



Keeping teachers happy: A Critical review of job satisfaction in educational settings

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Abstract

Teacher job satisfaction is a vital factor influencing motivation, retention, and educational quality. This paper critically reviews six peer-reviewed studies published between 1998 and 2011, focusing on the relationship between human resource management (HRM) practices and teacher job satisfaction. The findings reveal that supportive leadership, fair HR policies, professional development, and balanced workloads significantly enhance teacher satisfaction and performance. Quantitative research provided broad generalizations, while qualitative studies offered deeper contextual insights. The review also considers the relevance of these findings to the Sri Lankan educational context, where hierarchical structures and resource constraints shape teacher experiences. It concludes that improving teacher job satisfaction through contextually responsive HRM strategies and leadership development is essential to build a motivated, effective, and sustainable teaching workforce.

Keywords: Teacher job satisfaction, human resource management, educational leadership

Introduction

Job satisfaction has been identified as a critical factor in achieving success. In managing any organization, managing of the human resources effectively is one of the main requirements. There, keeping the workers happy and contented can be seen as the most challenging task. Especially, in the field of education, keeping the teachers, and other practitioners satisfied is a real challenge when considering the pressures, they have to face during their work environment. As Skaalvick and Skaalvick (2011) highlight positive human resource management practices like "stress management" programmes can have a significant effect on improving job satisfaction of the employees. When considering the education institutions where teachers have to experience pressures from the management, students as well as the community, it is extremely important to keep them satisfied and happy to ensure better management of the learning teaching process and to achieve success ultimately. This, paper intends to explore the area of job satisfaction of the teachers through a critical analysis of six selected articles published in peer reviewed journals from 1998 to 2011.

Articles selected

Given below is the list of the selected articles with a brief background about them

1. **"Teacher Job Satisfaction: The Importance of School Leadership"**
 - **Authors:** Dinham, S., & Scott, C.
 - **Journal:** Educational Administration Quarterly
 - **Year:** 1998
 - **Summary:** This study investigates the relationship between leadership practices and teacher job satisfaction. The author emphasizes how effective leadership influences the work environment and satisfaction levels of teachers significantly, and how their job satisfaction impacts overall school performance.
 - **Key Findings:** Leadership quality is a major determinant of job satisfaction. Supportive and

democratic leadership can help retain teachers and reduce turnover.

2. **"Job Satisfaction Among Teachers: An Empirical Study on Human Resource Management in Schools"**
 - **Authors:** Ho, C. S., & Au, W. T.
 - **Journal:** Journal of Educational Administration
 - **Year:** 2006
 - **Summary:** This paper examines job satisfaction from a human resource management angle, emphasizing how positive HR policies contribute to job satisfaction. The researcher considers factors such as professional development, salary, and workload here.
 - **Key Findings:** Teacher satisfaction heavily depends on HR practices, such as fair compensation, opportunities for growth, and workload management.
3. **"Teacher Motivation and Job Satisfaction: A Key Component in School Effectiveness"**
 - **Authors:** Richardson, P. W., & Watt, H. M. G.
 - **Journal:** Journal of School Psychology
 - **Year:** 2010
 - **Summary:** This research links teacher motivation with job satisfaction and explores how both are crucial to school performance. The author proposes that enhancing teacher motivation through positive HR practices is a key element for the improvement of school performance.
 - **Key Findings:** Motivated and satisfied teachers are more active, leading to better student outcomes and overall school performance.
4. **"The Impact of Job Satisfaction on Teacher Retention: A Human Resource Management Perspective"**
 - **Authors:** Ingersoll, R., & Smith, T. M.
 - **Journal:** American Educational Research Journal
 - **Year:** 2004
 - **Summary:** This article explores on teacher retention; how job satisfaction is a critical factor in reducing

teacher turnover. The paper also discusses effective HR strategies that can be implemented to improve retention rates in schools.

- **Key Findings:** Schools that implement effective HR strategies aimed at improving teacher satisfaction experience lower turnover rates.
5. **"Teacher Job Satisfaction and Burnout: Implications for Human Resource Management in Schools"**
- **Authors:** Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S.
 - **Journal:** Teaching and Teacher Education
 - **Year:** 2011
 - **Summary:** This paper explores two themes; job satisfaction and burnout, examining how burnout negatively impacts job satisfaction and what HR managers can do to mitigate this issue.
 - **Key Findings:** Burnout is negatively related to job satisfaction. Effective HR practices like stress management programs can significantly improve teachers' job satisfaction.
6. **"Professional Development and Job Satisfaction Among Teachers: Human Resource Implications for Schools"**
- **Authors:** Avalos, B.
 - **Journal:** Educational Research Review
 - **Year:** 2011
 - **Summary:** This article highlights the role of professional development in increasing job satisfaction among teachers. The author argues that managers in schools should focus on providing continuous learning opportunities to maintain high levels of job satisfaction.
 - **Key Findings:** Professional development opportunities are directly linked to job satisfaction, and continuous learning helps prevent teacher burnout and increases retention.

Critical analysis of the selected articles

These articles collectively highlight the importance of human resource management in enhancing job satisfaction among teachers, which finally results in retention, motivation, and overall school effectiveness.

1. **"Teacher Job Satisfaction: The Importance of School Leadership"** (Dinham & Scott, 1998)^[2]
 - **Methodology:** This study used a variety of instruments like surveys and questionnaires to collect data from teachers across multiple schools, focusing on their perceptions of leadership and job satisfaction.

Strengths

- **Quantitative approach:** The use of large-scale surveys facilitates broad generalization and identification of trends across different schools.
- **Representative sample:** The study covered multiple schools, which increases the reliability of the findings pertaining to different school environments.

Limitations

- **Subjectivity of self-reported data:** Reliance on teacher perceptions through surveys may sometimes introduce biases, such as inaccurate self-assessment.

- **Limited depth:** While the surveys provide valuable quantitative data, they lack depth in understanding the complexities behind the teacher-leadership dynamics.
 - **Relevance:** Despite the limitations, the study offers valuable insights into how school leadership influences job satisfaction, which is a key HR component.
2. **"Job Satisfaction Among Teachers: An Empirical Study on Human Resource Management in Schools"** (Ho & Au, 2006)
 - **Methodology:** The authors utilized a mixed-methods approach by bringing together surveys and semi-structured interviews. Surveys were used to gather broad data on job satisfaction factors, while interviews provided deeper insights.

Strengths

- **Mixed-methods approach:** The combination of qualitative and quantitative enhances the findings of the study, offering both general trends and in-depth understanding of teacher experiences.
- **Multiple data sources:** By using both surveys and interviews, researcher cross-validates findings, enhancing its credibility.

Limitations

- **Resource-intensive:** Mixed-method studies require more time and resources, which might limit the sample size for interviews, reducing generalizability.
 - **Interpretation bias:** Qualitative data analysis from interviews can be subject to researcher bias during interpretation, though this can be mitigated with rigorous data analysis protocols.
 - **Relevance:** This methodology provides a broader understanding of how HR management impacts job satisfaction, making it valuable for policy recommendations.
3. **"Teacher Motivation and Job Satisfaction: A Key Component in School Effectiveness"** (Richardson & Watt, 2010)^[5]
 - **Methodology:** The study depended on longitudinal survey data collected from teachers over multiple time points to track changes in job satisfaction and motivation.
 - **Strengths**
 - **Longitudinal design:** The longitudinal approach facilitates researchers to observe how teacher motivation and job satisfaction evolve over time, giving insights into long-term factors.
 - **Time-sensitive findings:** This design is especially valuable in determining the impact of changes in policies, leadership, or job responsibilities on teacher satisfaction.

Limitations

- **Attrition rate:** Longitudinal studies very often face challenge of participant drop-out, which can affect the consistency of the data.
 - **Causality issues:** Although this study can track changes over time, it cannot definitively establish causality between variables like motivation and satisfaction.
 - **Relevance:** This methodology is highly relevant for HR management, especially in formulating lasting policies aimed at improving teacher retention and satisfaction.
4. **"The Impact of Job Satisfaction on Teacher Retention: A Human Resource Management Perspective"** (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004)^[4]
- **Methodology:** This research utilized large-scale, secondary data analysis from national databases (e.g., teacher surveys and employment records) to explore the relationship between job satisfaction and teacher retention.

Strengths

- **Large sample size:** Using secondary data from national databases allows for comprehensive analysis and greater generalizability across different school settings.
- **Statistical rigor:** Secondary data often include robust statistical tools that help in making strong inferences about correlations and trends.

Limitations

- **Lack of control over data collection:** Researchers using secondary data are limited by the structure of the pre-existing datasets, which may not contain all the variables of interest.
 - **Surface-level insights:** Secondary data might not capture the nuanced, contextual factors that affect teacher job satisfaction, such as specific school culture or leadership styles.
 - **Relevance:** This method provides strong, generalizable findings that are useful for HR policies but might miss specific context-driven factors affecting individual schools.
5. **"Teacher Job Satisfaction and Burnout: Implications for Human Resource Management in Schools"** (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011)^[6]
- **Methodology:** This study employed a cross-sectional survey design, collecting data at a single point in time from teachers about their job satisfaction and levels of burnout.

Strengths

- **Efficient data collection:** Cross-sectional surveys allow for gathering data from a large number of participants relatively quickly, offering a snapshot of current job satisfaction and burnout levels.

- **Wide applicability:** Since it covers multiple schools and regions, it offers a broad view of the relationship between job satisfaction and burnout.

Limitations

- **Lack of temporal depth:** Cross-sectional designs cannot track changes over time, making it difficult to understand how burnout and job satisfaction evolve.
 - **Causality issues:** This design captures correlations but cannot establish the directionality of the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction.
 - **Relevance:** While limited in showing longitudinal trends, this method is effective in identifying immediate HR needs related to teacher well-being.
6. **"Professional Development and Job Satisfaction Among Teachers: Human Resource Implications for Schools"** (Avalos, 2011)^[1]
- **Methodology:** The study used qualitative case studies involving in-depth interviews and observations to explore how professional development influences job satisfaction.

Strengths

- **In-depth insights:** Case studies provide rich, contextualized data that help explain how and why professional development affects job satisfaction.
- **Context-specific recommendations:** Findings from qualitative research are highly relevant for developing tailored HR strategies for schools.

Limitations

- **Limited generalizability:** Case study findings are often context-specific and may not be easily applicable to other schools or systems.
- **Potential for researcher bias:** The qualitative nature of the study can introduce subjectivity in data interpretation.
- **Relevance:** This methodology is useful for HR professionals looking to implement context-specific professional development programs that enhance teacher job satisfaction.

Conclusion

- **Strengths of Methodologies**
- The studies collectively employ diverse methodologies (e.g., surveys, interviews, longitudinal designs, case studies), providing a rich understanding of teacher job satisfaction.
- Quantitative approaches (e.g., surveys, secondary data analysis) offer broad generalizability, while qualitative approaches (e.g., interviews, case studies) provide in-depth insights into contextual factors.

Limitations

- Causality challenges in non-experimental designs, such as cross-sectional surveys, make it difficult to establish direct cause-effect relationships.

- Biases in self-reported data, qualitative interviews, and case studies can affect the reliability of findings.
- **Relevance to HR Management**
- The mixed-method approaches are particularly valuable in HR management, as they allow schools to derive both broad policy recommendations (quantitative) and context-specific interventions (qualitative).

Research Objectives and Focus

All five studies focus on the central question of teacher job satisfaction as a significant factor in the effectiveness of human resource management (HRM) in schools. Specific focal points include:

- The role of school leadership and HR policies in improving teacher job satisfaction (Dinham & Scott, 1998^[2]; Ho & Au, 2006).
- Teacher motivation, retention, and its links to HRM (Richardson & Watt, 2010^[5]; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004^[4]).
- The relationship between burnout and job satisfaction, and the role of professional development in enhancing satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011^[6]; Avalos, 2011)^[1].

Key Variables across Studies

Common variables investigated in these studies include

- Leadership quality (Dinham & Scott, 1998)^[2]
- Human resource management policies such as compensation, workload, and professional development (Ho & Au, 2006; Avalos, 2011)^[1]
- Motivation and retention factors (Richardson & Watt, 2010^[5]; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004)^[4]
- Burnout and its negative impact on job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011)^[6].

Methodological Analysis

A critical evaluation of the methodologies reveals distinct strengths and limitations:

- **Quantitative Methods (Surveys, Longitudinal, and Secondary Data Analysis):**

Strengths

- The use of surveys (Dinham & Scott, 1998^[2]; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011)^[6] and secondary data analysis (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004)^[4] allows for broad generalizations and statistical rigor.
- Longitudinal designs (Richardson & Watt, 2010)^[5] track changes over time, giving insights into the long-term impact of HR practices on teacher satisfaction and retention.

Limitations

- Cross-sectional surveys (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011)^[6] cannot establish causal relationships, limiting the ability to infer the directionality of relationships between variables.
- Secondary data analysis (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004)^[4] can lack specificity and control over key variables, making it harder to capture the nuances of teacher satisfaction in different school contexts.

Qualitative Methods (Interviews and Case Studies) Strengths

- Studies using case studies and interviews (Ho & Au, 2006; Avalos, 2011)^[1] provide rich, in-depth data, offering insights into individual experiences of teacher satisfaction that surveys may miss.
- The mixed-methods approach (Ho & Au, 2006) combining surveys and interviews enhances validity by providing both broad and deep insights.

Limitations

- Generalizability is a key issue with qualitative methods, as the context-specific nature of interviews and case studies limits applicability to wider populations.
- Subjectivity in interpreting interview data introduces potential biases, which can affect the reliability of qualitative findings.

Key Findings across Studies

Despite the methodological diversity, the studies converge on several key findings:

- **School Leadership's Critical Role**
- Dinham & Scott (1998)^[2] highlight that school leadership is a primary determinant of job satisfaction. Effective leaders foster a positive school climate, which enhances teacher morale and reduces turnover.
- Similar findings are presented by Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2011)^[6], where the absence of supportive leadership exacerbates burnout, further reducing job satisfaction.

HR Policies and Teacher Satisfaction

- Ho & Au (2006) and Avalos (2011)^[1] demonstrate that HR policies related to compensation, professional development, and workload management are crucial in enhancing teacher satisfaction.
- Avalos (2011)^[1] specifically highlights the role of professional development in keeping teachers engaged and satisfied, thereby improving retention and reducing burnout.

Motivation and Retention

- Richardson & Watt (2010)^[5] argue that teacher motivation is closely linked to job satisfaction, suggesting that motivated teachers who feel supported by HR policies are more likely to stay in their positions.
- Ingersoll & Smith (2004)^[4] corroborate this by showing that schools with higher teacher satisfaction have lower rates of teacher turnover, emphasizing the importance of job satisfaction as a retention tool.

Burnout and Job Satisfaction

- Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2011)^[6] highlight the inverse relationship between burnout and job satisfaction, showing that teachers experiencing burnout are more likely to leave their profession. This underscores the need for HR strategies that promote work-life balance and stress reduction.

Implications for Human Resource Management

Based on the findings, several HR strategies are recommended to enhance teacher job satisfaction

- **Leadership Development:** Effective leadership training for school administrators can improve communication, teacher support, and overall school climate, boosting teacher satisfaction.
- **Professional Development Programs:** Providing teachers with opportunities for continuous learning and professional growth, as suggested by Avalos (2011)^[1], can maintain high levels of job satisfaction.
- **Workload Management and Compensation:** Addressing teacher workload, offering fair compensation, and improving work-life balance are essential HR strategies to reduce burnout and enhance teacher morale (Ho & Au, 2006; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011)^[6].
- **Retention Strategies:** Schools need HR strategies focused on teacher retention, including mentorship programs, performance incentives, and personalized support for teachers in challenging environments (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004)^[4].

Relevance of the Studies to the Sri Lankan Context

1. **Leadership and Teacher Job Satisfaction:** According to Dinham & Scott (1998)^[2], school leadership is a primary determinant of teacher job satisfaction. This is particularly relevant in the Sri Lankan context, where hierarchical leadership structures dominate schools. Many Sri Lankan school principals focus on administrative tasks, often neglecting the critical role they play in fostering a supportive and motivating environment for teachers. This study emphasizes the importance of strong leadership in enhancing job satisfaction, suggesting that leadership development programs for school principals could significantly improve teacher morale and, consequently, school outcomes.
2. **HR Policies and Professional Development:** Ho & Au (2006) highlight the importance of HR policies related to compensation, professional development, and workload management in boosting teacher satisfaction. Sri Lanka's public-school teachers often face challenges in these areas, including low salaries, heavy workloads, and limited opportunities for professional growth. Implementing targeted HR policies that provide continuous learning opportunities, fair compensation, and manageable workloads would likely increase teacher satisfaction and retention. This is particularly important in Sri Lanka, where teacher shortages are growing concerns.
3. **Teacher Motivation, Retention, and Burnout:** The studies by Richardson & Watt (2010)^[5] and Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2011)^[6] point to the close relationship between teacher motivation, retention, and burnout. In Sri Lankan schools, teacher motivation is often hindered by inadequate resources, lack of professional development opportunities, and excessive administrative burdens. The literature suggests that

addressing burnout through HR strategies such as stress management and workload reduction could significantly improve job satisfaction. In turn, this would help retain experienced teachers, a pressing issue in Sri Lanka's rural schools, where teacher turnover is particularly high.

Limitations of the Studies in the Sri Lankan Context

While the findings of these studies are relevant to Sri Lanka, several limitations must be considered when applying them to the local context:

1. **Cultural Differences:** The studies reviewed in the meta-analysis were conducted primarily in Western countries, where school leadership styles, teacher expectations, and HR practices may differ significantly from those in Sri Lanka. For instance, leadership structures in Sri Lankan schools are often more hierarchical, and the local culture places a strong emphasis on authority and respect for seniority. This may affect the applicability of leadership-related findings from Western contexts.
2. **Economic Constraints:** Sri Lanka faces significant economic challenges, which limit the ability of educational institutions to implement some of the HR strategies suggested in the literature. For example, increasing teacher salaries or reducing workloads might be difficult to achieve without substantial investment, which is often not feasible in the current economic climate. Professional development programs, while beneficial, may also be constrained by limited resources.
3. **Educational Policy and Bureaucracy:** In Sri Lanka, educational policy is highly centralized, and schools often have limited autonomy in HR decision-making. The effectiveness of HR strategies such as leadership development or workload management may be hindered by bureaucratic structures that slow down or complicate the implementation of reforms. This highlights the need for policy changes at the national level to support HRM improvements in schools.

Application of Findings in the Sri Lankan Context

Given the relevance and limitations of the studies reviewed, several key actions can be taken to improve HRM in Sri Lankan schools:

1. **Leadership Development:** The findings of Dinham & Scott (1998)^[2] underscore the importance of leadership in teacher job satisfaction. In Sri Lanka, this could be addressed by introducing leadership development programs for school principals. These programs should focus on building the skills necessary to create a supportive and motivating school environment, which would, in turn, improve teacher satisfaction and retention. By shifting the focus from administrative tasks to teacher engagement and support, school leaders can foster a more positive and productive school climate.
2. **Professional Development Opportunities:** As suggested by Ho & Au (2006), professional

development is a key factor in teacher job satisfaction. In Sri Lanka, schools should prioritize continuous professional development programs that offer teachers opportunities to enhance their skills and advance in their careers. This could include workshops, mentorship programs, and collaborative learning opportunities that allow teachers to share best practices and innovate in their teaching methods.

3. **Workload Management and Stress Reduction:** The studies by Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2011) ^[6] emphasize the negative impact of burnout on job satisfaction. In Sri Lanka, teachers often face high workloads, particularly in rural areas where teacher shortages are common. To address this, HRM policies should focus on reducing teacher workloads and providing support for stress management. This could include hiring additional staff, redistributing tasks more equitably, and providing teachers with resources to manage their workloads effectively.

Suggestions for Future Research

While the meta-analysis provides valuable insights into HRM practices in educational institutions, there are several areas that warrant further research, particularly in the context of Sri Lanka:

1. **Contextualized Leadership Models:** Future research should focus on developing leadership models that are tailored to the Sri Lankan cultural and educational context. These models should take into account the hierarchical nature of school leadership in Sri Lanka and explore how to balance authority with teacher engagement and support.
2. **Economic Feasibility of HR Policies:** Research is needed to explore the economic feasibility of implementing HR policies such as increased teacher salaries, workload reduction, and expanded professional development programs in Sri Lanka. This research should also identify cost-effective strategies for improving teacher job satisfaction in resource-constrained environments.
3. **Teacher Retention in Rural Schools:** A significant area for future research is teacher retention in rural schools, where turnover is a critical issue. Studies should investigate the specific challenges faced by rural teachers in Sri Lanka and identify HR strategies that can be implemented to improve job satisfaction and retention in these areas.
4. **Impact of Centralized Bureaucracy on HRM:** Research should also focus on understanding how centralized educational policies in Sri Lanka impact the effectiveness of HRM in schools. This would help identify barriers to the implementation of HR strategies and provide recommendations for policy reform.

Conclusion

Human resource management in Sri Lankan schools has a profound impact on teacher job satisfaction, motivation, and retention. By drawing on international research, it is clear that effective leadership, professional development, and workload management are essential components of a successful HR strategy. While the studies reviewed offer

valuable insights, their application in the Sri Lankan context requires careful consideration of cultural, economic, and policy constraints. Future research should focus on developing context-specific HR models that can be effectively implemented in Sri Lankan schools to enhance teacher satisfaction and ultimately improve educational outcomes.

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