

A Survey of Job Satisfaction of Employees at Higher Learning Institutions in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT The study investigated job satisfaction among employees of higher education institutions. One hundred and fifty academic and non-academic staff (male=75; female=75; age range: 24 to 54) participated in the study. A group-administered questionnaire was used to collect data. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The study found that few (69) employees were satisfied with their jobs. Of these, more female than male and younger than older employees reported that they were satisfied with their jobs. In addition, job satisfaction decreased with a rise in academic qualifications. Further research should investigate the nature and magnitude of the influence of gender, age and educational level on job satisfaction among employees.

INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction is regarded as one of the strongest predictors of employee retention (Caers et al. 2008). Locke (1976) notes that job satisfaction is a broad concept that focuses on the pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the approval of one's job or job experience. An institution which is sensitive to its employees' job satisfaction is likely to survive in any economic environment (Lambert et al. 2002). Put in another way, understanding employee job satisfaction is important for the transformation of performance and productivity in an institution. Job satisfaction of employees at higher learning institutions in Masvingo Province was surveyed basically to determine whether employees were satisfied or dissatisfied with their jobs at a time when media and research reports indicated that many dissatisfied skilled personnel were emigrating to neighbouring countries for better economic fortunes (Gwaradzimba and Shumba 2010; Chireshe and Shumba 2011).

Human resources departments at higher learning institutions in Masvingo are always hiring academic staff. Before the appointment of an employee is

concluded, he/she has already resigned. Furthermore, those who are in posts are frequently not performing up to the expected standard. It is against the above background that the current researchers sought to establish whether employees in the higher education institutions in Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe were satisfied with their jobs. Libraries are awash with literature on employee job satisfaction, but studies on institutions of higher learning in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular are underrepresented. The absence of documented studies on the Zimbabwean perspective further strengthened the need for the study.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theories of Maslow (1943), Herzberg et al. (1959), Vroom (1964) and Lawler (1973) guided our understanding of the nature and characteristics of job satisfaction. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory postulates that human beings are motivated by unsatisfied needs. According to this theory, human needs comprising physiological, safety, love and belongingness, esteem and self-actualisation are hierarchically organised, from the bottom in ascending order. The lower human needs have to be satisfied before the higher needs can be met. A need that has been satisfied ceases to be a need. Maslow (1943) suggests that the needs must be satisfied for a person to be operative. Herzberg et al. (1959) however, propose another job satisfaction theory known as the motivation-

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hygiene theory. The theory is anchored on motivation and hygiene factors. Motivation factors include achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, advancement and growth, while hygiene factors comprise company policy, supervision, relationship with boss, work conditions, salary and relationship with peers (Samad 2011). Hygiene factors prevent dissatisfaction but do not lead to satisfaction. Herzberg et al. (1959) note that empirical studies to test the motivation-hygiene theory produced inconclusive results. The need fulfilment theory also attempts to explain job satisfaction. It states that satisfaction is determined by the extent to which the job or the job environment produces results which an individual finds desirable or undesirable (Vroom 1964; Lawler 1973). Thus, people have different needs which moderate how motivated they will be to perform their jobs. The fulfilment of needs leads to greater job satisfaction. Therefore, the greater the importance a person attaches to a particular need, the more the consequent satisfaction when the need is fulfilled and the greater the dissatisfaction if it is not satisfied (Smither 1994).

Research in other parts of the world has moved beyond establishing whether or not employees are satisfied with their jobs (Samad 2011). The focus of most of the studies reviewed was to determine whether or not job satisfaction could be correlated with demographic variables like gender, age and educational level. Kim (2001) noted that of the three demographic variables, gender has received the most scholarly attention.

Studies conducted in America (DeVaney and Zhan 2003; Nestor and Leary 2005; Scott et al. 2005), Britain (Gazioglu and Tansel 2002), Taiwan (Lin et al. 2007) and Korea (Kim 2001; Kocabryik 2008) confirmed that job satisfaction is correlated with gender. A consistent finding reported by the majority of the cited studies is that female employees experience more job satisfaction than their male counterparts (DeVaney and Zhan 2003; Nestor and Leary 2005; Scott et al. 2005; Lin et al. 2007). However, studies conducted by Kim (2001) and Kocabryik (2008) suggest that males were more satisfied with their jobs than females. Kim attributed his discrepant finding to the fact that male officials dominate most of the public organisations. The excitement generated by studies demonstrating correlation between gender and job satisfaction was dampened by a study conducted by Nestor and Leary (2005) which demonstrated that the relationship between gender and job satisfaction was positive but statistically insignificant. Comparatively fewer

studies showed a lack of relationship between gender and job satisfaction (for example, Hek 2008 with Egyptian physicians; Curtis 2008 with Irish nurses; Bryant 2001 with American principals in low performing and exemplary schools). Bilgic (1998) concluded that despite gender claiming the largest chunk of literature on job satisfaction, the findings on its relationship with job satisfaction is far from being conclusive.

Age is another demographic variable that has received a fair share of scholarly studies. Most international data confirm that there is a significant relationship between job satisfaction and age (for example, Tarver et al. 1991, who studied College Student Affairs Administrators and Academic Administrators in North Carolina; Sokoya 2000 with public sector managers; Bryant 2001; Curtis 2008 with Irish nurses; and Krishnamurthi and Ganesan 2008 who studied MBA students in India). These studies suggest that job satisfaction increases with a rise in the age of employees. The explanation of this finding is that the younger employees considered themselves more mobile and that they sought greener pastures. This finding was contested by Gazioglu and Tansel (2002) who argued that the relationship was not linear, but U-shaped as the very young and old employees were the most satisfied. Other studies showed a lack of association between age and job satisfaction. Examples of these studies include Linz's (2002) study on Russian workers, Scott et al. (2005) on Mississippi extension agents, DeVaney and Zhan (2003) who studied graduates in financial services in Washington, Knights and Kennedy (2005) who studied senior public servants in Australia and Hek's (2008) study on physicians in Egypt's public sector. In view of these discrepant findings, it is difficult to determine with clarity the nature and magnitude of the association between age and job satisfaction.

Studies on the relationship between educational level and job satisfaction generated three interesting results. First, there are studies which suggest an insignificant relationship between the two variables. These include studies conducted in America and Europe (Gordon and Arvey 1975; Linz 2002; Hartman 2005; Scott et al. 2005), Asia (Kim 2001 with Korean public officials; Kocabryik 2008 with Indian members of the Faculty of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry) and Africa (Tella et al. 2007 with Nigerian professional and non-professional personnel in academic and research libraries; and Hek 2008 with Egyptian physicians).

Second, another set of studies conducted across the globe [for example, Woodruff 1988 (America); Gardner and Oswald 2002; Gazioglu and Tansel 2002; European Commission 2006; Curtis 2008 (Europe); Metle 2001 (Middle East); Lin et al. 2007; Kocabryik 2008; Krishnamurthi and Ganesan 2008 (Asia) and Sokoya 2000 (Africa)] showed a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. In fact, Kocabryik's (2008) study on hospital staff in India revealed that employees who had doctoral qualifications had more job satisfaction than those with lower educational qualifications. Research on employees in the tourism sector revealed similar findings (Gurbuz 2007). Third, studies conducted in America (Woodruff 1988; Tarver et al. 1999) found educational level and job satisfaction to be negatively associated.

The researchers did not come across studies conducted in Zimbabwe that directly focused on sources of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction of employees in the higher learning institutions. As a result, they reviewed studies that were conducted in other countries. For example, Oyediji (1995) observed that administrative functions, salary and qualification levels affect job satisfaction of academic staff in Nigerian Universities. Furthermore, both senior and junior academic staff members were reportedly not satisfied with the current teaching facilities and the available research grants. Oyediji (1995) encouraged universities to motivate academic staff who had not obtained post graduate qualifications to do so in order to enhance their job satisfaction. Michaelowa and Wittman (2007) concur that teachers' academic qualifications, while beneficial for students' learning, tend to lead to mismatch between their expectations and professional realities, thereby reducing job satisfaction.

Goals of the Study

The study sought to establish whether employees in institutions of higher learning in Masvingo Province were satisfied with their jobs in relation to their gender, age and educational level.

METHOD

Research Design

The design was a descriptive survey within the quantitative research paradigm. The design was

employed to gather the opinions of employees in higher education institutions on the nature of satisfaction with their jobs.

Participants

Participants were 150 academic and non-academic employees drawn from five higher learning institutions in Masvingo Province ($F = 75$, $M = 75$). One-hundred and three participants were below 35 years of age, while 47 were aged 35 and above. The participants had the following educational levels: ordinary level and below ($n = 31$), diploma ($n = 27$) and degree ($n = 92$).

Instruments

A group administered questionnaire with three sections was used to collect data for the research. The first section gathered biographical data while the second section collected information on the employees' perceptions of their jobs, whether they were satisfied or not. The third section captured information on sources of employee dissatisfaction. The questionnaire was the preferred data collection instrument because it is commonly used to obtain facts and opinions about a phenomenon from people who are informed on the particular issue (de Vos et al. 2002). On the Pearson Product Moment Correlation, the questionnaire had a high test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.91.

Procedure

Prior to the study, senior management of the five higher learning institutions granted permission for the employees to participate. The participants were randomly selected from five institutions of higher learning in Masvingo Province. To ensure a fair representation of the institutions, the stratified sampling method was employed to select the sample. The desired number of hundred participants was selected proportionally from each of the five institutions. Randomisation of selection at institutional level meant that every employee had an equal chance of being chosen. Stratification consisted of the institutions (universe) being regarded as the strata that are mutually exclusive, and the employees who are homogeneous with regard to some characteristic (de Vos et al. 2002). Prior to the administration of the questionnaire to the participants, a pilot study was conducted

with 12 participants who did not form part of the sample. The questionnaires were hand delivered to the participants and group administered, hence a maximum return rate of 150 completed questionnaires was realised.

Data Analysis

The study used descriptive statistics to analyse the collected data. The computed percentages indicated the point at which items tended to cluster (Kothari 2004). The statistical technique was preferred for its simplicity.

Ethical Considerations

Participating employees indicated their consent verbally before completing the survey questionnaires. The researchers assured participating employees of the confidentiality of their responses. All answers were recorded anonymously. Before analysing employees' responses, each questionnaire was assigned an appropriate code for researchers' identification. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage. The study did not subject them to psychological or physical harm.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that proportionately, more female employees were satisfied (60 %) with their jobs than not (40 %). In contrast, fewer male employees (32 %) were satisfied with their jobs compared to those (68 %) who were not satisfied. Overall, comparatively fewer employees (46 %) were satisfied with their jobs.

Table 1: Job satisfaction by gender (n = 150)

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Not satisfied</i>
Female	45 (60%)	30 (40%)
Male	24 (32%)	51 (68%)
Total	69 (46%)	81 (54%)

Table 2: Job satisfaction by age (n = 150)

<i>Age range</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Not satisfied</i>
Below 35 years	49 (47.6%)	54 (52.4%)
35 years and above	20 (42.6%)	27 (57.4%)
Total	69 (46%)	81 (54%)

Table 2 shows that more employees (47.6 %) who were below 35 years of age were satisfied with their jobs as compared to those (42.6 %) in the 35 year and above age category. In both age groups, proportionately fewer employees (46 %) were satisfied with their jobs.

Table 3 shows that employee job satisfaction in institutions of higher learning decreases with a rise in academic qualification. Employees who possessed degrees were the least satisfied (32.6 %), followed by diploma holders (66.7 %) and lastly ordinary level and below with 71 %

Table 3: Job satisfaction by educational level (n = 150)

<i>Educational level</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Not satisfied</i>
Degree	30 (32.6%)	62 (67.4%)
Diploma	18 (66.7%)	9 (33.3%)
Ordinary level and below	22 (71%)	9 (29%)
Total	70 (46.7%)	80 (53.3%)

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed at establishing whether or not employees at higher learning institutions in Masvingo Province are satisfied with their jobs. The study showed that fewer employees (46 %) were satisfied with their jobs. The finding was not surprising as the study was conducted at a time Zimbabwe was going through serious economic hardships. As expected, the majority of participants indicated that their dissatisfaction with their jobs emanates from conditions of service and actual remuneration. The finding that the sources of employee dissatisfaction with their jobs had to do with working conditions and remuneration packages echo the findings of Oyediji (1995) and Ololube (2006), which revealed several job related factors as sources of university employees' dissatisfaction with their jobs. The working conditions and salaries of the participants in this present study like that of other civil servants in Zimbabwe were reported to be very low and demotivating (Chireshe and Shumba 2011). Some of the employees were contemplating leaving for greener pastures. The economic turmoil ravaging the Zimbabwean economy was evidenced by the massive brain drain experienced by the country (Gwaradzimba and Shumba 2010). Frustrated people are emigrating mainly to neighbouring countries to seek better economic fortunes. The finding may not

therefore be a reflection of the employees' perceptions of their jobs. Job satisfaction among employees in the public higher learning institutions support Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory and need fulfilment theory (Vroom 1964). Jobs are enmeshed in socio-economic needs that have to be met for job satisfaction to be realised. The finding seems to dispute Herzberg et al.'s (1959) motivation-hygiene theory that contends that hygiene factors like salary prevent dissatisfaction but do not lead to satisfaction. Presumably, in an economically turbulent environment, the employees' job satisfaction seems to be anchored on conditions that address the immediate needs like physiological and security.

The survey revealed that proportionately, more female (60 %) than male (32 %) employees were satisfied with their jobs, echoing the findings of several international studies on job satisfaction (for example, Gazioglu and Tansen 2002; DeVaney and Zhan 2003; Nestor and Leary 2005; Scott et al. 2005) that showed that women were more satisfied with their jobs than their male counterparts. Since Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society, women may have low expectations. The women may also be married and getting support from their husbands. The males as breadwinners may probably have viewed their salaries as not meeting their families' demands.

On age differentiation, the study revealed that younger employees (below 35 years of age) (47.6 %) were satisfied with their jobs than older (above 35 years of age) employees (42.6 %). The study disputes most international literature (Tarver et al. 1991; Sokoya 2000; Curtis 2008; Krishnamurthi and Ganesan 2008) that showed that older employees were more satisfied with their jobs than younger employees. Presumably, the younger employees' morale is still relatively high while the older employees' morale declined due to the non-fulfilment of some expectations or work related values and are yet to make realistic expectations (Clarke et al. 1996). In a collectivist society that is experiencing serious economic hard-ships, financial obligations for younger employees could be fewer than those of older employees. Also, older employees by virtue of their experience, may have more responsibilities at work which may not match their conditions of service and remuneration packages. The study did not support Linz (2002), DeVaney and Zhan (2003), Scott et al (2005), Knights and Kennedy (2005) and Hek (2008) whose studies

revealed that there was no relationship between age and job satisfaction.

The pattern that emerged from the study was that, employees who possessed ordinary level passes and below were the most satisfied (71 %), followed by diploma holders (66.7 %) and degree holders (32.6 %) being the least satisfied, thus showing that job satisfaction increased with a decrease in educational level. This finding concurs with the findings of most of the studies conducted across the globe (Woodruff 1988; Sokoya 2000; Metle 2001; Gardner and Oswald 2002; Gazioglu and Tansel 2002; European Commission 2006; Lin et al. 2007; Curtis 2008; Kocabryik 2008; Krishnamurthi and Gansen 2008) that indicated that a relationship existed between the employee's educational level and job satisfaction. Those with higher qualifications could have been more dissatisfied with their jobs probably by seeing that they have invested a lot in their education in terms of time and money yet the conditions of services and remunerations packages did not match with this investment.

CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrated that job satisfaction of employees in higher learning institutions in Masvingo Province is influenced by a combination of gender, age and educational variables. Unlike studies conducted elsewhere, which explored the correlation between job satisfaction and the three variables mentioned above, the current study stopped at the basic level of assessing employees' satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their jobs. The pattern of job satisfaction revealed by this study has both theoretical and practical importance for understanding, predicting, and changing employee performance and institutional productivity. We will expect employees who feel more satisfied with their jobs to embrace an active role in job performance. By contrast, employees who feel less satisfied with their jobs are expected to contemplate leaving for greener pastures.

LIMITATIONS

This study has limitations. The findings of the present study might be applicable to higher education work situations only. More so, the findings, might not be a true reflection of the situation

that obtains at all institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe as the study focused on Masvingo Province only. The study depended on the participants' self reports that reduce the reliability of the findings. Future research among a larger sample of employees drawn from more provinces will yield generalisable results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Intervention strategies are needed to improve general satisfaction levels of employees. If job satisfaction levels of employees are low, productivity will drop, while employee burnout and misdemeanours will increase. In the spirit of gender equity, there is need for a review of employee benefits to accommodate the realities of culturally embedded responsibilities of men as gatherers and providers of their families. In addition, there is need for differential remuneration that takes into consideration the employee's years of service. Policies that are sensitive to the peculiar needs of senior employees should be enacted. Remuneration should be in commensurate with the qualifications of the employees.

It would be interesting to test the sensitivity of the findings to job satisfaction levels of managerial staff, employees in stable economies and the effect of monetary rewards and non-monetary rewards. The study also recommends further research to establish the nature and magnitude of the influence of gender, age and educational level on job satisfaction. Robustness can also be validated through using different samples from both public and private institutions of higher learning.

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