

Key Factors Influencing Job Satisfaction among Academic Staff in the University

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Abstract

Job satisfaction (JS) undoubtedly impacts significantly on the productive capacity and general well-being of academic staff within universities. Poor JS affects not only individual performance but also broader institutional goals and may culminate in a decline in staff morale, disloyalty, constant labor migration and unending industrial actions by labor unions within the university. Enhancing job satisfaction can improve staff's quality of service, staff retention, productivity, and the overall academic quality of the institutions. This study reviews factors associated with job satisfaction among academic staff in universities, and how these factors independently contribute to overall job satisfaction. This study draws on expert opinions and experiential knowledge, underpinned by an extensive review of scholarly literature, peer evaluations, and document analysis in the field of advanced career development. These methodologies were employed to deeply understand the key factors influencing job satisfaction within academic settings. By synthesizing insights and ideas from seasoned academic literature with empirical data, the aim to construct comprehensive thoughts and ideas for the identifications of the key factors and enhancing knowledge on job satisfaction at all levels beyond the university environment, thereby fostering better organizational outcomes was construed. Therefore, this paper in its quests to underpin knowledge recommends that Institutions of higher learning should ensure quality leadership and effective management practices aimed at addressing key factors for job satisfaction among university staff and create an equitable platform for all university staff irrespective of cadre and race. This paper lays out knowledge of the key factors that predict job satisfaction among university staff. Also setting the basis for further research.

Keywords

Job Satisfaction, Academic Staff, Mental Health, Academic Environment

1. Introduction

Job satisfaction is defined as the good feeling derived from a job that an individual enjoys doing (Oxford Learners Dictionary). In a research context, job satisfaction in the academic workplace encapsulates the positive emotional well-being and contentment felt by faculty employees regarding their assigned roles and responsibilities. (Giroux, 1960)

According to a study conducted (Hee et al., 2020; Senin et al., 2014), members of staff who are pleased with their jobs are motivated to exert more commitment and high service delivery in performing their duties. This sentiment is influenced by factors such as the nature of tasks, autonomy, recognition, and the overall work environment. Recognizing and understanding job satisfaction becomes vital for organizations seeking to measure the overall well-being and engagement of their employees, serving as a critical factor for those aiming to improve work-life quality and enhance employee retention (Hee et al., 2020).

Furthermore, in a world of academic competition (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016) pursuit of academic excellence, good service delivery, conducive and stimulating academic environment and scholarship drive are a matter for consideration, thus, recognizing and addressing these factors that influence job satisfaction of academic staff becomes paramount.

However, a study reveals that the level of job satisfaction varies among employees, even when they share the same occupation and perform similar tasks. Additionally, the study emphasizes that job satisfaction encompasses both intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction derived from organizational and employer-related factors (Norsuhaily Abu Bakar, 2019).

According to (Xu et al., 2023), job satisfaction among faculty staff is challenged by multifaceted and distinctive high degree extrinsic general factors, these include a spectrum of interconnected variables, such as personal factors (Biopsychosocial factors), environmental dimensional factors (environmental conflicts, economic crisis, governmental policies and law factors) and organizational factors (such as, facilities/structures, materials, networks, leaders etc.). Another study reported poor job satisfaction among faculty members is due to poor staff welfarism and standard benchmark for staff welfare scheme (Harris et al., 2004) these challenges not only affect University staff job satisfaction, but also undermine the goals of the establishment. Therefore, if not discussed and addressed in a timely manner the University's aspirations and system may be on the decline and staff loyalty may be in question (Tavárez de Henríquez & Domínguez Valerio, 2023).

The question is what is the essence of job satisfaction among faculty members in the university? And why is job satisfaction critical for the survival of any cooperate institution of higher learning? Job satisfaction among faculty members is an organization's success (Memon et al., 2023) any institution of higher learning that fails to put adequate mechanism to checkmate job dissatisfaction may have challenges regarding productivity. In addition, Organizational commitment is

like an extension of job satisfaction, reflecting the positive attitude an employee has not just towards their own role but also towards the entire organization (Ćulibrk et al., 2018).

Furthermore, according to (Wang et al., 2022) job satisfaction results in performance. Therefore, critical attention needs to be paid by academic institutions to job satisfaction among academic staff in the university settings for it to remain favorable and competitive on the global stage. Therefore, the need to understand these key factors that influence Job satisfaction among university staff cannot be underemphasized, a thoughtful and strategic study of these key factors is necessary.

In recent years, we see competitions in higher learning, as academic institutions across the world are seeking world ranking, hence, ways to improve to remain competitive and relevant remain a key factor and one key factor is academic work environment. An academic work environment is anywhere where academics engage in teaching, research, and administrative duties, fostering the development and sharing of knowledge and skills within their discipline. It must be conducive and stimulating for academic purposes. (Gu et al., 2022) Thus, it must be healthy, and the working climate must comprise two dimensions factors: physical and behavioral aspects, meaning that both human and logistics must be adequately prioritized for faculty members to live up to their expectations within the University, however, this is not the always the usual case (Tavárez de Henríquez & Domínguez Valerio, 2023).

The second key factor is University structure and leadership. In advanced academic institutions, faculty members and their environment are inseparable due to the nature of their work. This nature of academic job may include teaching, administrative services, and research, all co-occur within the university work environment and structures. Hence, poor or lack of facilities and structures such as conducive office spaces, and research facilities and other essential facilities impacts the academic functions of the university staff members which in turn may lead to job dissatisfaction (Chen, 2023).

Hence, lack of provisions of the structures within the University environment usually are tied to poor leadership and leadership style which may impact output of staff (Breevaart et al., 2016). A study conducted by (Chen, 2023) revealed that Job-related dissatisfaction often leads to faculty staff poor academic impactful and disloyalty to the leadership. In retrospect, in recent times, more focus has been on leadership and leadership style among scholars in the University environment. However, supervision of university institutions is a great deal of interest among faculty members. Toxic leadership can only cause disloyalty which is hazardous to any organization, ranging from authoritarianism, ebullism and ableism, to unhealthy rivalries, and denials of rights and privileges, and bad governance of the institution causing unhealthy work environment. According to a study by (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016), there is a positive significant relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction. In fact, according to Alonderiene study, servant leadership style has higher impacts on job satisfac-

tion than autocratic leadership style.

Hence, such types of leadership that stimulate academic staff in rendering quality service should be encouraged in the University. Thus, the importance of good leadership that supports a positive work environment, that foster job satisfaction and impacts positive influence on the academic goes beyond the physical attributions, it also contributes to the social and psychological wellness of the University staff (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000) and mental well-being, and this must be balanced with work security, the physical and social aspects of the workplace. (Alabi & Sarkiunaite, 2022)

Furthermore, there is a growing concern among university staff about their wellbeing due to the problem of balancing work and life. Taking a look at the meaning of work-life balance In the context of research, work-life balance involves individuals' perceptions of control over the time they devote to work in contrast to the time designated beyond work boundaries. (Reiter, 2007) In fact, work-life balance has three components, balance of time, involvement balance and satisfaction balance, thus, key to understanding this concept of work-life balance, these components must be put into consideration (Arulkumar, 2015) and this researcher further reported that imbalance may occur when individuals struggle to maintain and satisfy the demand placed on them by the work and family domain. University staff are not immune from the challenge of work-life balance and should be a key priority of any institution of learning to factor in this key factor in their interventionist approach to mitigating challenges to job satisfaction, considering the dynamics of work and family experiences of their staff. A study shows that staff in higher education of learning reported instability in work-life balance (Franco et al., 2021). Therefore, considering this fact University management cannot afford to shy away from this most important key factor that may impact job satisfaction without setting up a strategy to address it.

In addition, there are many growing researches that have reported key factors like stress and other similar mental health issues among University staff due to imbalance in the work-life experience, not just among the university staff, but also among other work related professions (Franco et al., 2021; Mythili Devi & Alban Nishanth Lalu, 2023), but the question is how much attention do the management of Universities pay on their University staff when it comes to this key factor mental health and wellbeing? Disappointing to know that there is growing rate of this key factor (mental health issues) among University staff and student especially severe depression (Meeks et al., 2021). Hence, this has a great impact on job satisfaction and if not checked has grave consequences on every academic institution of learning.

There is another key factor that is of concern to experts regarding university dynamics among staff, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 is remote work. This is a pattern of practice deployed by employees doing their jobs primarily from a location other than an official and operational, or any other place outside of the traditional corporate office building or campus designated or de-

fined by the employer. These may include the employee's home, a co-working or other shared space, or a private office (Dmour et al., 2023).

There could be a variety of reasons associated with remote work, maybe due to poor or inadequate working facilities, threat to life, disability, pandemic, organizational or public policy on health and safety, convenience, but all legitimate reasons peaked during the COVID-19 pandemic Universities operated remotely (Lonska et al., 2021). During this period there was a global disruption in human services. And the University Institutions were never left out, as many staff members were asked to work from home for public safety, (Dey et al., 2020) but there are concerns about remote work. (Aksoy et al., 2022) From positive evaluations to negative outcomes, but the focus is how remote work impacts job satisfaction. According to (Ali et al., 2023), remote work is a predictor of Job satisfaction. This study seeks to explore the key factors that impact job satisfaction among university staff.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Job Satisfaction

In various cooperate organizations Job satisfaction is a significant subject of discussion, as it affects productive behaviors of staff, performance out-put of the institutions of higher learning and may become an existential threat. Periodically, these Universities conduct research or studies on their staff to ascertain levels of job satisfaction to know whether their staff or subordinates are satisfied with their work. By definition of term, Job satisfaction is understood as accomplishment of tasks by employees who obtain sense of achievement from their workplace (Saba, 2011).

There are various views and studies on job satisfaction. In some instances, job satisfaction could be inclined from tasks done and a fair reward system. However, according to (Abraham, 2012), the high level of job satisfaction is premised on more work tasks, and working environment that satisfies the employee's personal characteristics, needs and values.

There are others who believe that Job satisfaction is an emotional phenomenon derived from personal opinions of the employees about their work (Umaru & Ombugus, 2017). This notion is in agreement with study findings by (Aazami et al., 2015) that reported a link between job satisfaction and psychological well-being as this study revealed psychopathologies, such as, depression, anxiety, psychological pain, sexual dysfunctions, sleep disorders and gastro-intestinal conditions are highly predicted by job dissatisfaction.

There are studies that have proven key factors that may predict job satisfaction, these include, work-life balance, work academic environment, remote work, mental wellness, psychosocial support system (Susanto et al., 2022). Most of these take place within the University system. It is vital to know the significance of Job satisfaction and the role it plays in institutions performance levels. Thus, with a clear cut, the study has examined the myriad factors that influence

employees' job satisfaction in the workplace (Kosec et al., 2022). Further understanding of these key variables is very necessary for institutions of higher learning, as this will directly determine the staff recruitment and retention services.

2.2. Academic Work Environment

An academic work environment is a place where academics or related activities take place and engage in teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities, fostering the development and sharing of knowledge and skills within their field. According to (Brady, 2010), a workplace or work paradigm is/are designed for employees to meet organizational goals and find personal satisfaction in their work through established policies and systems.

Furthermore, academic work environment is an important factor that aids in the understanding and the fostering of job satisfaction, which emerges as a critical element in motivating and encouraging faculty members in the enhancement of faculty staff performance. Study has shown that there is a positive correlation between the work environment and dimensions of job satisfaction (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015).

Hence, as satisfaction is an inner self-awareness and predisposition that is intrinsic, various elements or factors of the work environment (Alspach, 2009), including pay, work hours, employee autonomy, organizational structure, and communication between employees and management, influence job satisfaction (Lane, 2010). Research further revealed that when faculty members feel valued by the organization they work with the impact of each of these elements on faculty satisfaction (Brady, 2010). They show increased commitment and a strong sense of ownership of the institution (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015). It is disappointing to know that the story is never the case in most tertiary institutions. These are some of the many reasons why many faculty staff keep hunting for jobs where their job satisfaction can be attained.

2.3. Work-Life Balance

Achieving a balance between work and personal life is complex and lacks a universal definition. Greenhaus and colleagues characterize work-family balance as how much an individual is equally engaged in and content with both their work and family roles (Arulkumar, 2015). This description of work-life balance is consistent with the definition of (Franco et al., 2021) that Work-life balance means finding a balance between your professional and personal life by effectively managing and organizing tasks and routines. Going forward, there are scholastic views that work and life are incompatible among university staff considering the task they are saddled with on both fronts of the divide, which in turn causes poor performance on both sides (Costa et al., 2020). But others argue differently, Kirchmeyer (2000) revealed that expending personal resources, and dedicating oneself to appropriate them equitably across the various domains is the means for a worker to achieve satisfaction in living a balanced life both pro-

professionally and personally.

Thus, how consistent, and related is the description of work-life balance with the experience of the university staff to their job satisfaction? (Susanto et al., 2022) established that there is a positive relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction. Therefore, considering current multifaceted factors challenging University staff in the workplaces, and rising family dynamic in a constantly changing society, how well can university staff consistently experience job satisfaction? This is a critical reason for this study, to be able to establish the predictability of work-life balance to job satisfaction among the University staff. Therefore, the need for Organization's attention to be focused on its work environment cannot be underemphasized, as it is of necessity that institutions must critically restructure their work, re-evaluate work ethics, and welfare that accommodate staff wellbeing, by this way worker's level of motivation and organizational commitment will incline and job satisfaction achievable.

3. Current Issues

3.1. Academic Environment

There is a current and major transformation in academia, like government funding cuts and restructuring, which have significantly altered the academic environment. These changes affect the well-being of both academic and non-academic staff, as well as students, directly and indirectly. This alteration in academic dynamics brought a lot of shortcomings in academic programming, management services, teaching plans, and research and structures or facilities for learning. All these impact both academic and non-academic members. (Kacane et al., 2019)

According to (Kalim et al., 2022), study academic and non-academic quality of service delivery impacts satisfaction, thereby suggesting the need for university organizations or management to give priority and equal importance to both.

Thus, the academic environment is highly sensitive, both staff and students are affected. Systematic management service delivery in every academic environment impacts admission of students, retention of students and job migration among academic members. Thus, both academic and non-academic staff and studentship performance indexes are determined by satisfaction derived from the school management systems. In a study by (Wang & Degol, 2014), their study reported that in Chinese university satisfaction was the leading motivating factor behind students' choice to remain in the university.

This factor expresses deep and current issues within the current academic environment as many universities systems have quality service issues with their staff. Therefore, the need for university management to pay critical attention to how it manages satisfaction among all within the academic environment is paramount. A leading voice in management quality of service (Biney & Cheng, 2021) says to attract international students to higher education is to focus on quality of service which is also known as education economy. Therefore, knowing that there is no university without students' attendance, thorough attention

should be paid to quality services especially towards staff who serve like intermediary between the management and students.

Funding cuts may imply cuts in assistantship for doctoral students in doctoral programs, which may impact teaching and research assistantship that faculty members would have been entitled to, these may increase workload on faculty staff of the University. These multilateral roles may increase stress and exhaustion, work-burnout and in turn may cause neuro-psychiatric conditions. (Winefield et al., 2003) Study has it that, budget cuts, faculty and management restructuring and learning with the use of technology for teaching and learning purposes by university staff cause stress (Ross et al., 2023). With limited literature to report the mental health of university staff members with disabilities, one can only imagine the negative experience of such University staff.

Therefore, the University environment must be given top managerial consideration both in planning and decision making.

3.2. Work Life and Remote

COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in 2020 impacted work-life balance leading to the widespread adoption of remote work, (Caringal-Go et al., 2022) this also introduced new challenges that influenced job satisfaction. However, with the aim to safely guide against COVID-19 by working remotely mostly from home, as academic staff carry out their duties on hybrid bases, even with the use of technology (Garfin, 2020). This also has made workers struggle to delineate boundaries between work and personal life, this comes with a new impact on the psychological wellbeing (Garfin, 2020) and job satisfaction. Organizations are exploring strategies to support remote employees effectively.

However, these strategies for improving employees' effective work performance are hampered by the post COVID-19 pandemic effect. The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically affected all aspects of people's lives and work, thus negatively impacting personal well-being and job satisfaction (Han et al., 2023). Thus, since the post COVID-19 effect, personal well being is on the decline as studies have shown an increase in global mental health crisis such as depression and anxiety disorders (Carboni-Jiménez et al., 2022). So, working-life balance and the ability to work remotely with staff of universities have become very challenging making job satisfaction seemingly impossible to achieve.

Furthermore, current issues affecting university staff working remotely which in part affect work-life balance include blurred lines between work and family life, home-office environment challenges and distractions, uncertainty in work tasks, inadequate tools, procrastination, and difficulties in effective communication, in such situations and circumstances job satisfaction have become difficult to achieved (Poulsen & Ipsen, 2017). Therefore, universities must urgently look into staff work plans, and programs that can facilitate workable working strategies that can enable staff work life experiences better in order to achieve job satisfaction in the University work setting.

3.3. Mental Health and Well-Being

Mental health is defined by scholars as a psychological state of living an active life (Goldberg, 1972). Employees' psychological status is determined by their mental health, which is an important indicator in which perception of job satisfaction may be impacted directly. Since the inception of the COVID-19 outbreak, according to (Cao et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021), mental health has gained prominence, and it is crucial to the overall well-being of academic staff.

Current studies by (Cao et al., 2022) have shown that mental health has both negative and positive components and that both components influence job satisfaction. This study further states that changes in the organizational structure and environment of external competitiveness impact the mental health and well-being of employees (Ding & Niu, 2020).

In the know of these findings, it is expected that organizational efforts to address mental health concerns, most importantly members of staff with disabilities, are limiting their opportunities to adapt in an ever-changing world. Also, provide support, and create a stigma-free environment targeted to promote academic staff level of job satisfaction.

4. Recommendations

Leadership in tertiary education is facing increased uncertainty due to significant external changes affecting how these institutions operate (Yielder & Codling, 2004). Leadership must be practiced based on definition of its general characteristics which are given, such as the responsibility for mission, direction, inspiration, building teamwork and setting an example (Harris, 2000). Leaders in the university must provide teamwork (Don & Raman, 2019) and mission which must ensure that key factors that predict job satisfaction among University staff are addressed. In addition, leadership style must be democratic and not autocratic to win the confidence and loyalty of staff of the university. In so doing job satisfaction will not be a mirage. (Chukwusa, 2019)

4.1. Periodic Evaluation of the University Policy on the Staff Wellbeing

Leadership and management must provide an equitable platform for all university staff irrespective of cadre and race. In a conducted study (Long et al., 2021), it was suggested that one way to provide social support for the mental health of college students is by training university staff who interact with students to implement well-being programs, hence, this can also be applicable to the university staff, while a periodic standard mental health monitoring and evaluation protocol program is formulated. This will identify and report job satisfaction of team employees of the University.

4.2. Social Support Policy

Institutions of higher learning should formulate policies geared towards job sa-

tisfaction of their staff, policies that create a social supportive network targeting remote employees, this will enhance their job satisfaction and personal well-being, which are crucial for employee performance and ultimately, the success of the organization (Ali et al., 2023).

Moreover, institutional policies that foster social connectedness among peers be promoted. According to a study revealed that work not only fulfills basic survival needs but also addresses the need for social connection (Di Fabio, 2017). People need relationships in workplaces. Therefore, workplace relationships are crucial for organizations and are viewed through the lens of sustainability (Garmendia et al., 2023). Thus organizational policies should be designed to accommodate social connectedness which in turn creates bonds in that wise job satisfaction can be enhanced among staff.

4.3. Hands-On and Hands-Off Policy

In the post-COVID-19 era, many organizations have experienced a shift in the dynamics of work relations between employers and employees. Leadership and followership are now often conducted remotely through platforms like Zoom (Newman & Ford, 2021). This shift poses challenges for hands-on management styles, where leaders may feel anxious about losing control over daily operations and staff who prefer remote work. This tension can lead to job dissatisfaction among both parties (Kniffin et al., 2021). In contrast, hands-off managers might be more amenable to remote work arrangements. Higher education institutions can address these challenges by formulating management policies that regulate practices and establish fair work relations, aligning the expectations of employees and managers.

4.4. The Snare of Publish or Perish

Coolidge coined phrase “Publish or Perish” in 1932 has today become not just a harsh reality, but a syndrome among scholars and a tool institutions of higher learning deploy to sanction, promote and evaluate faculty and staff (Coolidge, 1932). The assumption that successful publication of research brings attention to scholars and their institutions and invariably attracts funding to the institution has made it a measure used by most R1 (first leading research institutions) schools to determine performance and competence. This has become a culture within the walls of higher learning institutions for decades (van Dalen & Henkens, 2012) and set in motion a syndrome of publishing or perishing among scholars.

Hence, Scholars who publish infrequently or prioritize activities that do not lead to publications, such as instructing undergraduates, may find themselves at a disadvantage when competing for many teaching positions (Rawat & Meena, 2014) while those with higher lecturing positions have little or no impact on teaching the young but are driven more in research and publications. This consequently impacts job satisfaction among ranks; therefore, management of high-

er learning should formulate a better measure or standard to measure competence that accommodate all yet standard is not compromised.

5. Future Direction

5.1. Physical Structures

Management must ensure that academic work environment is conducive, appropriate, and accessible, teaching and learning among university staff. Such as, research laboratory, teaching aid and facilities for university staff with disabilities, and regular evaluation of these physical structures to meet current challenges.

5.2. Mental Assessment

Management must encourage periodic confidential mental health evaluation and needs assessment of her members, to be able to track decline in the mental experience and complaints of their members. However, the university must demonstrate a high level of private data protection and secrecy to have the support of this policy. This will not just facilitate confidence in the members to believe that the management is there to listen to their needs but also establish trust in the Institution.

5.3. Feedback from Faculty Members on Job Satisfaction

Regular and constant feedback from faculty members on job satisfaction is essential both for the university staff and the progress of the Institution. This can be done by open senate meetings, and regular contact with the leadership at every layer of the University, a bottom-up pyramid. Also, easy and confidential channels can be created to enable individual staff to communicate easily and efficiently without fear or favor in an honest way.

6. Conclusion

This paper commenced by examining the wide array of factors that influence job satisfaction among university staff. Hence, delving deeper, the author identified specific key predictors that are crucial to understanding job satisfaction within this context of study. These predictors are/is foundational to the advancement of productivity and effectiveness in institutions of higher learning (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011).

Therefore, recognizing the importance of these factors is critical because, like employees in any organization that prioritizes job satisfaction, university staff members also highly value the fulfillment of their own job satisfaction needs and these views and beliefs should be priced. The impact of job satisfaction extends beyond individual well-being to encompass broader institutional outcomes, such as increased productivity, improved morale, and reduced turnover rates.

Therefore, ensuring that the job satisfaction of university staff is adequately addressed is not merely a matter of personal contentment but a strategic impera-

tive that influences the overall quality and competitiveness of educational institutions. This approach aligns with the recognition across various organizational settings that employee satisfaction is tightly linked to achieving operational and strategic goals.

Therefore, the recommendations presented in this paper should be considered a priority for stakeholders and leaders involved in shaping policies and managing higher education institutions.

Hence, these stakeholders are encouraged to develop policies that address the critical factors influencing job satisfaction among university staff. In addition, this study provides a foundational knowledge base for future research, which will further explore these issues and enhance the understanding necessary to address the complex needs requiring informed responses.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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