted from Creswell and Clark (2011, p. 69)

## Instrument

The questionnaire used in the study consisted of three sections spreading over nine pages in Google Forms. The first section was a credible cover story, which was intended to increase the respondent motivation and minimise biased responding as recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2012). It included statements that assure the respondents' anonymity and explain how their opinions and feedback would be valued. A link to the participant information sheet and consent form was also included.

The second section of the questionnaire consisted of two constructs: Advantages (12 items) and disadvantages (12 items) of WFH consistent with the original survey (Advantages, 11 items, α = 0.74; Disadvantages, 16 items, α = 0.83) by Ipsen et al. (2021). To suit the context of the study, only 24 items were adapted to measure these two constructs which encompassed three subconstructs each. For the advantages of WFH construct, the subconstructs include Work-Life Balance (WLB, four items, "I like the atmosphere in my home better than at work"), Work Efficiency (WE, four items, "I am more productive working at home") and Work Control (WC, four items, "I can control my work efficiently"). For the disadvantages of WFH construct, the subconstructs include Home Office Constraints (HOC, four items, "I feel tied to my computer more than when I am working at my workplace", Work Uncertainties (WU, four items, "I do not know what kind of work I should do") and Inadequate Tool (IT, four items, "There are work-related tools that I do not know how to use"). The responses of all subconstructs were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) consistent with the original survey.

The last section was intended to gather demographic information and respondent preferences. The demographic information was placed at the end of the questionnaire to avoid negative feelings about the provision of personal information that might impact on the answering behaviour as highlighted by Lietz (2010). The single open-ended question allowed the respondents to express freely their personal perspectives so that any additional insights into the phenomenon under study could be gathered. All items were presented in English and Malay (the official language of Malaysia). The translation process of the questionnaire from English to Malay adapted Brislin's model of translation recommended by Yu et al. (2004) along with "bilingual subjects" (Sperber et al., 1994, p. 503) since the instrument would be used on bilingual participants. Subsequently, the final version of the instrument was subjected to pretesting on a small group of language educators who were similar in kind to the sample of this study to detect any possible ambiguities or problems in answering the questions.

**Population and sampling**

Because this study required rapid access to data during the MCO, non-probabilistic sampling methods were used. While convenient sampling aimed to gain access to the language educators who were accessible by the researchers during the pandemic, purposive sampling sought to identify the subjects who possess the necessary information in relation to the research questions (Etikan et al., 2016). Consequently, individuals who were not language educators and were not easily accessible, were excluded from the study as they fell outside the scope of the research. The sample of this study consisted of 152 language educators from either public or private universities in Malaysia with ages ranging from 26 to 60 (M = 38.9; SD = 7.6). The response rate was 40.6%. Most of the respondents were women aged 26 to 60 years (M = 39.0; SD = 7.7) and men accounted for 28.9% of respondents aged 27 to 52 years (M = 38.7; SD = 7.5). The ethnic distribution reflected the composition of the population in Malaysia (Malay, Chinese, Indian and others including bumiputras or indigenous people such as Bidayuh, Dusun, Iban, Kadazandusun, Kenyah, Melanau and Rungus). More than half of the respondents had one or more children at home. The household size ranged from 1 to 9 persons at home during the MCO. There were similar number of respondents who preferred to WFH and work from office. Table 1 presents the respondents' demography.

**Table 1**

***Demography* of Respondents**

| Particulars | Items | Frequency (*N* = 152) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Female | 108 | 71.1 |
| | Male | 44 | 28.9 |
| Age (years) | 26-35 | 60 | 39.5 |
| | 36-45 | 56 | 36.8 |
| | >45 | 36 | 23.7 |
| University | Public | 80 | 52.6 |
| | Private/Technical | 72 | 47.4 |
| Ethnicity | Malay | 92 | 60.5 |
| | Chinese | 27 | 17.8 |
| | Indian | 14 | 9.2 |
| | Others | 19 | 12.5 |
| No. of children at home | No child | 65 | 42.8 |
| | With Child | 87 | 57.2 |
| No. of people at home | 1-3 persons | 70 | 46.1 |
| | 4-6 persons | 68 | 44.7 |
| | 7-9 persons | 14 | 9.2 |
| Preference for WFH | Yes | 57 | 37.5 |
| | No | 59 | 38.8 |
| | Not sure | 36 | 23.7 |

## Data collection

Firstly, permissions were officially sought from each faculty of the universities identified. After obtaining the approval, the corresponding persons-in-charge were asked to disseminate the online questionnaire (Google Forms) via email or social media (WhatsApp) to their language educators. Information on the study including the purpose of the study, inclusion, exclusion and withdrawal criteria, study procedures and duration, possible benefits and risks, confidentiality, and data handling, along with the participant information sheet and consent form approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the authors' university were integrated into the online questionnaire. In this manner, all language educators were adequately informed about their rights as respondents to ensure informed voluntary participation that involved neither threats of harm nor offers of inappropriate rewards. The survey was made available for responses from 26 July 2021 to 15 September 2021 with a total duration of about eight weeks. All respondents expressed their agreement to participate in the study and completed the self-report questionnaire anonymously.

## Data analysis

The quantitative results collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics through IBM SPSS Statistic software (version 23). These analyses included exploratory factor analysis (EFA), comparison of means techniques such as one-way between subjects ANOVA and independent-samples t tests at a significance level of .05 between the different respondent

groups regarding the effects of WFH. The two rounds of EFA confirmed the six-factor structure with one cross-loaded item (WC4) removed. After re-examining the content of the remaining items, they were re-clustered as shown in Appendix A along with the indicators of the internal consistency of all subconstructs expressed by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Reliability analysis returned an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.646 for a sample of *N* = 152. Results show that the alpha values of the two dimensions and six constructs ranged from .68 to .86, all of which were found within the acceptable range described in the literature (Creswell, 2012; Hair et al., 2019; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016) except for the construct WLB (α = .57). A possible explanation for such a result might be the complexity of the WLB concept within the Malaysian context, hence it is argued that somewhat lower Cronbach's Alpha is to be expected as cautioned by the original authors. Based on all these accounts, the questionnaire was hence considered conceptually adequate, in other words, it had good internal consistency and therefore the data collected was fit for further analyses.

The qualitative data (open-ended question) was subjected to a six-stage thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis used in this study was a dualistic approach integrating both deductive and inductive strategies proposed by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). This approach was deliberately selected to answer the RQs whereby the constructs and subconstructs under study were integrated into the process of deductive thematic analysis while allowing for new ideas or themes to emerge from the qualitative data using inductive coding. For systematic analysis and presentation of the qualitative data, each respondent was coded R1, R2, R3...R152, respectively. A detailed description of the thematic analysis is provided in Appendix B.

Among the 152 respondents, only 44 (29%) answered the open-ended question. A total of 89 meaningful units were coded from the 39 meaningful comments (raw data) received. These comments reflected the two themes (advantages and disadvantages of WFH) including the six subthemes. All aspects under study were captured including one new theme which emerged from two inductive codes. All the comments reflected some level of patterned response or meaning between and within the personal WFH experiences, ideas, and views of the language educators. Subsequently, the mixed methods results are presented based on the RQs of the study.

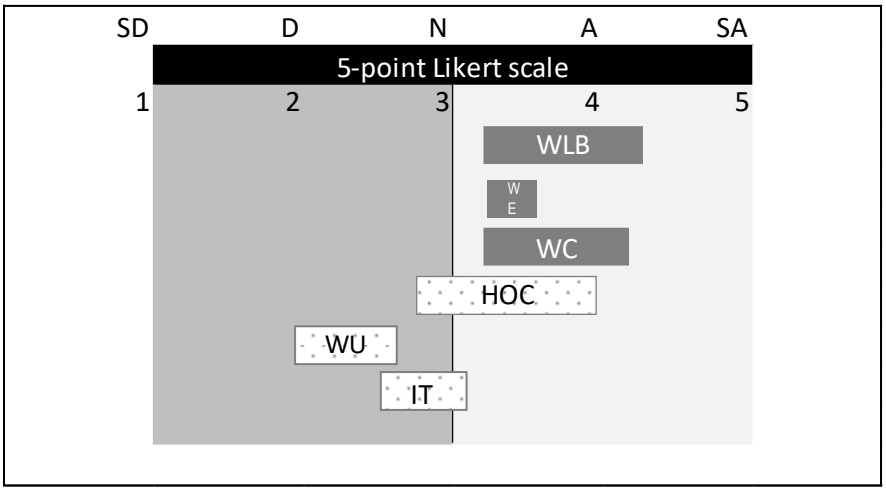
## Results

### Overall effects of WFH

The overall mean score for all the 23 items of the WFH questionnaire was 3.24 (SD = 1.12). This value (close to the midpoint) suggested that the overall effect of WFH was neither significantly positive nor negative on the Malaysian university language educators during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a closer scrutiny, these language educators experienced more advantages (M = 3.65, SD = 1.06) than disadvantages (M = 2.84, SD = 1.18) during WFH. To offer a visualisation of the results, Figure 2 illustrates the location of the six subconstructs along the 5-point Likert scale: (1) strongly disagree (SD) to (5) strongly agree (SA). The three subconstructs of the advantages of WFH were labelled in filled bar, and those of the disadvantages were in dotted bar. It was observed that four (WLB, WE, WC and HOC) of the six subconstructs spanned across the

**Figure 2**

**Effects of WFH based on the six subconstructs under study.**




positive side of the Likert scale. Another line of evidence was found when only two items from the advantages construct (WLB3 and WC1) fell below the overall mean score while only two items from the disadvantages construct (HOC1 and HOC4) were found to be above the overall mean score.

In general, Malaysian language educators perceived that saving commuting time (M = 4.28), greater flexibility in terms of eating occasions (M = 4.18) and closer to family (M = 4.13) were the most important advantages experienced from the WFH. The biggest disadvantages were missing colleagues (M = 3.96) and feeling tied to the computer more often (M = 3.38). Interestingly, despite the noted disadvantages, these university language educators mostly disagreed that they did not know what to do (M = 1.95), they could not focus (M = 2.47), and they did not know how to use the work-related tools (M = 2.50). These results signify some level of comfort among the university language educators in dealing with their various job-related tasks during the WFH period.

These quantitative results were supported by the qualitative data considering that the ratio of positive and negative experiences reported by the respondents was 1.23:1. These experiences not only corroborated the established six subconstructs, but also foregrounded a new theme, (Individual Wellbeing, IW). While some respondents acknowledged that WFH was “safer” (R13 and R57) and favourable in protecting their children and “curb[ing] the spread of the covid-19” (R71), more understanding from the university management was sought in terms of their wellbeing, for instance, management should “pay attention and care towards staff wellness and wellbeing” (R73), “assist staff not to have too much pressure” (R36) and “understand that employees are juggling with a lot of things at home” (R56). Moreover, “employers should take note that we are not robots” (R19) and “I hope the management team considers the situation, rather than having high expectations of us” (R16).

### Perceived advantages of WFH

Quantitative results showed that the mean score for the construct of advantages of WFH was 3.65 (SD = 1.06). Considering any mean value above 3.5 as indicative of a positive experience

(Ipsen et al., 2021), these results suggested that the language educators in Malaysian universities deemed WLB, WE and WC as advantages of WFH. Among the seven respondents' characteristics (see Table 1), only 'preference for WFH' showed statistically significant differences in mean scores across the three subconstructs with large effect sizes. For WLB, $F (2, 149) = 23.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .24$; for WE, $F (2, 149) = 17.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .19$; for WC, $F (2, 149) = 9.77$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .12$. In other words, there were significant differences in WLB, WE and WC between the university language educators who preferred WFH and those who did not prefer including those who were undecided. Post-hoc Tukey HSD test (see Table 2) showed that the differences were statistically significant between the Yes-No groups, and between the Yes-Not Sure groups. However, the differences between the No group and the Not Sure group were not statistically significant for the three subconstructs. For the significant cases ($p < .05$), all effect sizes ($d$) were interpreted as large following Lakens's (2013) interpretation: 0.20 = small effect; 0.50 = medium effect; 0.80 = large effect for between groups analysis in empirical research. These large effect sizes signified that a significantly higher percentage of the Yes group indicated agreement on the advantages of WFH if compared to the other two (No and Not Sure) groups.

**Table 2**

**Tukey HSD Tests on Preference for WFH for the Advantages Construct**

| Subconstruct | Yes vs. No | Yes vs. Not sure | No vs. Not sure |
|---|---|---|---|
| WLB | .000* ($d$ = 0.91) | .000* ($d$ = 1.36) | *ns* |
| WE | .000* ($d$ = 0.94) | .000* ($d$ = 1.05) | *ns* |
| WC | .001* ($d$ = 0.76) | .001* ($d$ = 0.78) | *ns* |

*Note.* *Post-hoc Tukey HSD, $p < .05$; *ns* = not statistically significant; $d$ = Cohen's $d$

A closer look at the individual items of this construct, significant differences were found in item WLB4, "I am closer to my family" consistently across four characteristics of the respondents including 'university', 'ethnicity', 'number of children at home' and 'number of people at home'. It is also interesting to find that public university language educators reported that they spent significantly less time in meetings ($p = .030$, M = 3.64, SD = 1.09) while the private/technical university language educators reported a significantly higher flexibility to do some other work during WFH ($p = .020$, M = 4.17, SD = 1.01). Likewise, those respondents with 1 to 3 persons at home could focus better on their work ($p = .045$, M = 3.63, SD = 1.07) if compared to the 7 to 9 persons group (M = 2.79, SD = 1.37).

The textual evidence was found to corroborate the numerical evidence because more positive experiences on WLB, WE and WC were coded among the responses than the negative ones. Table 3 summarises the codes and subcodes for the three subconstructs of advantages of WFH alongside the frequencies and percentages of the occurrence of related responses. While the

**Table 3**

**Frequencies and Percentages of the Codes for the Subconstructs of the Advantages of WFH**

| Subconstruct | Code/Subcode | *n* (%) | Code/Subcode | *n* (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Positive experiences | | Negative experiences | |
| WLB | *Positive reception* | 3 (20) | *Negative effect* | 4 (40) |
| | *Positive affective experiences* | 4 (27) | *Heavier workload* | 6 (60) |
| | *Positive expectation* | 8 (53) | | |
| Total | | 15 (100) | | 10 (100) |
| WE | *Higher productivity* | 4 (44) | *Long meetings* | 3 (33) |
| | *Reduced interference* | 5 (56) | *Negative feeling* | 2 (22) |
| | | | *Emotional distress* | 4 (45) |
| Total | | 9 (100) | | 9 (100) |
| WC | *Greater flexibility* | 4 (67) | *Lack of choice* | 1 (100) |
| | *Self-improvement* | 2 (33) | | |
| Total | | 6 (100) | | 1 (100) |

*Note. n* (%) = frequency of response coded (percentage by code); subcodes were italicised

quantitative results showed that WLB, WE and WC were advantages of WFH, qualitative findings disclosed the opposite side of these subconstructs. Not only the positive experiences of WLB, WE and WC were substantially attested. For instance, while WFH was flexible (R46, R127, R132, R146), well received (R26, R57, R103), improved affective experiences (R57, R72, R146, R147), enhanced productivity (R57, R68, R71, R146), reduced undesired interference (R13, R26, R38, R57), and improved personal development (R57), some negative experiences also surfaced from various respondents, for example:

(1) “this is affecting my quality time with my family” (R19)

(2) “WFH is not a favourite…it's abnormal to live like that” (R36)

(3) “no work-life balance if working from home for too long” (R45)

(4) “[it is] not healthy to be WFH all the time” (R109)

(5) “WFH is definitely not working for me…It’s very hard to accommodate different situations” (R120)

Furthermore, some respondents suffered from emotional distress (R8, R16, R56, R127), heavier workload (R16, R19, R56, R69), longer meetings (R56, R69, R108) and a lack of choice (R5).

**Perceived disadvantages of WFH**

Quantitative results showed that the mean score for the construct of disadvantages of WFH was 2.84 (SD = 1.18). Unlike the advantages construct, this value (close to the midpoint) suggested that the Malaysian university language educators neither agreed nor disagreed whether HOC, WU and IT were disadvantages of WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similarly, among the seven respondents’ characteristics, only ‘preference for WFH’ showed statistically significant differences in mean scores across these three subconstructs with large

effect sizes. For HOC, F (2, 149) = 13.04, $p < .001$, η2 = .15; for WU, F (2, 149) = 22.07, $p < .001$, η2 = .23; for IT, F (2, 149) = 19.21, $p < .001$, η2 = .21. In other words, there were significant differences in HOC, WU and IT between the university language educators who preferred WFH and those who did not prefer including those who were undecided. Post-hoc Tukey HSD test (see Table 4) showed that the differences were statistically significant between the Yes-No groups, and between the Yes-Not Sure groups. Similarly, the differences between the No group and the Not Sure group remained statistically insignificant for the three subconstructs. For the significant cases ($p < .05$), all effect sizes could be interpreted as large. The large negative value computed for Cohen's *d* signified that a significantly higher percentage of the Yes group indicated disagreement on the disadvantages of WFH if compared to the other two (No and Not Sure) groups.

**Table 4**

**Tukey HSD Tests on Preference for WFH for the Disadvantages Construct.**

| Subconstruct | Yes vs. No | Yes vs. Not sure | No vs. Not sure |
|---|---|---|---|
| HOC | .001* (*d* = 0.68) | .000* (*d* = 1.04) | *ns* |
| WU | .000* (*d* = 1.22) | .000* (*d* = 0.93) | *ns* |
| IT | .000* (*d* = 0.98) | .000* (*d* = 1.14) | *ns* |

*Note.* *Post-hoc Tukey HSD, $p < .05$; *ns* = not statistically significant; *d* = Cohen's *d*

Delving deeper into the individual items of this construct, significant differences were found in various items across other six characteristics of the respondents. Although younger (26-35 years old) language educators seemed to get more exercise than those 36 to 45 years old ($p = .039$, M = 3.45, SD = 1.26), they were more unsure about the work they needed to do during WFH ($p = .011$, M = 2.20, SD = 1.18). The private/technical university language educators reported that they missed seeing their colleagues ($p = .038$, M = 4.15, SD = 1.07) and WFH is not as interesting as working from the office ($p = .013$, M = 2.86, SD = 1.15). Compared to other ethnic groups, Malay language educators not only reported that WFH is not interesting (M = 2.88, SD = 1.14), but they found it also more difficult to maintain focus (M = 2.64, SD = 1.23) and were more worried that there was not enough work while WFH (M = 2.93, SD = 1.27). Language educators with children at home also found it more difficult to stay focused when WFH ($p = .009$, M = 2.82, SD = 1.34). Lastly, language educators with the highest number of people at home (i.e., 7-9 persons) reported that they encountered more difficulty in performing work-related tasks during WFH (M = 3.71, SD = 0.91).

The qualitative findings of this construct were consistent with the quantitative data. It was observed that 15 (17%) coded responses indicated agreement on the HOC subconstruct while only 7 (8%) coded responses disagreed that HOC was a disadvantage of WFH. Moreover, respondents indicated disagreement in the comments in relation to the WU and IT subconstructs. These findings supported the quantitative results which showed that HOC spanned across the positive side and WU and IT located only at the negative side of the Likert scale (see Figure 2).

Table 5 summarises the codes and subcodes for the three subconstructs of disadvantages of WFH alongside the frequencies and percentages of the occurrence of related responses.

**Table 5**

**Frequencies and Percentages of the Codes for the Subconstructs of the Advantages of WFH**

| Subconstruct | Code/Subcode | *n* (%) | Code/Subcode | *n* (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Positive experiences | | Negative experiences | |
| HOC | *Home-inclined* | 7 (100) | *Office-inclined* | 6 (40) |
| | | | *Teaching preference* | 6 (40) |
| | | | *Lack interaction* | 3 (20) |
| Total | | 7 (100) | | 15 (100) |
| WU | *Certainties* | 3 (100) | | |
| Total | | 3 (100) | | |
| IT | *Tool provision* | 3 (100) | | |
| Total | | 3 (100) | | |

*Note. n* (%) = frequency of response coded (percentage by code); subcodes were italicised

Similarly, the qualitative findings unravelled the opposite side of these subconstructs, but with relatively fewer subcodes. Not only were the negative experiences of HOC supported, for instance, there were respondents who preferred working in the office (R5, R13, R16, R56, R120, R151), face-to-face teaching and learning (R38, R46, R120, R147), and more interactions with colleagues and students (R78, R109, R151), there were also some positive experiences that emerged from the coded responses. For example, various respondents who preferred WFH despite the spatial constraints, in this regard, R103 stated: “I think WFH is right for certain tasks even marking, I prefer to do it at home”, R70 concurred: “WFH is a bonus”, and R65 added: “WFH is the future working environment that is hoped to be adapted by all universities for their teaching staff”. Regarding WU, some responses refuted the work-related uncertainties by recommending that “the university should not be violating the working hours allocated for each staff. Even though it's working at home, it doesn’t mean meetings or work instructions can be done/given any time like especially at night or during the weekends” (R69). In terms of IT, some respondents identified and proposed the working tools required, for example, provision of a new device (R75) and internet data and related facilities (R112).

## Discussion

### Overall effects of WFH

Results suggest that WFH has both positive and negative effects on the Malaysian university language educators during the COVID-19 pandemic, the ratio (qualitative) and the slightly higher mean score (quantitative) lead to the inference that there is an inclination of these educators

towards the positive effects of WFH. These results are in line with those of Quoquab et al. (2013), Husin et al. (2018), Badri (2019), Othman et al. (2021) and Zamani et al. (2021) which indicate that Malaysian employees favour WFH. Moreover, these results lend support to some previous studies (e.g., Ipsen et al., 2021; Irawanto et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2020) which reveal that most people exhibit a more positive rather than negative attitude towards WFH during lockdowns. Not limited to the Europeans as in the study by Ipsen et al. (2021), saving commuting time and greater flexibility (regarding food and breaks) were also rated by the university language educators as the most important advantages of WFH. Besides, our results also concur with Wong et al. (2020) and Irawanto et al. (2021) in that, in the Asian context, personal and family wellbeing are important benefits of WFH, which can help reduce stress and this in turn, enhances job performance.

The results are contrary to Arumugam et al. (2021) who find that Malaysian ESL educators have "technical difficulties with online teaching tools" (p. 142) and Juhary (2021) who argues that some educators may "lack the knowledge and understanding" (p. 1) on how the pertinent platforms and applications work best during the initial stage of the pandemic. Two possible explanations for this contradiction may be attributed to: (a) the time this study was conducted (July to September 2021, which was much later than the two studies mentioned) whereby many language educators had received necessary training for OTL from the respective universities, and (b) the availability of free online applications and the possible effect of self-efficacy on resilience among the language educators in creating their own teaching materials in relation to the IT subconstruct as discussed in more detail later.

**Perceived advantages of WFH**

Results showed that the Malaysian university language educators were in general more favourable towards WFH and supported that WLB, WE and WC were advantages of WFH. As an illustration, private university language educators seemed to enjoy more advantages than those of the public universities, such as, closer to family (WLB) and more flexible in dealing with other work (WC), but they continued suffering from long meetings (WE) during WFH. This finding was found to resonate with the study by Ponnampalam (2012) in that, before the pandemic, heavier workload which was evident in the Malaysian private higher education sector had triggered the perceived work-life imbalance among the academic staff. During the pandemic, the situation was mitigated to a certain extent by the implementation of WFH as evident in this study.

Congruent with Quoquab et al. (2013) and Husin et al. (2018), the compensation in terms of domestic support could have alleviated the pressing work-related demands among the family oriented Malaysian employees. However, the work intensification remained at the individual level. This could then explain the significant difference in the attendant advantages including WLB, WE and WC between those who prefer and those who did not prefer WFH. From the negative experiences reported, it is evident that the conflict stemmed largely from the expanded work-related demands placed on an individual's role with "consequent role overload, role ambiguity and role conflict" (Ponnampalam, 2012, p. 165) which in turn negatively influenced the perceived advantages of WFH of some university language educators.

### Perceived disadvantages of WFH

Results supported that HOC (but not WU and IT) constituted a disadvantage of WFH among the Malaysian university language educators. This finding concurred with Quoquab et al. (2013), Othman et al. (2021) and Wong et al. (2020) in that a good number of the university educators had suffered from the HOC not only because a proper workspace could not be established at home, but also a lack of social interaction with colleagues and feeling of isolation and disconnection with the students. This social isolation was particularly prominent among the private university language educators, and this could pose a serious problem that might affect employee retention and subsequently reduce motivation and job performance (Irawanto et al., 2021).

However, the results are found to be contrary to the original study by Ipsen et al. (2021) which supported that WU and IT were perceived disadvantages of WFH. On the one hand, our finding highlighted the dissimilarity between the Asian and European perceptions on these two subconstructs. On the other hand, our finding supported Calderon et al. (2022) and Othman et al. (2021) who claimed that lecturers generally received clear instructions from the university authorities during remote working. This phenomenon could also be associated with teacher proactive agency during the emergency remote teaching as highlighted by Ashton (2022), Badiozaman (2021) and James et al. (2022). In respect of the IT subconstruct, a lack of infrastructure support for employees to carry out the tasks effectively when they WFH might be a disadvantage in early years (cf., Quoquab et al., 2013), in other words, before the pandemic has shaken up the education sector, nonetheless, the plethora of free online applications and the possible effect of self-efficacy on resilience among the university language educators in creating their own teaching materials as evident in the study by Végh et al. (2021) has substantially mitigated the challenges posed by this IT. In fact, language teaching and learning does not necessarily involve new and inventive tools, it is more about commendably exploiting the available tools to creatively design and deliver the lessons online (Moser et al., 2021).

Another point that merits attention is that the present study implicated solely university language educators unlike the cited studies which involved employees from various disciplines. While some enjoyed OTL, numerous others explicitly indicated that they preferred face-to-face teaching and learning not only because languages are skill-based, but they also believed that language learners should be given a greater extent of interaction and communicative opportunities to properly develop their proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking that OTL could not render. This could have contributed to the significant difference in all the three subconstructs of the disadvantages of WFH between those who prefer and those who did not prefer WFH. In this regard, we concur with Nordmann et al. (2021) in that we should “diversify our teaching methods” (p. 5) to offer an effective and pragmatic solution to our institutions during crisis moments.

## Conclusion

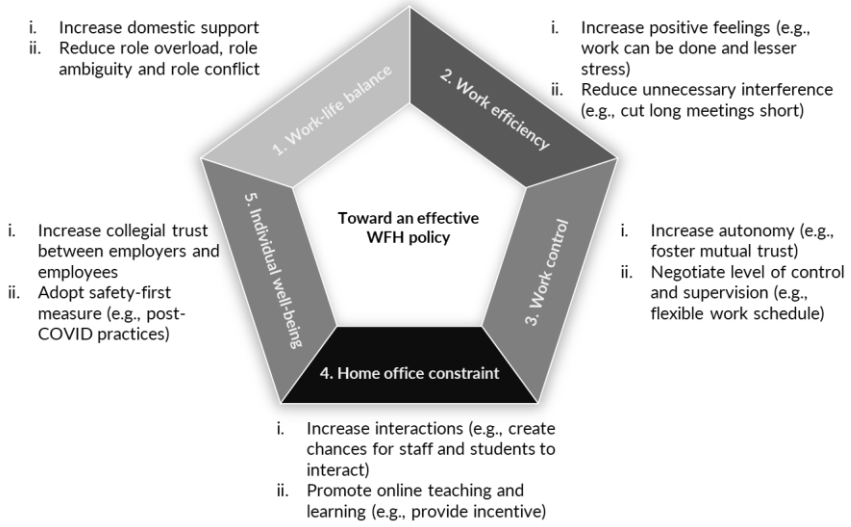
The emergence of the global health crisis has compelled many universities to make an unprecedented shift towards WFH to maintain not only the continuity of teaching and learning, but also some semblance of normalcy during the pandemic. To understand the effects of WFH implemented, this study has ventured into the language domain and has found that language educators in the Malaysian universities experienced both positive and negative effects of WFH as evident in various related studies (e.g., MacIntyre et al., 2020). These findings underline the

contribution of the study in informing the literature on WFH in the higher education particularly in settings similar to Malaysia, such as those within Southeast Asia. In a closer scrutiny, Malaysian university language educators indicated a more favourable inclination towards the advantages of WFH. This in turn suggests that WFH can be a viable practice for the language teaching profession in higher education in the endemic phase or post COVID-19 era.

Drawing on the mixed methods results of this study, a model, shown in Figure 3 below, is proposed to guide universities in planning, implementing, and continue assessing future WFH policy not only for the language educators in Malaysia, but also across continents, specifically as a post-pandemic measure. The model proposes five inter-related considerations – (1) WLB, (2) WE, (3) WC, (4) HOC, and (5) IW – for planning a practical and effective WFH policy. These considerations are found to be consistent with Sumer et al. (2021) who call for support for university academics which comprises technical, pedagogical, and social aspects, hence policy makers are encouraged to simultaneously consider the five dimensions of the model to ensure productivity, commitment, and retention among the language educators. Nevertheless, we believe that this model is far from complete and may need improvement and refinement. Hence, future studies could focus on the assessing the (cost)-effectiveness of the model and thus, suggest strategies on how WFH policy across different learning and cultural domains could be folded into the fabric of institutional development efforts.

**Figure 3**

**Model for Planning an Effective WFH Policy**




Subsequently, cautions should be exercised in interpreting the findings of this study based on the following limitations. First, although the online questionnaire could reach all potential respondents through authors' personal networks, the response rate could be improved by persistent follow-up. This could not be done in this study because of the time constraints and other uncertainties such

as the WFH implementation might halt at any time. Second, other qualitative data collection methods, such as interview or analysis of WFH policy document could be integrated in future research to further triangulate the quantitative data and strengthen the subsequent inferences. Finally, the study targeted language educators in general and did not require them to specify their other roles within the university, as those who hold other administrative positions may have different perceptions on the advantages and disadvantages of WFH.

## Conflict of Interest

The author(s) disclose that they have no actual or perceived conflicts of interest. The authors disclose that they have not received any funding for this manuscript beyond resourcing for academic time at their respective universities.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

## Descriptive and Reliability Statistics for all Constructs Under Study

| Item | L | M(SD) |
|---|---|---|
| Construct 1: Advantages of WFH (11 items, α = .77) | | |
| Subconstruct 1.1: Work-life balance (4 items, α = .57)<br>The extent to which the language educators can enjoy the home atmosphere, change routines, and have more time for their family life during WFH | | |
| WLB1: I like the atmosphere in my home better than at work. | .696 | 3.50(1.04) |
| WLB2: I save on the normal commute time to my workplace. | .678 | 4.28(0.88) |
| WLB3: It is easier to get in touch with people than normal. | .658 | 3.20(1.13) |
| WLB4: I am closer to my family. | .782 | 4.13(0.92) |
| Subconstruct 1.2: Work efficiency (3 items, α = .74)<br>The extent to which the language educators can focus on their tasks without interruptions during WFH. | | |
| WE1: I do not have to spend long time in meetings. | .599 | 3.43(1.25) |
| WE2: I can focus on my work without interruptions from other people. | .762 | 3.37(1.22) |
| WE3: I am more productive working at home. | .802 | 3.24(1.04) |
| Subconstruct 1.3: Work control (4 items, α = .68)<br>The extent to which the language educators can have more control over the day during WFH. | | |
| WC1: I have no one looking over me. | .412 | 3.20(1.20) |
| WC2: I can take a break when I want to. | .883 | 3.92(1.03) |
| WC3: I can eat and drink my own food. | .857 | 4.18(0.91) |
| WC4 (previously WE2): It is flexible for me to do some other work that I would normally not have time to do. | .559 | 3.97(1.01) |
| Construct 2: Disadvantages of WFH (12 items, α = .86) | | |
| Subconstruct 2.1: Home office constraints (α = .71)<br>The extent to which language educators have limited recreation and contact with people, are more glued to the computer and get disturbed by others at home. | | |
| HOC1: I do not get to see my colleagues as much as I would like to. | .418 | 3.96(1.09) |
| HOC2: I do not get enough exercise if compared to working at my workplace. | .698 | 3.09(1.28) |
| HOC3: The physical conditions in my home do not afford a conducive working environment (e.g., proper table and chair, enough light, quietness, facilities like library). | .560 | 2.78(1.21) |
| HOC4: I feel tied to my computer more than when I am working at my workplace. | .609 | 3.38(1.24) |
| Subconstruct 2.2: Work uncertainties (α = .83)<br>The extent to which the work situation is unclear for language educators and there are various uncertainties during WFH. | | |
| WU1: I am afraid that there will not be enough work for me to do from home. | .803 | 2.60(1.24) |
| WU2: I do not know what kind of work I should do. | .813 | 1.95(0.94) |
| WU3: The work I do from home is not as interesting as the work I do at my workplace. | .694 | 2.61(1.17) |
| WU4: I find it difficult to keep myself focused when I work alone at home. | .729 | 2.47(1.18) |
| Subconstruct 2.3: Inadequate tools (α = .80)<br>The extent to which language educators are deprived of the working tools required to perform their work adequately during WFH. | | |
| IT1: There are physical equipment that I do not have access from home to do my work. | .638 | 3.07(1.28) |
| IT2: There are data or documents that I do not have access from home to do my work. | .834 | 2.81(1.18) |
| IT3: There are work-related tasks that I want to do but cannot do from home. | .758 | 2.91(1.22) |
| IT4: There are work-related tools that I do not know how to use. | .628 | 2.50(1.09) |

*Note.* L = factor loading; M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation; α = Cronbach's Alpha.

## Appendix B

## Thematic Analysis: An Example for the 'Advantages' Theme

| Stages | Data Analysis Activities | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Developing the code manual | The code manual or template was developed a priori based on the research questions. Hence, six broad code categories formed the code manual including WLB, WE, WC, HOC, WU and IT. The code categories were consistent with the operational definitions and the descriptions of the subconstructs. | - |
| 2. Testing the reliability of the code | To test the reliability of the coding process, the researchers independently coded several randomly selected comments. As an attempt to reduce potential bias, all discrepancies were discussed and resolved during consensus meetings, for example, coding categories were paraphrased, modified, and reorganised through an iterative manner to establish the desired consistency based on predefined code categories. | See example below |
| 3. Summarising data and identifying initial themes | The first few reads of the comments were intended to get an overall comprehension of the raw data. Subsequent reads involved summarising and highlighting texts or codable meaningful units (units were underlined). At this stage, chunking original sentences or phrases was applied (chunks were italicised and bracketed). Relevant comments (in square brackets) were also inserted judiciously to facilitate subsequent analysis. | "I believe WFH is a <u>good way</u> to make us <u>more discipline</u> and enhance our <u>creative and critical thinking skills</u> (*creative*) in teaching the students. It makes me <u>more relaxed</u> and <u>job can still be done effortlessly</u> (*work can be done*). It all depends on your own effort. Work efficiency [WE construct is mentioned] depends on <u>less stressful</u> work environment wherever you are make it home or office. Most importantly, <u>it has to be safe above all matters</u> (*stay safe*) [inductive code]." (R57) |
| 4. Applying template of codes and additional coding | Analysis of the highlighted texts at this stage was guided by the template of codes to determine if the meaningful units fitted within the deductive codes. Any inductive codes whether they were independent from or expanding the deductive codes were reflected and identified by keywords, phrases or/and sentences that directly indicated ideas, views, concepts, and notions of the constructs under study. | Theme: Advantages of WFH<br>Subtheme: WC<br>Deductive code: Positive experiences<br><br>Two of the above underlined texts/keywords indicated respondent's positive experience on WC. Codable meaningful units including 'more discipline' and 'creative' were collated. From this example (R57), one inductive code (security: stay safe) was developed. |
| 5. Connecting the codes and identifying themes | The process of managing data occurred at this stage. The chunks of meaningful units were then sorted, organised, or clustered iteratively to connect codes. Themes and patterns in the data were identified by looking at the similarities and differences of each code including positive or negative comments. If applicable, content analysis, sometimes considered as a quantitative thematic analysis, was performed to quantify (provide frequency or counts) the occurrence of related codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This frequency analysis was done in Excel spreadsheet aided with multiple colours. | Inductive code: Security<br>(*n* = frequency of codes = 6)<br><br>safer (R13)<br>better during pandemic (R30)<br>stay safe (R57)<br>curb the spread (R71)<br>protect kids (R71)<br>temporary measure (R137) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 6. Corroborating and legitimating coded themes | All the themes were corroborated to ensure accuracy of the themes coded. This was done by examining the connections between the assigned codes or excerpts and the underpinning concepts of the theme. This examination involved several iterations whereby texts, codes and themes might be collapsed or segregated, redefined, and renamed to legitimise the analysis before entering the process of interpretation in which compelling excerpts, quotes, phrases, and sentences were connected into an explanatory framework consistent with the thematic map. This entire process was intended to give meaning to the themes. | Theme: Advantages of WFH<br>Subtheme: WC<br>Deductive code: Positive experiences (6)<br>Subcodes: discipline<br>creative<br>flexible (x4)<br>Inductive code: Negative experiences (1)<br>Subcode: forced to adapt<br><br>In the thematic analysis of this study, it is incumbent to address any single disparate comment as those that were repeated by others. In sum, the codes indicated that WFH contributed to respondents' positive and negative experiences in terms of WC. |