The role of mindfulness skill and inclusive leadership in job performance among secondary teachers in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Purpose – Researcher agreed that job performance has a positive effect on productivity as well as an organisation's efficiency. Thus, this study aims to investigate the impact of mindfulness skill, inclusive leadership (IL), employee work engagement and self-compassion on the overall job performance of secondary school teachers in Hong Kong. It then evaluates the mediating effect of employee work engagement between the relationships of mindfulness skill, IL and job performance, as well as the moderate effect of self-compassion between the relationships of mindfulness skill, IL and employee work engagement.

Design/methodology/approach – The sample comprised 263 teachers working from three secondary schools in Sha Tin, Hong Kong. The data was then analysed using Smart PLS version 4.0.9.

Findings – The results showed significant positive relationships between mindfulness skill and IL towards employee work engagement and between employee work engagement and job performance; meanwhile, there emerged a significant effect on the relationship between mindfulness skill and IL towards job performance. Furthermore, this research has confirmed that self-compassion did not moderate the relationship between mindfulness skill, IL and employee work engagement, but employee work engagement plays a mediating effect on the relationship between mindfulness skill, IL and job performance.

Originality/value – This research has helped to fill the literature gap by examining the mediating roles of employee work engagement and mediator role of self-compassion in the integrated relationship of multi-factor and job performance. Examining the mediating role of employee work engagement has helped to enhance the understanding of the underlying principle of the indirect influence of mindfulness skill, IL and job performance. The result of this research shows that self-compassion plays a vital role in influencing the employees’ work engagement. Hence, it is important that companies design human resource management policy that enables self-compassion to be used as a consideration psychological-related strategy when structuring organisation or teams. It is also crucial for top management and policymakers to define and communicate the organisation’s operating principle, value and goals.

Keywords Mindfulness skill, Inclusive leadership, Employee work engagement, Self-compassion, Job performance, Secondary teachers, Hong Kong

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Hong Kong is a city and special administrative region of China on the eastern Pearl River Delta in South China with 7.5 million residents of various nationalities (Hong Kong in brief, 2022). It is counted among the most developed city in the world and has great potential becoming a global financial centre. However, Hong Kong as a small city with limited natural resources and land area, talent is one of Hong Kong's most important assets, and education is the backbone propping up the development of this key resource according to the Hong Kong’s education market – trends and opportunities. China Briefing News (2023). According to Census and Statistics Department (2023), labour force fell 2.4% year on year...
to 3,776,300 in 2022 which is the biggest drop in labour force since records began almost four decades ago in Hong Kong. About 5,720 teachers have turnover intention from Hong Kong’s local school system during the 2021 to 2022 academic year, according to Leung (2022). The education industry is a human resource-intensive sector with a dynamic, complex and uncertain work environment in which success is highly dependent on the employees themselves. The previous study conducted by Azar and Shafiqi (2013) found that employees’ motivation levels play a crucial role in how effective they will be at the workplace, as highly motivated individuals tend to be more committed at work and have increased productivity than employees with a lower degree of motivation. Thus, organisations are becoming more and more aware of the potential of the workforce as a source of competitive advantage. Therefore, it is essential to have a deeper understanding of job performance among teachers in Hong Kong.

One of the major challenges that modern-day education organisations are confronted with is the proper teaching performance to achieve high productivity. Teachers are the most important stakeholders in all educational settings, as they are specialists in a range of teaching approaches, strategies and course design (Kunter et al., 2013). Instructional clarity and classroom management guarantee instructional engagement and they appear to be the two most influential teaching characteristics (Chen and Lu, 2022). Borman and Motowidllo (1993) proposed that job performance was bifurcated into task performance and contextual performance. In the perspective of task performance, inadequate classroom management is a specific aspect of low-task performance that can contribute to teachers leaving schools in Hong Kong (Rozelle and Wilson, 2012). Hue (2001) showed that in some schools, many teachers expressed the concern that half of all classroom time was taken up with managing students’ behaviour other than instruction, and that discipline problems were responsible for a significant portion of this lost instructional time. Teachers tend to move towards traditional teacher-centred teaching methods instead of using innovative teaching methods and are relatively rigid in their classroom behaviour because of their inexperience in the profession (Ng et al., 2010). The previous research examined that mindfulness skill is associated with lower levels of emotional burnout, cynicism, turnover intention and missed work days, and to higher levels of professional efficacy, job satisfaction and job performance (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Hülsheger et al., 2012; Taylor and Millear, 2016). In perspective of contextual performance, lack of collaboration and teamwork among teachers in Hong Kong is a specific aspect of low contextual performance that can contribute to low teaching performance (Flores, 2005). The research revealed that teachers who reported lower levels of participation in decision-making processes and limited opportunities for involvement in school improvement initiatives experienced lower job satisfaction (Toropova et al., 2020). Previous studies in public management and human resource management (HRM) show that, inclusive leadership (IL) are focused on facilitating group members feeling part of the group (belongingness) and retaining their sense of individuality (uniqueness) while contributing to group processes and outcomes (Dane and Brummel, 2014). In addition, the abrupt transition to online teaching left many secondary school teachers in Hong Kong unprepared to effectively use digital technology for instructional purposes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hong Kong Annual Reports (2021–2022) indicated that the absence of face-to-face interaction and limited opportunities for real-time feedback led to decreased student engagement, ultimately affecting teaching performance. Research illustrates that individuals high in self-compassion report greater emotional wellbeing that may improve the job performance because it protects individuals from social stressors through engaging in self-kindness and learning to accept that having imperfections is part of human nature (Crego et al., 2022). In this context, research on malleable factors that can improve teacher job performance is desirable. Thus, job performance has emerged as the key focus that needs to be addressed to maintain a competitive workforce in the education industry.
Throughout the years, many studies have addressed employees' job performance. Yet, the literature specific to job performance managerial practices among secondary teachers in the context of the education industry of Hong Kong is overlooked in the education literature. This is because most of the literature is about university teachers, primary school and special education research in the field of education research in Hong Kong, while there is relatively little research on the teaching performance of high school educators. Therefore, the relationship between mindfulness skill and IL and job performance remains unexplored in the education literature. In addressing the above knowledge gaps, the present study unfolds the mindfulness skill and IL among teachers and how they are linked to the job performance. Firstly, the study identified the effects of mindfulness skill and IL on job performance. Secondly, the mediating role of employee work engagement and the moderating role of self-compassion were assessed. Due to the well-researched positive effect of mindfulness skill and IL on job performance, mediation and moderation are assumed to occur between mindfulness skill and IL and job performance. The rest of the paper's structure is as follows: it begins by presenting a review of relevant literature and the development of the conceptual framework. Then, the methodology is described, followed by results and discussion. Finally, the conclusion and implications are explained.

Literature review

A comprehensive review of scholarly publications on job performance shows that the most frequently researched topics include the following factors: mindfulness skill, IL, employee work engagement and self-compassion. For the purposes of this study, four variables that shape job performance are identified, and relationships between these variables are examined.

Job performance

Employee job performance is an indicator of individual employees’ efficiency and productivity, organisational operational efficiency and long-term success. Thus, an effective job performance evaluation tool can contribute to enhancing employees’ work performance and the attainment of organisational goals (El Sheikh Taha, 2021). Job performance is based on the state of affairs, circumstance working atmosphere and social associations of an organisation (Coetzer, 2007). An employee gets self-satisfaction and feels superior when he accomplishes a task well and if the performance is not good and unable to achieve the target, it causes disappointment and personal failure (Van Scotter and Motowidlo, 2000). Job performance, which refers to the actions individuals engage in at work that contribute to organisational goals, is a core construct in business research. El-Sabaa (2001) explained that job performance is related to the willingness and openness to try and achieve new aspects of work, which will improve individual productivity. On the other hand, Borman and Motowidlo (1993) proposed that job performance is a concept that includes both task performance and contextual performance. The latter focuses on the importance of social skills as predictors of job performance (Borman, 2018). Task performance is defined as the effectiveness of job incumbents in performing activities that contribute to the organisation’s technical core (Borman and Motowidlo, 1997). Task performance is related to the direct output of work. When it comes to product production or service provision, workers use specialised skills or work knowledge. The core of the organisation’s technology provides support and completes the organisation’s assigned tasks (Parveen et al., 2022). Contextual performance is defined as performance that is not formally required as part of the job but helps to shape the social and psychological context of the organisation (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993). Contextual performance is related to the work itself. It refers to the social organisation and psychological environment in which the core of the technology is supported and also incorporates the behaviour of the members of the organisation based on an individual’s free will (Hung et al., 2022). Van Zyl et al. (2022) believes that task
performance is significantly related to the final project results. Therefore, contextual performance helps to achieve organisational goals. Therefore, in this study, job performance is defined as the degree to which an individual helps the organisation reach its goal (Motowidlo et al., 1997).

On the performance concept, Sonnentag and Frese (2005) had illustrated three different perspectives. They are (1) the individual’s differences perspective that focuses on an individual’s characteristics (e.g. general mental ability and personality); (2) the situational perspective that focuses on situational factors (e.g. job characteristics and system factors); and (3) the performance regulation perspective that focuses on the performance process (action process). These perspectives are said to integrate with one another that seeks to explain why specific individual characteristics and situational factors result in high individual performance. The individual differences exist between individuals can be explained by the individual’s abilities, personalities and/or motivation suggesting that for ensuring high individual performance, organisations need to select individuals based on their abilities, experiences and personalities (Bernales-Turpo et al., 2022). High performers get promoted more easily within an organisation and generally have better career opportunities than low performers (Van Scotter et al., 2000). Performance is rewarded by financial rewards and other employment benefits (Tarigan et al., 2022). The evaluation and management of job performance is an integral part of the organisation; to achieve success, each employee needs to perform well at work, providing high-quality products and services to gain an advantage over competitors.

Mindfulness skill and job performance

While a growing body of evidence indicates that mindfulness carries a number of benefits, little empirical research has investigated mindfulness from a workplace standpoint. It is, therefore, unclear whether or how mindfulness relates to key job performance. Addressing this literature gap, researchers consider the relationship between mindfulness and job performance. Langer (1989) began to represent mindfulness as a psychological feature and pointed out that it is the “default state” of cognitive processing, assuming three aspects of mindfulness, such as (a) seeking novelty behaviour – individuals who seek novelty and view each situation as an opportunity to learn, (b) participating – individuals who may observe more details about their involvement in the current situation and (c) novelty generation – novelty generation behaviour is a way to generate more innovative information in the current context. Mindfulness has been defined as self-regulated present-centred attention and awareness with an open, curious, non-judging orientation to experience (Bishop et al., 2004; Brown and Ryan, 2003). Drawing on the observation that mindfulness is likely impactful in dynamic environments (Vogus, 2011). To begin, one of the most theoretically and practically important outcomes in workplace settings is job performance. While job performance commands much scholarly attention (Motowidlo, 2003), little research has empirically connected mindfulness to job performance. As research in this vein suggests, mindfulness contributes to performance by improving cognitive flexibility and alertness (Moore and Malinowski, 2009; Zeidan et al., 2010) and guarding against distractions and performance blunders (Herndon, 2008). Taken together, these findings raise the possibility that workplace mindfulness facilitates job performance.

Dynamic environments require individuals to make a series of interdependent decisions in real time (Gonzalez, 2005). In such environments, it is critical to attend to a wide range of events because any given event might bring with it critical information and, thus, inform one’s decisions about how to proceed (Dane, 2013; Endsley, 1995). Mindfulness facilitates performance behaviour in dynamic environments because it is characterised in part by a wide attentional breadth – a feature that attunes individuals to a large number of events and stimuli (Dane, 2011). Furthermore, Tiwari and Garg (2019) stated that mindful individuals may be better able to disengage from redundant thoughts and emotions that disrupt tasks.
or events and facilitate persistent engagement with intended tasks. It is worth noting that employees with high levels of mindfulness can better counteract hostile working conditions by using a receptive state of consciousness and simultaneously observing ongoing internal and external events (Reina et al., 2022). Therefore, employees’ mindfulness should enhance their ability to cope with the negative consequences of workplace exclusion and promote their successful adaptation to this situation (Ioannou et al., 2022). Due to the positive impact of mindfulness on job performance, it is predicted that:

H1. Mindfulness skill is positively related to the employees’ job performance.

Inclusive leadership and job performance

Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) initially described leader inclusivity as the words and actions of leaders, which invite and thank others for their contributions. IL can create an inclusive environment within an organisation, helping employees gain valuable resources for themselves (such as work and career opportunities, autonomy, psychological security and happiness) (Carmeli et al., 2010; Rudy et al., 2007). Therefore, IL can be seen as a valuable resource for subordinates. The social exchange theory (SET) is used to explain the relationship between IL and job performance. Blau (1964) SET explains that when individuals believe that another person is right and fair to them, they feel obligated to reciprocate beneficial behaviour. Inclusive leaders have successfully addressed subordinates’ challenges (usability), encouraged communication and discussion (accessibility) and are willing to listen to subordinates’ new ideas (openness) (Carmeli et al., 2010). By collaborating with such leaders, subordinates can gain energy resources (such as information) (Ioannou et al., 2022) and emotional resources (such as happiness) (Mor Barak and Levin, 2002). According to the theory of social exchange and reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), when employees obtain resources in an organisation, they are more likely to develop a sense of responsibility (Song et al., 2009) and reward them through high-performance or creative work (Hollander, 2009). Many published studies have pointed out that under IL, subordinates may exhibit both intra-role work behaviour (such as innovative work behaviour) (Javed et al., 2017) and out-of-role behaviour, such as voice behaviour (Jiang, 2020) and OCB (Tran and Choi, 2019). Therefore, the author posits the following research hypothesis:

H2. IL has a positive impact on employees’ job performance.

Mediating factor: employee work engagement

Work engagement is defined as the extent to which one feels invigorated, dedicated and absorbed by one’s work (González-Romá et al., 2006). The first dimension, vigour, reflects the degree to which one approaches work with energy and mental resilience (Bakker, 2011). The second dimension, dedication, captures the degree to which one derives a sense of pride, inspiration or significance from one’s work (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). The third dimension, absorption, concerns the degree to which one concentrates fully and engrosses oneself deeply in one’s work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). This study has used job demands and resources theory to explain the employee work engagement plays a mediating role in between mindfulness and job performance. For example, the dimensions of work engagement lead people to direct mental resources toward work-related events and tasks (Leroy et al., 2013). This is because workplace mindfulness is a cognitive construct concerned with the degree to which one’s attention tends to be focused on a wide breadth of events unfolding in one’s work context (Smoktunowicz et al., 2023). By contrast, vigour, dedication and absorption implicate affective qualities that lack parallel with workplace mindfulness. Specifically, this study expects that workplace mindfulness will contribute uniquely to each of these work outcomes when controlling for the dimensions of work engagement. Researchers have argued that the effects of work engagement can be understood through a basic observation: engagement motivates. In so far as they are invigorated, dedicated and absorbed by their work, individuals are likely to exert high levels of
effort with the aim of achieving high performance (Halbesleben and Wheeler, 2008). That is, work engagement should influence the “persistence and intensity with which individuals pursue their task performance” (Christian et al., 2011). Mindfulness enables individuals to attend to a wide range of potentially critical stimuli in their work environment and guards against performance-related errors and mishaps (Schuman-Olivier et al., 2020). Therefore, while workplace mindfulness may spur performance in dynamic environments through the wide attentional net it casts across unfolding events, work engagement facilitates performance via increased effort. Hence, based on the discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

\[ H3. \] Employee work engagement mediates the relationship between mindfulness skill and job performance.

Work engagement is a positive, affective-motivational state of high energy combined with high levels of dedication and a strong focus on work (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010). IL shows accessibility, openness and availability to their employees. It motivates the employees to participate fully in their given tasks and dedicate themselves mentally, emotionally and physically to the organisation (Aslan et al., 2021). Employees with high levels of engagement are more attentive, connected and focused on their task performance (Lai et al., 2020). In light of the essentials of work engagement, the literature has investigated its antecedents, and one of the most important of these is leadership. However, although numerous studies have examined the relationships between different forms of leadership and work engagement, such as transformational leadership (Bui et al., 2017) and empowering leadership (Cai et al., 2018), little attention has been paid to IL. The previous discussion used IL as the antecedent of employees’ work engagement, while employee work engagement was the antecedent of job performance (Khusanova et al., 2021). This present study proposes that IL can promote employees’ job performance through work engagement. This increase in work engagement will lead to various job performances that, in turn, will include work engagement and are related to job performance. In other words, work engagement as an intermediary promotes the interrelationship between IL and job performance.

Qi et al. (2019) found that since inclusive leaders are available and accessible for employees whenever in need, employees tend to perceive that their leaders and working environment are supportive. In the context of the theory of job demand and resource, this perceived support provides psychological resources for employees to handle job demands and encourages employees to persevere in difficult moments, factors that are strongly associated with a high level of work engagement (Cai et al., 2018). As previous studies have confirmed, employees with high work engagement are more likely to exhibit innovative behaviours than those with low work engagement owing to a greater focus at work, have the capacity to bear more failures and frustrations, dare to accept challenges and have the active pursuit of solutions to problems (Janssen, 2000). Furthermore, this study have seen that IL can stimulate employees’ enthusiasm for work by promoting positive social exchange between leaders and employees (Choi et al., 2015; Peng et al., 2017; Xue and Li, 2017). This in turn helps employees to expand the scope of their attention, concentration and cognition, thereby increasing the likelihood of job performance. Therefore, it can be inferred that IL stimulates employees’ work engagement, and employees’ work engagement inspires employees to exhibit their positive job performance. Therefore, this study formed the following hypothesis:

\[ H4. \] Employee work engagement mediates the relationship between IL and job performance.

\textbf{Moderating factor: self-compassion}

Self-compassion is defined as “being touched by one’s own suffering, generating the desire to alleviate one’s suffering and treat oneself with understanding and concern” (Neff and Germer, 2013, p. 28). Neff (2009) described it as a healthier alternative to strong self-esteem
Self-compassion can be regarded as a useful emotion regulation strategy. In this strategy, pain or painful emotions will not be avoided, but maintained through the awareness of kindness, understanding and sharing human nature (Steindl et al., 2022). Therefore, negative emotions can be transformed into more positive emotional states, so that they can better understand their current situation and take actions to change themselves and/or the environment in an appropriate and effective way (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2000). Baer et al. (2012) and Neff and Germer (2013) observed that the focus of mindfulness is on any internal experiences that include emotions, thoughts or sensations. The literature presents empirical evidence for the self-compassion moderated relationship between mindfulness and employee work engagement. For instance, Tirch (2010) observed that mindfulness could improve the self-compassion of individuals. Bluth and Blanton (2013) found a significant relationship between mindfulness and self-compassion among adolescents. In a recent study, Dreisoerner et al. (2020) found a significant relationship between mindfulness and self-compassion. For instance, becoming more mindful may correspond with better self-understanding, gaining access to multiple perspectives and, thus, less self-judgment and more self-kindness (Kabat-Zinn, 1982; Langer, 1989). Another study showed that a brief mindfulness meditation successfully increased state self-esteem, defined as an individual’s belief about his or her own worth (Pepping et al., 2013). Blinie et al. (2010) showed that after completing the mindfulness intervention participants showed higher scores of self-kindness as well as lower scores of self-judgment. Mindfulness is not only associated with present-moment awareness and non-judgment but also with cultivating socially oriented values such as loving-kindness, compassion, decreased egocentrism and empathetic joy (Nhat Hanh and Kornfield, 2005; Sujiva, 2007).

Self-compassion has recently appeared as a construct of interest in applied psychology (Ferrari et al., 2019; Neff, 2011). Neff (2009) conceptualised self-compassion as the ability to be kind, connected to self and be mindful of oneself. In organisational settings, a tendency to be self-compassion has been linked with a range of outcomes, including work engagement (Kotera et al., 2020), burnout (Pérola-de Torres et al., 2019) and perceived organisational threat (Henshall et al., 2018). Previous research suggests that self-compassion might buffer the adverse effects of fear of failure, fear of negative evaluation, social comparison and social anxiety (Vöchter and Schnell, 2019). Therefore, self-compassion might be particularly useful for evaluating stressors as a way of meaning-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1987). Through meaning-focused coping, employees who are high in self-compassion will experience a sense of personal accomplishment when faced with challenging stressors (Lepine et al., 2004). In contrast, employees low in self-compassion will be immersed in self-criticism and negative affect, e.g. anxiety (Neff, 2011). An increase in negative affect will impede creativity and development because it narrows employees’ thought-action repertoire (Fredrickson, 2001) and alters employees’ work engagement. Thus, self-compassion promotes meaning-focused coping, which then reduces challenge stress and negative affect and results in greater work engagement. Hence, based on the discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H5.** Self-compassion moderates the relationship between mindfulness skill and employee work engagement.

First introduced by Nembhard and Edmondson (2006), IL has been defined as “words and deeds by a leader or leaders that indicate an invitation and appreciation for others’ contributions”. As the job demands–resources theory primarily posits, with an increase in job demands, the employees experience higher work-related stress if there is no increase in the available resources to meet those demands (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014). The psychological toll in terms of job demands has also seen a steep rise during COVID-19 and requires employees to incur more mental exertion than usual. IL is a key antidote because it provides employees with a psychological resource where they can channel their thoughts,
fears, concerns and needs (Wang et al., 2019). Being an inherent listener, an inclusive leader profoundly shapes self-compassion by fostering an environment where individuals feel valued, respected and secure in expressing themselves (Ma, 2022). This leadership style cultivates psychological safety, allowing people to acknowledge vulnerabilities and imperfections without fear of judgment. By promoting a sense of belonging and acceptance, inclusive leaders encourage individuals to develop a more positive self-view, reducing self-criticism and embracing constructive feedback for growth (Hassan and Jiang, 2019). The empathy and understanding exhibited by inclusive leaders lead individuals to internalise self-empathy and self-understanding, thus, increasing self-compassion. Moreover, the encouragement of diverse perspectives and the emotional support and validation in such environments contribute to individuals extending this compassion to themselves during challenging times (Gall, 2023). In essence, the inclusive environment established by these leaders significantly influences individuals’ abilities to practice self-compassion in both personal and professional aspects of their lives.

Studies addressing the consequences of self-compassion on employees’ lives show a positive association between this construct and positive attitudes toward work, including work engagement (Mason et al., 2014; Meyer et al., 2015; Chiappo-West, 2017; Kim et al., 2017; Audin et al., 2018). The reason is that those with high self-compassion are able to deal with negative work events such as work conflict or hurtful communication without feeling the intensity of negative emotions, which suggests that self-compassion has a buffering effect in the workplace (Leary et al., 2007). In particular, workers experiencing positive emotions can broaden their behavioural and cognitive repertoire, and, as a result, work better and more intensely (Fredrickson, 2001). Specifically, employees with greater self-compassion are more engaged at work and less burned out by job demands (Moreno-Jiménez et al., 2023). The positive emotions related to compassion satisfaction may enhance the workers’ amount of vigour and absorption, respectively, described as “high levels of energy and mental resilience while working” and “being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one’s work” (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008, p. 2). “Upward Spiral” effect of positive emotions, namely, the ability of positive experiences, if repeated over time, to promote emotional well-being, thus, resulting in a higher ability to cope with difficulties and give meaning to their experience. In other words, according to the upward spiral effect, the positive emotions related to compassion satisfaction may enhance the workers’ amount of dedication, described as “being strongly involved in one’s work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and challenge” (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008, p. 2). In teaching contexts, for example, high self-compassion among teachers has been linked to better work engagement, in particular, mindsets, attitudes, characteristics and behaviours that help teachers develop supportive relationships with students and a classroom climate conducive to learning (Jennings et al., 2013). Considering the high-stress, high-burnout nature of the teaching profession and the ubiquitous presence of uncertainty in it, self-compassion initiatives are warranted in helping teachers and school leaders learn to recognise the nature of uncertainty, understand its underlying mechanisms and manage it adaptively. Given the findings of prior studies, this study will examine the following hypothesis:

H6. Self-compassion moderates the relationship between IL and employee work engagement.

Based on the above-listed argument, a number of factors, as supported by previous research, determine job performance. The research framework used in this study is presented in Figure 1.

Research method

Hong Kong has been chosen as the research context for studying teacher job performance due to its unique characteristics that offer a multifaceted environment for exploration. The influence of British colonial rule has left a lasting impact on the educational system, creating a space where researchers can delve into the fusion of Western and Eastern educational
philosophies. Hong Kong’s economic prosperity and status as a global financial hub contribute to a multicultural and internationalised society, making it an ideal setting to investigate how teachers incorporate global perspectives into their methodologies. In essence, Hong Kong’s distinct features make it a compelling research context, with findings likely to have broader implications for understanding teacher job performance in diverse and dynamic socio-political environments.

Sample and procedure

Empirical research is a quantitative method strategy to test and generalise the initial findings (Creswell et al., 2011). Using survey questionnaires, researchers collected primary data from the three targeted private secondary schools of Hong Kong which, namely, GCC & ITKD Lau Pak Lok Secondary School, Ma On Shan St. Joseph’s Secondary School and Ng Yuk Secondary School of Sha Tin of Hong Kong. This study used cross-sectional design in which it is appropriate for this study because the data collected reflected the phenomenon of the situation and the behaviour of the individual; and organisational environment is assumed to be constant at a different point in time (Cooper and Schindler, 2008). Since this study focused mainly on secondary teachers, the definitions of secondary teachers by these three secondary schools will be used to identify an appropriate respondent for inclusion in this study. The criteria meet the following specifications for inclusion: teachers with 3–5 years of experience and minimum bachelor’s degree qualification, working in a current and registered secondary school in Hong Kong. This is because a previous empirical study conducted by Graham et al. (2020) that investigated teachers’ standardised classroom observations to examine the relationship between teachers’ years of experience and teaching quality. Differences were found among teachers with four to five years of experience, who scored significantly lower in the field of classroom organisation. At the dimensional level, the transition group also scored significantly lower in a negative atmosphere, behavioural management and teaching and learning forms. Thus, this study aims to explore the job performance of secondary teachers with three to five years of work experience.

The selection of these respondents is based on purposive sampling. Before the investigation, the researcher sent a Cover letter to the human resources manager of the Hong Kong target schools, explaining the purpose of the study, explaining a brief description and requesting permission for the study. Once the data collection permission of the HR manager of
Hong Kong School is obtained, the questionnaires (refer to Google link) were distributed to the academics by contacting their HR manager and by email. The teachers who agreed to participate were instructed to complete the questionnaire and to send it electronically to the researcher. In addition, each employee respondent was also instructed to invite one co-worker with whom she/he worked closely on a daily basis to respond to a shorter survey about the focal employee’s job performance. In this process, not only did it help the researchers achieve their research objectives, but also emphasised the benefits of teacher participation in the questionnaire, that is, to what extent the research will contribute to their respective private schools, provide useful insights and information, assist managers in strategic planning and implementation, to better play their role and gain competitive advantages by improving work performance. Thus, the unit of analysis used for this research is the individuals who are the teachers of the secondary school in Hong Kong. The researchers sent out approximately 360 questionnaires, only 263 were returned and analysed, representing a response rate of approximately 73.05%.

**Measurement instruments**

This study used a structured questionnaire. Multi-item scales were used to measure job performance, mindfulness skill, IL, employee work engagement and self-compassion. A questionnaire was developed from past studies and modified to suit the context of the study. Respondents answer on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

The 24 items scale is used to assess job performance. Job performance has been measured using Instructional Development and Effectiveness Assessment (IDEA) developed by Canshin and Perrin (1978).

There are 39 items in mindfulness skill that were adopted from Baer et al. (2006), which include three dimensions: nonreactivity to inner experience, describing/labelling with words and observing/noting/attending to sensations/perceptions/thoughts/feelings.

There are 13 items for IL that were adopted from Ashikali (2019), which include two dimensions, namely affective dimension and cognitive dimension.

This study uses a nine-item scale to measure employee work engagement were adapted measurement items by Schaufeli et al. (2006).

Employee perceptions of self-compassion will be measured through use of a 26 item-scale adopted from (Neff, 2009).

**Data analysis**

According to Podsakoff et al. (2003), if the data were collected from a single source, common method variance needs to be examined. A usual method of identifying this problem is by using Harman’s single factor test; that is by the admission of all main constructs into principal component factor analysis (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). The result indicated that the first factor explains 40.956% of the variance from the data collected, which is less then 50% from the cut-off value as suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2003). Since the single factor did not emerge and the first factor did not account for most of the variance, this study concludes that common methods bias was not a major threat in this study.

The researchers examined the relationship between the constructs using smart-PLS version 4.0.9. There are two distinct portions of this analysis, first is the assessment of the measurement model, and the second is the assessment of the structural model. The main purpose of assessing the measurement model is to determine the validity and reliability of the measurements applied in this research. On the other hand, the assessment of structural model is targeted to verify the signficance of the relationship between the variables.
Measurement model

In this study, the latent variable of mindfulness skill and IL is conceptualised as a second-order reflective construct, where the first-order construct; nonreactivity to inner experience; describing/labelling with words; observing/noticing/attending to sensation/perceptions/thought/feelings; cognitive dimension; and affective dimension possess reflective measurements, referring to a reflective–reflective type. Subsequently, mindfulness skill and IL is measured as multidimensional in this study. The higher order construct is included as to reduce the number of relationship in the structural model; and so that the PLS path model be more parsimonious and easier to understand (Hair et al., 2011).

The PLS path modelling algorithm requires that every latent variables has at least one manifest indicator. Wold (1982) and Lohmöller (1989) suggested that the second-order constructs were measured by adopting the repeated-indicator method used by Becker et al. (2012) to model hierarchical latent variable. In the first stage of the repeated-indicator approach, first-order factor (nonreactivity to inner experience, describing/labelling with words, observing/noticing/attending to sensation/perceptions/thought/feelings, cognitive dimension and affective dimension) with reflective indicators were modelled in the second stage as the manifest variables in the hierarchical order construct. Hence, indicators of all first-order factors directly measure the second-order factor of mindfulness skill and IL.

The convergent validity and discriminant validity were used to examine the measurement model. As suggested by Hair et al. (2011), factor loading, average variance extract (AVE) and composite reliability are to be considered in determining convergent validity. The results showed that all the items loading were higher than 0.5, the AVEs were higher than 0.5 and also the CR were above 0.7 (Table 1 and Figure 2). This study used HTMT technique by Henseler et al. (2015) in assessing discriminant validity. As shown in Tables 2 and 3, all the values are lower than the required threshold of HTMT.85 (Kline, 2011) and HTMT.90 (Gold et al., 2001), this indicates that discriminant validity has been ascertained.

Structural model

Prior to evaluating the structural model, it is crucial to ensure that there is no lateral collinearity issue in the structural model. Since multiple predictors are tested, this study refers to the variance inflation factor (VIF) to assess multicollinearity issue. A full collinearity test was conducted to determine if any constructs reflect VIF values equal to or greater than 3.3 (Kock and Lynn, 2012). The results showed that the pathological VIF range of all constructs was 3.391 to 5.224 (refer to Table 4), confirming once again that CMV was not a serious issue in this study. As shown in Table 4, all the VIF values are lower than 5 (Hair et al., 2011).

Referring to the Table 5, two direct hypotheses and four indirect hypotheses were developed between the constructs. To test the significance level, t-statistics for all paths are generated using SmartPLS 4.0.9 bootstrapping function. Specifically, IL (β = 0.564, t = 8.005, p < 0.05) was found to have significant positive relationship with job performance, however, mindfulness skill (β = -0.080, t = 0.119, p>0.05) was found to have a week relationship with job performance. Thus, H1 is not supported and H2 is supported. Regarding indirect hypothesis of mediating, employee work engagement mediated the relationship between the mindfulness skill and job performance (β = 0.045, t =1.711, p < 0.05), and employee work engagement mediated the relationship between the IL and job performance (β = 0.098, t = 2.257, p < 0.05) were found to have significant positive indirect relationship with job performance, via employee work engagement as mediator. For indirect hypothesis of moderating, self-compassion moderated the relationship between mindfulness skill (β = 0.076, t = 1.102, p >0.05) and employee work engagement; while,
<table>
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<th>Second-order construct</th>
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(continued)
the data shows that self-compassion moderated the relationship between IL ($\beta = -0.05$; $t = 0.719, p > 0.05$) and employee work engagement; we were found to have no significant indirect effect relationship between IL and employee work engagement with the self-compassion as moderator.

<table>
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<th>First-order construct</th>
<th>Second-order construct</th>
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</table>

Notes: MS = mindfulness skill; IL = inclusive leadership; EWE = employee work engagement; SC = self-compassion; JP = job performance

Source: Created by authors
Next, the effect size ($f^2$) is assessed. To measure the effect size, Cohen (1988) guideline is used. The values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 represent small, medium and large effect, respectively. From the Table 5, it can be observed that mindfulness skill and job performance ($f^2 = 0.000$) have no effects in producing the $f^2$; IL and job performance ($f^2 = 0.338$) has medium effect in producing the $f^2$; According to Davidescu et al. (2020), the
value of 0.01, 0.09 and 0.25 represents small, medium and large to measure the effect size of the indirect effect. Thus, employee work engagement-mediated mindfulness skill and job performance ($f^2 = 0.003$) has small effect in producing the $f^2$; employee work engagement-mediated IL and job performance ($f^2 = 0.0096$) has no effect in producing the $f^2$. Similarly, self-compassion-moderated IL and employee work engagement ($f^2 = 0.003$); self-compassion-moderated mindfulness skill and employee work engagement ($f^2 = 0.006$) have no effect in producing the $f^2$.

Discussion

The Hong Kong context has profoundly shaped the educational system and teaching performance of educators in the region. The enduring influence of British colonial rule is evident in the educational structure, influencing curriculum design and teaching methodologies. Teachers, therefore, blend Western and Eastern educational philosophies in their approach. With Hong Kong’s unique characteristics in the postcolonial context, the intersection of Eastern philosophy and methods with Western philosophy and methods can be considered as an ideal system for generating innovative ideas and practices (Lu and Campbell, 2021). Hong Kong’s multicultural society, driven by economic prosperity and internationalisation, demands that educators incorporate global perspectives into their lessons. The “one country, two systems” principle introduces political complexities, prompting teachers to address sensitive topics related to national identity and the relationship with mainland China. Government-initiated education reforms emphasising Chinese values and patriotism directly impact teaching strategies, requiring educators to adapt to changing curricular expectations. Thus, the Hong Kong context weaves multicultural influences, political sensitivities and ongoing reforms into the fabric of teaching, shaping the educational experience in this unique socio-political environment. However, understanding the role, influence and impact of teacher education as a career-long pursuit in Hong Kong remains both contested and under-theorised (Bautista et al., 2022). While Hong Kong enjoys a complex and sophisticated teacher education infrastructure which includes a range of opportunities and legislated time to dedicate to the varied forms of teacher education throughout a teacher’s career, such opportunities are frequently reported on as being too demanding, rigid or unrelated to practice (Pang et al., 2016). Therefore, this study uses the unique background of Hong Kong as the entry point for this study, which lays the foundation for exploring the factors that affect teachers’ work performance, providing effective strategies for improving teachers’ teaching quality and improving the overall school education quality.

The analysis result confirmed that there is no significant positive relationship between mindfulness skill and job performance. The claim that mindfulness skill has no influence on job performance among teachers can stem from several factors. It is important to note that the impact of mindfulness may vary from individual and environment. Firstly, there may be individual differences that mindfulness might not be equally effective for everyone. Secondly, a deficiency in teacher training for mindfulness techniques can result in ineffective use and a potential misinterpretation of the principles associated with mindfulness. For example: school introduces a mindfulness program without offering proper training to teachers. As a result, many teachers do not fully grasp the concepts, making it difficult for them to integrate mindfulness into their teaching practices effectively. Thirdly, the lack of training in mindfulness among teachers may be linked to the practical challenges of their profession, such as heavy workloads and time constraints, which hinder their ability to dedicate time to personal development and the consistent practice of mindfulness techniques. On the other hand, teachers faced the external stressors that overwhelm the benefits of mindfulness, such as personal issues or challenging classroom environments. This is because teacher deals with difficult behavioural issues in their classroom, facing constant disruptions that prevent them from fully benefiting from mindfulness practices.
during teaching hours. Thus, while mindfulness can be beneficial for some individuals and contexts, it may not be a one-size-fits-all solution, and its effectiveness might be influenced by various factors unique to each teacher and their work environment.

The analysis result confirmed that there is a significant positive relationship between IL and job performance. This suggests that leaders who are open, approachable and able to talk and discuss employee ideas are reinforcing IL (Carmeli et al., 2010). These three aspects of IL reflect the leader’s care and concern for subordinates and allow leaders to be inclusive and effectively communicate their expectations with followers. In other words, inclusive leaders are open, willing to listen to employees, discuss new ways to achieve work goals and focus on new opportunities. These traits also allow them to cultivate high-quality relationships with employees (Carmeli et al., 2010). Through these actions, they create a social environment where employees are safe to speak up or contribute. Therefore, IL can help improve employee performance. This was verified by the previous study conducted by Carmeli et al. (2010) clarifying that IL is a form of relational leadership, emphasising that leaders are always on call, willing to listen and pay attention to the needs of followers and whether leaders listen and pay attention to the needs of followers. This is because IL focuses on three specific supportive behaviours of the leader, including openness, which, similar to other leadership styles such as servant leadership, is characterised by specific behaviours of the leader (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022).

The analysis results confirmed that there is a significant positive relationship between mindfulness skill, IL and job performance with employee work engagement as mediator. This conclusion highlighted that employee work engagement provides a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind, which is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption because it has been shown to promote a variety of not only the employee but also organisational outcomes. Job satisfaction, job performance and low turnover intentions (Aboramadan and Kundi, 2020; Albrecht et al., 2020; Rai and Maheshwari, 2020) have been reported as the examples of these outcomes. Moreover, Ng and Feldman (2009) in their meta-analytic review found that work engagement was one of the most important correlates of subjective career success. When employees feel vigorous and enthusiastic while working, they thrive and continuously develop themselves which contributes to job performance. Work engagement is contagious and that colleagues, leaders and the intimate partner can be important causes of job performance. The findings clearly indicate that work engagement emerges in a vibrant social context that organisations and their management may wish to cultivate. Work engagement and its crossover among employees can be fostered by team-boosting behaviours, such as initiatives to organise joint social activities – to connect team members and build strong relationships (Fortuin et al., 2021). Therefore, when teams as a whole become more engaged in their work, they show better coordination, collaboration and performance.

However, the analysis results do not show any evidence of a significant relationship between mindfulness skill, IL and employee work engagement with self-compassion as a moderator. Secondary schools are facing a difficult challenge in supporting good mental health whilst striving to enhance job performance among employees (Lu et al., 2022). A self-compassionate person sees problems, weaknesses and shortcomings accurately, yet reacts with kindness and compassion rather than with self-criticism and harshness. This is important for employees as individuals with high self-compassion are more likely to accept responsibility for their actions and to perceive their mistakes more accurately than those with lower levels of self-compassion and this is highly relevant when interpreting and responding to employee work engagement (Hope et al., 2014). In conclusion, the findings of this study have indicated that self-compassion has a positive effect on employee work engagement but has no impact on both mindfulness skill and IL among employees. The present research, thus, realised that self-compassion can influence employees’ work engagement. This finding is particularly important for managers and leaders in secondary
school to inculcate the use of the self-compassion as the strategy to improve psychological empowerment to motivate employees in overall job performance.

Implications

Theoretical implication

Firstly, this research has enriched the literature on job performance, by integrating the mediator and moderator into one holistic research model. This research integrates multi-dimensions of variables with mediating role of employee work engagement and moderator role of self-compassion to examine the predictors of mindfulness skill and IL. The similarity with this theory is demonstrated by the findings that experience from mindfulness skill, employee work engagement and IL, all of which can be integrated well as factors of SET. For the more, this research has provided empirical support to the applications of the SET. This research enriched the SET by examining several variables in a single holistic research model, to assess the effect of employee work engagement and self-compassion into the social exchange relationship towards job performance. Theses research results show that employee work engagement serve as a significant mediator between the independent variables and the job performance. This research has also render support to the similarity–attraction hypotheses by examining the mindfulness skill and IL in the unique aspect of employee work engagement. Assimilating with the SET, the results found in this research concluded that employee work engagement has a significant influence on the relationship between mindfulness skill, IL and job performance and has laid the pathway for future researchers to examine further the impact of similarity–attraction hypothesis on relationship involving multi-factor mindfulness skill, IL, employee work engagement and job performance.

Secondly, based on the job-demand resource theory, it presents employees’ work engagement as a mechanism mediating mindfulness and IL’s positive impact on employees’ job performance, thereby providing context for previous studies that have shown that mindfulness and IL have an important impact on job outcomes. In other words, IL’s tolerance for individual differences and mistakes creates an open and autonomous organisational environment that encourages employees to actively participate, solve problems and achieve goals. Under this type of leadership, employees are likely to increase their work engagement to maintain their existing resources, engender self-motivation and a sense of responsibility and regard organisational goals as personal goals. Furthermore, IL can provide continuous positive energy for job performance. Specifically, in work environments where high levels of IL exist, employees feel that their different opinions and behaviours are supported and understood by the organisation and their peers. This support can help alleviate the pressure of resource loss and provide necessary resources for the implementation of work performance, thereby enhancing the influence of IL on employees’ work performance. Organisations should recognise that relationships between members or between members and leaders are more than just transactional; they also involve commitment, responsibility, psychological awareness and interaction. Prior to this study, there was no research discussion about work engagement’s mediating role between mindfulness and IL and employees’ job performance, so this article can be regarded as a useful supplement to previous research.

Last but not least, this research has helped to fill the literature gap by examining the mediating roles of employee work engagement and mediator role of self-compassion in the integrated relationship of multi-factor and job performance. By examining the moderator role of self-compassion, it helps to improve the understanding of the casual mechanism of self-compassion affect employee work engagement on employee. Subsequently, examining the mediating role of employee work engagement has helped to enhance the understanding of the underlying principle of the indirect influence of mindfulness skill, IL and job performance.
Practical implications

On top of theoretical contribution, the results from this research also offer valuable inputs and suggestions to practitioners in the leadership position. Especially, leaders in charge of leadership development and HRM can use research results to create targeted plans and programs. This strategic approach aims to improve leadership skills and enhance employee job performance, ultimately contributing to the organization’s overall success in achieving its goals. This research has practical implications to help address the concern on employees’ job performance which has a direct effect on companies success and indirectly influence the trend of GDP growth and employment opportunities in a country. Leadership style have an impact on employees’ behaviours and on the adoption of the strategies of the company. The results from this research could be used by the policymakers and top management of companies to define leadership expectation and create a company policy that will cultivate leadership behaviours that can promote high job performance.

Moreover, organisations should attempt to implement IL because it has a direct positive impact on employee performance and employee engagement. The new generation of employees pays more attention to fairness and equality, so too much emphasis on command and obedience will seriously undermine employees’ self-confidence, reducing self-efficacy, optimism and hope while increasing emotional exhaustion and employee silent behaviour. This inevitably hinders organisational performance because negative mindsets are not conducive to information transmission, sharing or efficient problem-solving. Leaders should gradually accept those leadership styles that promote organisational and personal growth to stimulate employees’ extra-role behaviour and enhance overall organisational performance.

Other than that, managers should promote mutuality rather than hierarchy by strengthening relationships with employees, as this fosters greater work engagement. This paper shows that IL can have an indirect positive impact on employees’ job performance through the mediating role of work engagement. Thus, by actively communicating with employees and enhancing emotional investment and cognitive trust, leaders can help employees cultivate positive emotions, share constructive advice and exhibit responsible behaviour.

In addition, the result of this research shows that self-compassion plays a vital role in influencing the employees’ work engagement. Hence, it is important that companies design HRM policy that enables self-compassion to be used as a consideration psychological-related strategy when structuring organisation or teams. It is also crucial for top management and policymakers to define and communicate the organisation’s operating principle, organisation’s value and goals. Essentially, for all the leaders in the organisation to be aligned and consistently having a conversation with their followers about work value. This research also reinforce publication by Collis and Hussey (2014) about enterprise performance which advocated that a company would be able to achieve a sustainable economic result through using the full potential of its human resources, which are the incomparable and most valuable asset of the organisation.

Along with that, examining job performance among secondary teachers in Hong Kong yields valuable insights applicable to comparable markets in Asia. The necessity for bilingual proficiency, given Hong Kong’s dual-language environment, suggests that teacher training programs in similar contexts could benefit from emphasising language proficiency to cater effectively to diverse student populations. The cultural sensitivity and adaptability required in Hong Kong, shaped by historical influences and internationalisation, underscore the importance of fostering these qualities in educators across markets with diverse cultural backgrounds. Integration of international perspectives, a response to Hong Kong’s global financial hub status, could be a valuable consideration in curricular development and teacher training programs for other markets aiming to prepare students for a globalised world. The awareness of political dynamics and their impact on classroom discussions...
highlights the need for equipping teachers in comparable markets with skills to navigate political sensitivities while facilitating open discourse. The emphasis on continuous professional development in response to changing curricula in Hong Kong suggests a similar need for investment in ongoing training for teachers in other markets undergoing educational reforms. Lessons from Hong Kong also point to the significance of incorporating discussions on civic engagement and social issues into curricula in markets experiencing social or political movements. Lastly, considering teacher well-being in Hong Kong highlights the importance of implementing support systems and well-being initiatives in comparable markets to ensure the resilience and satisfaction of educators. In summary, insights gleaned from Hong Kong’s secondary teacher job performance can guide strategies in comparable Asian markets, emphasising language proficiency, cultural sensitivity, global perspectives, political awareness, continuous professional development, civic engagement and teacher well-being.

Limitation of the research

Even though this research provides theoretical and practical implications to both academics and practitioners, there are some limitations in this research which readers should be aware and take note. First of all, the data collected in this research could lead to some potential bias or skew. The results relying on a sample predominantly consisting of junior teachers may pose difficulties in accurately measuring leadership effectiveness. The relative inexperience or lower organizational position of junior teachers could impact the robustness of the leadership assessment. This could be due to the business nature of the contributing factors which skews the result where employees do not require a lot of hands-on supervision from their manager. Therefore, there is a possibility of the results having limitation of reflecting behaviours and expectation of particular generation.

Furthermore, during the execution of this research, the majority of the participating schools limit the researcher from direct engagement with the employee and was not allowed to have access to the organisation structure and employee name list. This induced the limitation that the research has not fully relied on the HR manager to select the participating department within the organisation and to pair and match the leaders and followers. This prevented the researchers to apply random process in identifying the participants. Hence, there could potentially have some biases in identifying the participants. Another potential limitation is if the HR manager respects the department or employee to volunteer, very likely those who volunteer to participant could be employees with good overall performance. This could potentially induce unintentional biases to the data collection.

Last but not least, the sample for this research was exclusively collected from three secondary schools located in Sha Tin, Hong Kong. The findings obtained from this research may not be generalised to other sample across different regions or across different education segment or across different education scale. Specifically, it may not be generalised to organisations in different education segment, for example, organisations in serving university could have a very different organisation policy and governance compared to secondary school. Furthermore, it may not be generalised to Sha Tin state, like Islands district and Yuen long district, due to variances in terms of socio-political and economic considerations between Kowloon and Hong Kong island.

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Further reading


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