Quiet Ego and Wellbeing Among Higher Education Faculty: Insights from the Post-COVID Educational Landscape

[1]Pooja Sharma
[1]HRM and OB
Central University of Jammu
Jammu
India
[2] Prof. Jaya Bhasin
[2]HRM and OB
Central University of Jammu
Jammu
India

Abstract

 The COVID-19 pandemic caused enormous disruptions in all spheres of life, particularly the education sector. In India, where the impact was significant, higher education institutions were compelled to shift to online teaching virtually overnight. This abrupt transformation presented various obstacles, particularly for teachers, who had to adjust to new technologies and approaches while working with limited resources. While much study has been conducted on the impact of this change on students, the well-being of teachers in higher education has received less attention. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the well-being of higher education teachers before and following the pandemic.

This research examines how the concept of the quiet ego, a trait of personality associated with eudaimonic well-being, can help teachers cope with rising pressures and uncertainties. The quiet ego, defined as a compassionate self-identity seeking balanced growth, has the potential to play a significant role in increasing faculty well-being. This study aims to better understand the relationship between the quiet ego and teacher well-being by conducting a thorough assessment of secondary data and accessible literature, as well as to provide practical solutions for developing wellbeing among teachers in the current academic climate.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Higher Education, Quiet Ego, Wellbeing*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic completely changed higher education and caused people all over the world to rethink how they understand, feel, and support faculty wellbeing. Higher education teachers were suddenly thrown into professional and personal upheavals that had never happened before. They had to deal with digital changes, emotional stress, and changing student expectations while still trying to maintain academic integrity and quality of teaching (Venkatesh, 2020; Meng et al., 2024). These problems have made it clear how important it is to look into not only the outside factors that cause stress for teachers, but also the psychological resources that help them be resilient, adaptable, and healthy in the long run.

The pandemic adversely affected public health, leading to heightened levels of anxiety, worry, and sadness within society (Planchuelo-Gómez et al., 2020; Lalani et al., 2025), further compromising both physical and mental well-being due to the pain of fear and the loss of loved ones experienced by people.

Previous research showed that depression, anxiety, and stress are negatively related to wellbeing among people, regardless of their sex, race, location (Davis et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2019; Svihus, 2024). Researchers identified higher education as most severely affected by the pandemic (Treve, 2021; Otto et al., 2024). The coronavirus pandemic had thrown colleges and institutions into disarray. Most colleges and universities had closed their physical campuses for that academic year, systematic functions were ceased and campuses transitioned to online, virtually overnight. During the pandemic, teachers' work practices underwent drastic and unexpected changes. No particular format was available to continue the teaching and learning process (Burki, 2020; Mottiar, 2024). Teachers were used to face-to-face, "chalk and talk offline methods for imparting education. Only a handful of top-tier institutes had the experience of online teaching methods pre-pandemic, all other institutes were still using the traditional ways of teaching. Thus, was a challenging task, especially for the teachers working in higher education who had no prior expertise with e-learning or access to educational technology but were required to continue teaching despite the lockdown (Burki, 2020; Ewing, 2021; Lalani, et al., 2025). Also, their students were more friendly with recent technologies and were at a more adaptive age.

Teachers with less virtual teaching expertise were more stressed than experienced professors. Virtual teaching technology including fast connectivity internet, Wi-Fi, safety of data, and secrecy will significantly influence stress situation among faculties (Prasad, K. D. V., 2022; Lalani, et al., 2025). It has been discovered that stress arising due to working was negatively related to wellbeing, implies that high levels of job stress were associated with a low level of wellbeing amongst teachers in higher education (Sawhney & Bansal, 2013).

In the Pre pandemic era, the institutions of higher learning were among those worst harmed by the reforms (Chaudhry, 2012; Vera & González-Ledesma, 2018). Teachers in educational institutions should be protected from growing stress and their wellbeing should be promoted (Aquino et al., 2018). Institutions hence should recognize the stress level and define the wellbeing parameters of their employees. Higher education institutions are becoming recognized as stressful settings, and academics is a stressful job (Woloshyn et.al, 2021).

Teachers of higher educational institutions have a direct and combining effect on not only their wellbeing, but also on student learning, their overall development, employment prospects, the university's cumulative impact on society, the country's research and development approaches, and the ultimate betterment of society. Despite the increased interest in faculty's wellbeing, little research has been conducted to particularly investigate the psychological variables that promote their wellbeing. In particular, the theoretical relationship between wellbeing and the quiet ego (a compassionate self-identity that promotes balanced growth) has significant potential for improving teacher well-being in higher education, particularly in the face of ongoing uncertainties, academic stressors, and institutional demands in a post-pandemic world.

Objectives of the research:
- Analyzing the wellbeing of teachers of higher education institutes in Pre and Post COVID.
- Determining the relationship between quiet ego and wellbeing.

Literature Review:
Globally India was amongst the worst-hit countries by COVID-19 with more than 5 lac deaths as of 9th April 2022 (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India). The epidemic severely impacted public health, wherein high number of individual reported stress, anxiety, and depression due to the outbreak (Planchuelo-Gómez, et al., 2020; Svihus, 2024; Golab et al., 2025) further impacting both

physical and mental wellbeing as people were going through huge sufferings. Previous research had shown that depression, anxiety, and stress negatively influence wellbeing in various populations, regardless of sex, race, location (Davis et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2019). Economic challenges and constrained medical resources for the preservation of physiological and mental health during these difficult times had exacerbated mental health issues in middle-income Asian nation (Wang et al., 2021). Teachers who are stressed out at work may negatively influence students' wellbeing (Sisask et al., 2014; Golab et al., 2025). Teaching has long been regarded as one of the most difficult and stressful professions (Ryan et al., 2019; Svihus, 2024). Various studies conducted in higher education settings during the pre-pandemic period analysed presence of stress (Abouserie,1996) due to number of reasons and worked on other determinants affecting faculty members mental health and job satisfaction (Oshagbemi, 1997).

Abouserie (1996) conducted a study on the stress levels, coping strategies, and job satisfaction of university academic staff. The study discovered that academic staff experienced moderate to high levels of stress, with primary sources including heavy workloads, lack of support, and pressures related to research and teaching performance. Coping strategies varied among individuals, with problem-focused strategies being more effective in managing stress.

Oshagbemi (1997) investigated the factors that influence job satisfaction and discontent among academic staff in UK higher education institutions. The study found that variables like rank, length of service, age, and academic discipline all had an impact on total job satisfaction. It indicated that academics were usually content with intrinsic components of their employment, such as teaching and research, but dissatisfied with extrinsic elements such as compensation, advancement possibilities, and administrative support. The findings emphasised the need of universities addressing these extrinsic elements in order to increase morale, motivation, and staff retention, while also providing a nuanced understanding of the varied nature of job satisfaction in academia.

Pitman (2000) investigated the changing attitude of professors and students as "customers" in higher education institutions using a survey of administrative staff. The investigation discovered a considerable conflict between conventional academic norms and the increasing impact of market-oriented ideas. Because of the increased emphasis on service delivery, performance metrics, and institutional accountability, administrative personnel frequently mistook students for consumers. At the same time, other people raised concern about the impact of such a customer-service approach on academic integrity and professional autonomy. Pitman concluded that this shifting image could restructure institutional goals, potentially displacing the instructional aim in favour of meeting "consumer" needs.

Metcalf et al., 2005 identified fundamental issues in recruiting and retaining academic personnel in UK higher education, citing serious shortages in fields such as engineering, IT, and business due to competition from the private sector. Low income, few advancement chances, and uncertain short-term contracts were significant deterrents, particularly for early-career academics. The research also highlighted the ageing academic workforce, the under-representation of women and ethnic minorities in senior positions, and the brain drain of UK academics to nations with better working circumstances. Institutional discrepancies also influenced retention, with more prestigious universities faring better. To address these challenges, the authors proposed structural improvements such as higher compensation, more defined career paths, diversity initiatives, and better working conditions.

Archibong and Effiom (2009) evaluated the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) by academic staff in Nigerian universities, determining both the amount of ICT integration and the problems encountered. The study discovered that, while there was an increase in awareness and use of ICT tools in teaching and research, usage remained limited due to infrastructure issues, insufficient

training, poor internet access, and a lack of institutional support. The authors emphasised the importance of strategic investments in infrastructure, continuous training programs, and governmental actions to foster effective use of ICT in institutions. The study greatly contributed to the discussion of digital revolution in higher education, particularly in developing countries. Oye et al., 2011, suggested an ICT acceptance in higher education faculty members that incorporated features from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). The study identified perceived utility, simplicity of use, attitude, social influence, and organisational support as significant factors influencing ICT adoption. It emphasised the value of training and institutional facilitation in improving faculty readiness, as well as the significance of positive user attitudes and self-efficacy in successful technology integration in academic settings.

Mushemeza's 2016 study explored at the opportunities and challenges that academics confront in Africa's higher education institutions. The study discovered that, while there is a growing demand for higher education and opportunities for academic advancement, staff face significant challenges such as inadequate remuneration, poor working conditions, heavy workloads, limited access to research funding, and a lack of clear promotion criteria. These factors contribute to decreased motivation, brain drain, and a decrease in educational quality. Mushemeza emphasised the need for comprehensive reforms, such as enhanced institutional support, improved career development policies, and more investment in academic infrastructure, to improve the working environment and productivity of academic staff at African universities.

Szromek & Wolniak, 2020 study looked into job fulfilment among academic staff and found that administrative workload, limited career advancement prospects, and inadequate institutional support all had a substantial impact on educators' satisfaction levels. The study emphasised the need for structural changes to improve the academic work environment.

Jacob, Jegede, and Musa, 2021, explored the ongoing issues that academics face in Nigerian universities and provided remedies to enhance their working conditions. The study identified important challenges such as inadequate university funding, low salary, limited access to contemporary research facilities, political intervention in university governance, and inconsistent government policies. These problems have led to low morale, frequent strikes, and decreased academic production. The authors recommended increased government funding commitment, regular training and capacity-building programs, better welfare packages for lecturers, and autonomy in university administration as critical steps towards improving academic staff performance and the overall quality of higher education in Nigeria.

Recent studies indicate that the status of higher education faculty is declining due to an augmented workload, including administrative responsibilities, heightened research and scholarly output needs, greater teaching loads, and escalating student expectations (Whitley & Gläser, 2014; Golab et al., 2025). Job instability and heightened workloads for academic personnel have escalated as a result of modifications in the tertiary education system (Kinman & Wray, 2017). Teachers in higher education should be safeguarded against heightened stress, and their wellbeing should be fostered (Aquino, et al., 2018; Avola et al., 2025). Teacher well-being encompasses various dimensions, including emotional, psychological, and occupational aspects. The OECD's framework highlights the significance of working conditions, professional development, and personal factors in influencing teacher well-being (OECD, 2020).

Ozturk et al. (2024) proposed a holistic model of teacher well-being that synthesizes various discourses, including mental health, job satisfaction, and professional identity. Integrating the quiet ego into this model offers a more comprehensive understanding of how personal attributes interact with institutional

factors to influence well-being. Faculty members with a quiet ego may be better equipped to engage in reflective practices, foster supportive relationships, and adapt to changing educational landscapes.

The PERMA framework is employed by Golab et al., 2025 and conducted a thorough analysis of teacher wellbeing and teaching excellence in higher education. The authors investigate the complex interplay between the five components of PERMA—Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment—and how they interact to impact both teacher wellbeing and teaching excellence.

Study conducted by Avola et al., 2025 on faculty members working in higher education identified a wide range of therapies, such as mindfulness and meditation practices, professional development programs, physical activity efforts, therapy-based strategies, gratitude exercises, and multi-modal approaches. These treatments largely focus on individual well-being, while some include communal activities.

Improving wellbeing has grown in popularity due to incremental enhancement of individuals' living standards as the economies have developed, as well as the requirements of people seeking greater meaning, purpose, and happiness in their lives. Employee wellbeing is a favourable emotional condition arising from a positive assessment of one's employment or work experiences (Locke, 1969). Furthermore, wellbeing is defined as the absence of a depression (Wilhoite, 1994), satisfaction with the entirety of his or her existence (Van Tran, 1987), and a person's feeling of self-worth, pleasure, and goodwill (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Employee wellbeing, Buitendach & De Witte (2005) assert that a person's view and evaluation of their employment is shaped by their distinct circumstances, including values, needs, and expectations. Employee satisfaction increases when the work environment meets an individual's requirements, values, and personal attributes (Yee, et al., 2010). People with better wellbeing exhibit improved working productivity, more effective learning, enhanced creativity, more prosocial behavior, and positive interpersonal interactions (Huppert, 2013).

Two positive aspects of wellbeing are eudaimonic and hedonic. The eudaimonic aspect aims to achieve personal growth, virtue, and greatness, as well as authenticity and autonomy while the hedonic aspect is aimed at achieving personal pleasure, comfort, and satisfaction (whether or not achieved) (Huta, 2013). Eudaimonia is closely associated with meaning, elevation, and self-connection (Huta & Ryan, 2010; Huta, 2013). Eudaimonic personality is not about self, it shows prosocial nature. According to Bauer (2008), eudaimonic personality development entails a reduction in self-centredness and an enhancement of interdependency.

Eudaimonic personality is defined as lowering one's ego to the point where one can hear the voices of others and act in their best interests. The psychosocial theory of personality development elucidates the evolution of the ego in relation to its aspiration to engage with a broader spectrum of individuals and psychosocial concerns (Erikson, 1950). Previous research on the concepts of "I" and "ME" has shown that an individual is egoistic in character if he or she always views himself above others. Every individual is at different levels of ego, from childhood to adulthood (stages of ego development, Loevinger, 1976). During the initial years of life, your ego is noisy, which implies that the individual is incapable of perceiving his negative capabilities and screams for the fulfillment of his demands only. For example, an infant crying for milk. Having a higher concern for self results in egotism and narcissism. A squashed or silent ego is thinking too negatively about oneself and is considered the opposite of a noisy ego. A heightened care for others leads to unrestrained communion, a condition in which an individual's identity or ego-self is lost (Helgeson & Fritz, 1999). However, it has been discovered throughout the time that high self-esteem and narcissism (a personality attribute) negatively influence one's overall wellbeing. It also had a negative effect on your relationships with yourself and the people around you. It prompted people to feel compelled to go beyond self-interest, transcending egotism, leading to the formation of a novel construct known as "Quiet Ego" (coined by Bauer & Wayment, 2008).

A quieter ego is characterized by a heightened sense of equilibrium and integration of self and others inside one's self-concept, a nuanced comprehension of one's strengths and weaknesses that facilitates personal development, and an elevated level of compassion towards oneself and others (Bauer & Wayment, 2008). It is a method of achieving humility, empathy, self-compassion, compassion mindfulness, and so on.

"The quiet ego denotes a harmonious and development-focused self-concept in relation to oneself and others. The quiet ego represents a self-identity that transcends egotism and its transient attractions, incorporating others into one's self-concept along with a focus on long-term, eudaimonic wellbeing" (Bauer & Wayment 2008; Wayment et al., 2015a).

Relationship between quiet ego and wellbeing:
The quiet ego is concerned with more than just pleasure and satisfaction; it also includes wellbeing that follows eudaimonia, which includes prioritising the welfare of others over self-interest (Keyes, 1998), with the cultivation of personal potential and abilities (Annas, 2011), which may or may not result in immediate hedonic enjoyment.

Self-centered people experience varying levels of enjoyment because they see themselves as a discrete and immortal entity. Egocentric individuals predominantly depend on stimulus induced gratification for their happiness. These pleasures are contingent not only upon the existence of anticipated stimuli (Alba & Williams, 2013), nonetheless hedonic adaptation also inhibits a sustained sense of pleasure, even in the presence of wanted stimuli. Affective responses such as rage and fear are elicited in the absence of the desired stimulus or in the presence of undesirable stimuli (Aue & Okon-Singer, 2015; Bennett et al., 2020). Formation of a quiet ego in one's life, like subjective wellbeing, is contingent on specific requirements being addressed, including physiological and bodily demands (Tay & Diener, 2011) as well as psychological wants including competence and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). To some extent, a quiet ego is integral to wellbeing. More precisely quiet ego is found related to eudaimonic wellbeing due to the conceptual link between quiet ego and compassion (Wayment and Bauer, 2017).

The QE Scale which is used to measure quiet ego involves many items of wellbeing and it is not surprising if both these are correlated (Wayment and Bauer, 2017). The formation of quiet ego in an individual's lifetime, like subjective wellbeing, is contingent on specific requirements being addressed, whether physiological & bodily requirements (Tay & Diener, 2011) or mental desires such as proficiency and connection (Deci & Ryan, 2000). To some extent, a quiet ego is integral to wellbeing. Liu et al., 2022, investigated the relationship between the quiet ego and wellbeing and discovered that people with a quiet ego—characterized by balanced self-other care, mindfulness, and reduced self-focus—have more self-concept clarity, which is associated with better levels of well-being and happiness. The study presents empirical evidence that the quiet ego promotes psychological well-being by establishing a stable and clear sense of self. These findings advance our understanding of how interior traits such as humility and mindfulness cultivate with quiet ego and improve long-term wellbeing of any individual.

Researchers suggested that quiet ego assists us in remembering significant life lessons, mitigating the adverse effects of excessive self-absorption, comprehension of others' views, and promoting collective growth and wellbeing (Kesebir, 2014, Goswami et al., 2024). It will be interesting to look forward to the continuous development of quiet ego functioning, with the ultimate goal of cultivating a self-identity that promotes eudaimonic or hedonic wellbeing.

Research Methods: This study employs a qualitative, conceptual research design with the objective of synthesising and analysing the existing literature in order to investigate the correlation between the quiet

ego and wellbeing among educators in higher education. The research exclusively utilises secondary data sources, such as academic texts, peer-reviewed journal articles, and credible organisational reports that are pertinent to the constructs being examined.

Results and Conclusion:

This conceptual paper is significant as it provides important implications of COVID-19 on teachers of higher education and highlighted their pre and post COVID wellbeing situation. The study attempts to identify the relationship between the wellbeing and quiet ego of teachers in higher education. The result of these linkages provided information benefits to develop the wellbeing of teachers working in higher education institutes. The majority of analysed studies indicate positive outcomes, such as decrease in stress and burnout, elevated mindfulness, improved teacher-student relationships, and enhanced job satisfaction. Mindfulness-based interventions, specifically, exhibit consistent efficacy in enhancing teacher well-being.

Integrating quiet ego into existing models of faculty well-being offers several implications:
- **Enhanced Resilience:** Teachers with a quiet ego may exhibit greater resilience in the face of stressors, maintaining emotional balance and professional commitment.
- **Improved Relationships:** A quiet ego fosters empathy and compassion, enhancing relationships with colleagues and students.
- **Sustainable Engagement:** By aligning personal values with professional roles, teachers may experience sustained engagement and job satisfaction.

These insights suggest the importance of fostering quiet ego for personal development alongside institutional support to enhance teacher well-being.

The authors further propose the necessity of additional qualitative and empirical research to elucidate the intricate experiences of faculty members and to comprehend the mechanisms that facilitate effective interventions to improve their wellbeing.

Conclusion:

Based on the synthesis of the studies discussed, some major conclusions may be derived about the evolution of research on faculty well-being, particularly in the setting of higher education.

1. Early Focus on Job Satisfaction and Stress

Initial research, such as that conducted by Oshagbemi (1997) and Abouserie (1996), concentrated on fundamental characteristics of faculty well-being, such as work satisfaction, discontent, and stress coping methods. These works lay the framework by focusing on the psychological and occupational pressures that academic personnel confront, such as workload imbalance, a lack of institutional support, and unclear career growth options. Pitman (2000) proposed the customer-service paradigm in higher education, signaling a shift in academic expectations, complicating their duties and increasing institutional pressure.

2. Structural and Systemic Issues (2000 to 2010)

Studies such as Metcalf et al. (2005) and Mushemeza (2016) begin to look into structural hurdles to academic recruitment, retention, and expansion, particularly in African and British higher education institutions. These studies identified concerns such as insufficient money, poor infrastructure, limited

professional development opportunities, and political meddling, emphasizing the intricate relationship between systemic elements and individual well-being.

3. The Rise of Technology and Digital Challenges

Archibong and Effiom's (2009) study enlarged the story to incorporate technological hurdles, stressing both the promise and the drawbacks of ICT integration in academic work. Although technology presented opportunities for instructional innovation, many institutions lacked infrastructure and training, resulting in digital stress and isolation for faculty (Oye et al., 2011).

4. Rising Emphasis on Mental Health, Burnout, and Holistic Well-Being (Post-2020 to Present)

Recent research, particularly after the epidemic, has taken a more holistic and psychological approach. Jacob et al. (2021) emphasized environmental, policy-based, and psychological pressures affecting Nigerian academic members. Avola et al. (2025) conducted a scoping assessment of interventions for burnout and well-being, highlighting the trend towards evidence-based practices and institutional responsibility. The incorporation of models such as PERMA (as seen in Golab et al., 2025) reflects a burgeoning field that is now investigating positive psychology frameworks and their relevance to faculty flourishing. Over time, research on faculty well-being has expanded beyond a narrow focus on job satisfaction and stress to include institutional, technical, psychological, and existential factors. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst, increasing both problems and awareness and prompting academics and institutions to examine systemic interventions, resilience building, and holistic well-being models.

Future Research Implications:

Future research implications of this paper suggest several promising directions for further investigation into the role of the quiet ego in enhancing the well-being of higher education faculty.

First, future study may look into intervention-based approaches to developing and cultivating quiet ego among faculty members. This could include developing mindfulness-based or self-compassion programs to promote quiet ego attributes and investigating their impact on teachers' well-being, stress management, and workplace resilience. Understanding the long-term benefits of such interventions could help inform institutional policy and professional development initiatives.

Second, additional research might look into the relationship between quiet ego and multiple characteristics of well-being, such as emotional, psychological, and social well-being, across a wider range of educational settings. Exploring how the quiet ego interacts with other elements, such as work-life balance, job satisfaction, and academic self-concept, may provide novel methods to improve faculty's wellbeing, particularly in difficult or high-stress situations.

Furthermore, future study might examine the influence of the quiet ego on faculty wellbeing across institutions (e.g., public vs. private, research-intensive vs. teaching-focused) and nations, providing a worldwide perspective on its application and advantages. Examining how societal, institutional, and individual factors influence the formation and outcomes of the quiet ego may lead to more targeted approaches to increasing faculty wellbeing.

Finally, longitudinal studies could trace the evolution of quiet ego qualities over time and analyze their long-term impact on overall life satisfaction and professional success. Researchers could identify important moments at which interventions may be most successful in improving well-being by studying how the quiet ego develops in response to career paths and life events.

Overall, the potential for developing the quiet ego as a key strategy for improving the well-being of higher education faculty presents an intriguing area for future research, with the potential to create more sustainable and holistic approaches to teacher support and development in the face of ongoing academic challenges.

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