A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF JOB SATISFACTION AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL HEAD TEACHERS IN THE CITY OF JEDDAH, SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to the limited literature on job satisfaction amongst secondary school head teachers in Saudi Arabia. Drawing on five focus group interviews with 25 head teachers and semi-structured interviews with 20 head teachers in the city of Jeddah, this paper identifies the factors producing job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and the impact this has on how head teachers feel. Head teachers’ satisfaction was found to lie in holding good relationships with educational supervision centres and supervisors, the implementation of human relationships and the practice of professional development for teachers. Factors causing dissatisfaction were found to be a lack of financial resources and authority, a lack of training programmes for head teachers, and a lack of response to their requests for school needs. The paper identifies the highly centralised educational system in Saudi Arabia and the lack of school autonomy as contributing factors to job dissatisfaction. The context of the Saudi educational system is considered specifically, in an effort to explore how the Saudi Ministry of Education officials may address the issue of secondary school head teacher satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Key words: head teachers, job satisfaction, Saudi Arabia, secondary school
**Introduction**

The importance of job satisfaction among the employees of organisations and institutions goes back to the second half of the 20th century, with the appearance of Maslow's theory (1956). Since then, researchers have given deep consideration to the matter and various analytical studies have been undertaken. The movement towards human relationships sheds more light on the importance of the morale and improvement of the work conditions for the employees of organisations and institutions aiming at increasing productivity.

The job satisfaction of employees in any organisation, as Conley et al. (1989) have indicated, is regarded as a main component of the work environment and one of the main factors determining organisational climate. In addition, Hoy and Misked (1987) have stated that job satisfaction is viewed as a decisive factor as to the general efficiency of an organisation.

It is known that research into job satisfaction started in the field of industry and business administration, with a special emphasis being laid on the working classes. Later on this research moved into the field of education, with more concentration being placed on the teaching sector. Abdualkhalig (1982) pointed out that the majority of job satisfaction research has been directed towards lower level employees, adding that it is limited with regards to looking at managers, technicians and professionals. Furthermore, Bacharch and Mitchell (1983) have expressed that within the educational context the importance of the reality of teachers and their attitudes towards their jobs came at the cost of studying the importance of the reality of other employees in the educational context, such as head teachers and supervisors.

Job satisfaction is regarded as a very important issue within the educational context, especially for school head teachers. This is mainly due to the fact that it is
connected with different aspects of their role and those which consume most of their time both in and outside of school. Therefore, it is necessary that they feel satisfaction and harmony in carrying out their duties to ensure effectiveness in delivering their role.

The nature of the Saudi educational context imposes another dimension for the importance of the job satisfaction of school head teachers, particularly at secondary level. The secondary level is the final stage of general education, which requires intensive effort and the fulfilment of responsibilities towards students and the community at large. However, the central system in Saudi Arabia has a tendency to minimise the autonomy of head teachers and their engagement in administrative issues at the cost of the professional side.

Within the Saudi educational context there are a few researchers dealing with the issue of job satisfaction among head teachers at different levels in Saudi Arabia, such as Alotabi (2000), Alonazi (2001), Alagbari (2002), and Alroyali (2002). Their studies in general have been descriptive, using questionnaires for data collection, laying emphasis on quantitative methods. Just one of these studies has dealt with the job satisfaction of secondary school head teachers, that of Alonazi (2001). This indicates the limitation of research based on the job satisfaction of secondary school head teachers, leaving the door open for more studies on the subject.

The findings of these studies indicate that the level of job satisfaction has not reached an optimal level. For example, the study of Alotabi (2000) showed the weakness of job satisfaction among head teachers in general. While the study of Alagbari (2002) indicated that a minority of the population studied felt a low level of job satisfaction.
On the other hand, the study of Alroyali (2002) and Alonazi (2001) both found that the level of job satisfaction among head teachers was average.

In short, all the aforementioned studies did not investigate the job satisfaction of secondary school head teachers in the city of Jeddah in particular. Moreover, these studies were not extensive and did not explore in depth the underpinning factors contributing to the job satisfaction of secondary school head teachers. Therefore, this study will bridge the gap by giving secondary school head teachers the chance to express their emotions, feelings, and attitudes regarding their job satisfaction through the adoption of qualitative methods.

This study was carried out with the benefit of the researcher’s personal experience from his job as a head manager for one of the educational supervision centres in the city of Jeddah. There are indications of job dissatisfaction among secondary school head teachers. These indications are as follows: Firstly the resistance from some distinguished middle school head teachers to being promoted to the secondary level. Secondly, the wish of a large number of distinguished secondary school head teachers to move to the private school sector.

This study focuses on exploring the factors that might affect the job satisfaction of secondary school head teachers. Our exploration in this paper provides a good opportunity to develop an entire in depth understanding of the underpinning factors contributing to the job satisfaction or dissatisfaction of secondary school head teachers in the city of Jeddah. The findings express the first-hand views of head teachers and capture their feelings on the different aspects of their role. Such knowledge will be of relevant importance to the educational administration of the city of Jeddah and the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia in their endeavour to increase the level of job satisfaction among this group.
Theoretical framework and literature on the job satisfaction of head teachers

The term job satisfaction is complex and multidimensional in nature. There is considerable amount of literature dealing with its complexity and multiplicity. There is no agreed upon definition of what constitutes job satisfaction. Different attempts have been made to define the term within different perspectives. While De Nobile (2003) defined it as the extent to which a staff member has favourable or positive feelings about work or the work environment, Furnham, (1997) and Locke (1976) defined it as positive attitudes or emotional dispositions people may gain from work or through aspects of work. Faragher et al. (2005) added another dimension, by defining it as being the positive emotional reaction and attitudes an individual has towards their job. From these different definitions, we can conclude that the main components of job satisfaction are emotion, attitude and reaction. Conversely, job dissatisfaction, according to Furnham (1997), refers to unhappy or negative feelings about work or the working environment.

Foundation theories on job satisfaction have been proposed by different scholars, the most prominent and widely used in the educational context being that of Herzberg and his associates (Derlin and Schneider, 1994; Dinham and Scott, 2000; Scott and Dinham, 1999). Herzberg’s (1968) two factors theory looks at job satisfaction from a set of variables, which are motivators or satisfiers. The same theory uses a set of variables governing job dissatisfaction, that of hygiene factors or dissatisfiers. In other words, these factors can be described as either intrinsic (such as feelings of accomplishment, recognition and autonomy) or extrinsic (such as pay, security and physical work conditions).

According to the two factors theory of Gruneberg (1979) and Herzberg (1968), job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are considered separate constructs. The absence of
hygiene factors was believed to lead to job satisfaction, but at the same time their fulfilment did not lead to job satisfaction. Similarly, the fulfilment of motivator variables did not lead to job satisfaction.

Although the two factors theory is widely used it has faced criticism for being too dependent on a particular methodology and by restricting its categorisation to satisfiers and dissatisfiers (McKenna, 1987). Along similar lines are the other prominent theories on job satisfaction, such as the expectancy theory, the equity theory, and Maslow’s theory, which have all been criticised in various ways. However, the criticism levied against them does not detract from the importance they have in the field of job satisfaction. Worth mentioning is the fact that these theories emerged mainly in the Western developed world. For this reason the theories cannot necessary be applied to the context of the education field in the developing world. Nevertheless, these theories are useful as a foundation to help in understanding the existence of the job satisfaction phenomenon within the Saudi educational context.

It has been agreed that job satisfaction can be categorised according to dimensions of work as well as un-dimensional or general (Scott et al., 1999). The determination of job satisfaction dimensions has the benefit of being more focussed on aspects of work that might lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Given that many studies have been carried out within developed countries, they can be used to identify the dimensions of job satisfaction among school head teachers. With regards to the context of the Arab world, the dimensions of job satisfaction have been identified through studies by Alomari (1992) and Yaseen (1990), who adopted well known job satisfaction measurements like the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (M.S.Q) and the Job Descriptive Index (J.D.I). While others identified job satisfaction within the Arab context, such as Alagbari (2002), by addressing twenty dimensions of job
satisfaction dealing with the different aspects of the role of head teacher in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia. Along similar lines, Alroyali (2002) determined the dimensions of job satisfaction to include six dimensions; namely, working conditions, relationships with educational administration, relationships with colleagues, social status, salary and advancement. In addition, the study of Team (1999) includes another two dimensions; namely, work stability and educational supervision. The study of Alarami (1998) approached the issue of the dimensions of job satisfaction from a different angle by including workload, promotion, financial reward, work challenges, work relationships, authority, and adequacy of resources.

In spite of the theoretical background of the issue of job satisfaction among head teachers, one can argue that certain characteristics of society as a whole, the educational context and personal traits are crucial in deciding the different dimensions or factors related to job satisfaction.

Over the last decade, many studies in the Arab countries have attempted to identify factors affecting the job satisfaction of head teachers. According to most of these studies, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction among head teachers is clearly related to a number of different aspects. The main factors that have been found to contribute to job satisfaction among head teachers are work conditions, supervision and relationships. Additional factors include achievement, societal recognition and teacher collaboration (Yaseen, 1999; Alomari, 1992; Alarami, 1998; Team, 1999; Alagbari, 2002; Aloanzizi, 2002; Alroyali, 2002). According to the same studies, factors contributing to job dissatisfaction included salary, financial reward and promotion.
**Context of the research**

Saudi Arabia is a country with an independent monarchy situated in South West Asia. The first feature of the educational system in Saudi Arabia is the combination of different international education systems along Islamic lines. The Ministry of Education (MOE) was founded in 1954 as a replacement to the Directory of Education. It is the responsible body for educational policy development of the curriculum and teaching methods.

The educational system is highly centralised, and decision making is top-down. General education is divided into three main levels: primary level for six years, middle level for three years and secondary level for three years. The schools in each city of Saudi Arabia come under the responsibility and supervision of the Educational Administration. The city of Jeddah, which is the second largest city in Saudi Arabia with a total population of four million, is located in the Western Region. The total number of secondary governmental schools in the city is eighty six, working under five educational supervision centres.

**Purpose of the study**

The research upon which this paper focuses was carried out late in 2006 and the beginning of 2007. It was conducted in two phases: In the first phase the data was collected through focus group interviews with 25 head teachers taking part in this phase. The second phase of the study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 20 head teachers. The present study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that affect the job satisfaction of secondary school head teachers in Jeddah?
2. What aspects of the head teachers’ role have an impact on job satisfaction?

3. Why do these aspects impact on job satisfaction?

Methodology

Since this study is concerned with the phenomenon of job satisfaction, considering the attitudes and feelings of head teachers in regards their job satisfaction, the most proper approach to tackle the issue was the phenomenological approach, which uses qualitative methods.

In order to collect the data, a random sample of 25 secondary school head teachers in the five educational supervision centres were selected to conduct five focus group interviews as a representative sample. The question for the focus group interviews derived from the research questions and the aspects of the job role, multidimensional relationships and responsibilities of head teachers. The duration of the five focus group interviews was around 8 hours. Since the experience for head teachers participating in such an event was exciting and an incentive for most of them, their interaction resulted in highly productive and extremely extensive data.

The focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed. Each transcript had been independently read several times so that the data was familiarised and the researcher could make sense of it. In order to reduce the data in a meaningful way the inductive qualitative approach of Thomas (2006) was applied. This approach is a systematic straightforward process based on thematic analysis. The major and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis were identified and categorised using the NVivo version 2 software. The findings of the focus group interviews were in 8 major themes; namely, morale, authority, relationship with educational administration, relationship with students and parents, school environment, relationship with
educational supervision, head teachers practices and relationship with teachers. To ensure the validity of the findings and minimise bias, the opportunity was given to some of the participants to engage in data analysis at certain stages.

The findings of this phase facilitated the second phase and the designing of the semi-structured interview questions, in order to investigate in depth each major theme and relevant themes that emerged during the interviews. This was to identify more related factors that affected the job satisfaction of head teachers.

Likewise, 20 secondary school head teachers were selected randomly as a sample for the semi-structured interviews. The duration of each interview was between 45 minutes to one hour. The interviews were also recorded and transcribed. The data form the semi-structured interviews were analysed using a deductive and inductive approach to obtain an in depth understanding of the underpinning factors affecting job satisfaction among head teachers. This led to an expansion of each major theme with the addition of more related factors.

The research findings

The analysis of both the focus group and semi-structured interviews provided a deep and enriched insight into secondary school head teachers of Jeddah city, the factors associated with satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and the many complexities of the emotions and attitudes of head teachers towards their work. In analysing the interviews, we have grouped responses together under themes that capture the emotions and attitudes of satisfaction and dissatisfaction underpinning the job of head teacher.
Table 1: Major themes and total responses derived from semi-structured interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major themes</th>
<th>Total responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Relationship with educational administration</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Morale</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Head teachers' practices</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. School environment</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Relationships with students and parents</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Head teachers' authority</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Relationship with educational supervision</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Relationship with teachers</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The definitions of these themes are the coded passages under each theme which captured the emerging factors related to the sub-theme dealing with the following:

1. **Relationship with educational administration**

Procedure, responsiveness, work system, trust, job security, interference, underperforming teachers, appreciation, respect, technology and training. These sub-themes included the factors affecting the job satisfaction of head teachers.

2. **Morale**

Appreciation, respect, decision making, recognition, honour, promotion, responsiveness, job security, trust, support and salary. These sub-themes included the factors affecting the job satisfaction of head teachers.

3. **Head teachers' practices**

Head teachers’ role, human relationship, teachers' professional development, setting up school environment, head teachers' practical hand book, achievement, team building, delegation of power and learning development. These sub-themes included the factors affecting the job satisfaction of head teachers.

4. **School environment**

Financial resources, rented building, school cleaning, school maintenance, school premises, shortage of administrative staff and expenses paid by head teachers. These sub-themes included the factors affecting the job satisfaction of head teachers.
5. Relationships with students and parents

Relationships with students, relationships with parents, students’ achievement, regulation of students assessment, regulation of students perseverance and behaviour, participation in parents council and school socioeconomic background. These sub-themes included the factors affecting the job satisfaction of head teachers.

6. Head teachers' authority

Head teachers' attitudes regarding their authority, authority related to students, authority related to teachers, authority related to deputy head teachers and authority of controlling salaries of staff. These sub-themes included the factors affecting the job satisfaction of head teachers.

7. Relationship with educational supervision

Relationships with educational supervision centres, relationships with educational supervisors, educational supervisors' practices and educational supervision authority. These sub-themes included the factors affecting the job satisfaction of head teachers.

8. Relationship with teachers

Teachers’ performance, commitment, moving teachers, teachers’ compatibility and teachers' professional development. These sub-themes included the factors affecting job satisfaction of head teachers.

The above definitions show the major and sub-themes, including the different factors affecting job satisfaction of head teachers, either positive or negative. The findings of the focus group interviews, although premature, nonetheless reveal indicators that helped to identify 45 factors that may contribute to job dissatisfaction and 15 factors related to job satisfaction, by quantifying the coded passages related to each of the factors. The salient factors identified from the focus group interviews are shown as data in Table 2.
Table 2: Salient factors related to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction of head teachers derived from the focus group interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors related to job satisfaction</th>
<th>Total responses</th>
<th>Factors related to job dissatisfaction</th>
<th>Total responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Implementation of human relation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1 Lack of authority to undertaken</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Positive relationship with</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2 Relationship with educational</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>educational supervisors</td>
<td></td>
<td>supervision centres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Corrective measure to</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3 Relationship with educational</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>standardized teachers'</td>
<td></td>
<td>supervisors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Positive relationship with</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4 Interference in head teachers'</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>affair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Head teachers' achievements</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5 Lack of job security</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Positive relationship with</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6 Problems with work system</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings of the semi-structured interview deepened and enriched our understanding of the factors affecting job satisfaction among head teachers. It has confirmed that the majority of the identified factors emerged from the focus group interviews; 41 factors found related to job satisfaction and 71 factors found related to job dissatisfaction. The salient factors identified from the semi-structured interviews are shown as data in Table 3.

Table 3: Salient factors related to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction of head teachers derived from semi-structured interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors related to job satisfaction</th>
<th>Total responses</th>
<th>Factors related to job dissatisfaction</th>
<th>Total responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Positive relationship with</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1 Lack of financial resources</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>educational supervisors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Positive relationship with</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2 Negative head teachers' attitude</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>educational supervision centres</td>
<td></td>
<td>regarding their authority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Efficacy of head teachers'</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3 Non response to head</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>practical handbook</td>
<td></td>
<td>teachers' requests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Practicing the professional</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4 Non participation in parents</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development for teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>council from parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Implementation of human</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5 Unavailability of head</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td>teachers' training programmes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Positive relationship with</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6 Lack of financial reward</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Furthermore, it seems that certain characteristics of the Saudi educational system, such as its highly centralised system and lack of school autonomy, have created many negative feelings and has unfortunate consequences for the work of head teachers. Factors related to job dissatisfaction determine how head teachers consider these aspects through the expression of negative feelings with regards to them, as can be seen in Table 3.

On the other hand, factors related to job satisfaction, as can bee seen in Table 3, are linked to the relationships held by head teachers. Surprisingly, the relationships held by head teachers with educational supervision centres is considered a factor of job dissatisfaction in the data of the focus group interviews. However, it appears as a factor of satisfaction in the data of the semi-structured interviews. This is most likely due to the time the focus group interviews were conducted, as they coincided with the beginning of the new school year. This is normally the time when there is much pressure and tension between schools and educational supervision centres because there is a high demand for efficient student enrolment.

In short, it is clear that the factors related to job dissatisfaction are greater than the factors related to job satisfaction. Nevertheless, it is too early to decide whether secondary school head teachers are satisfied or dissatisfied with their job. This means that the identified factors will be of great value to developing a questionnaire to examine the overall job satisfaction of secondary school head teachers.

In addition, the findings indicate particular aspects of the head teachers’ role that impact on their job satisfaction, such as a lack of response from educational administration to their requests with regards to school needs. Another important aspect is lack of authority and shortage of training programmes. Moreover, the salary and financial rewards have also been expressed as cause of dissatisfaction.
Discussion

The findings presented and analysed in this paper make a significant contribution to the study of the feelings and attitudes of secondary school head teachers to their work in the city of Jeddah. Their perceptions of satisfaction were intimately connected to the joy gained from their relationships with students, parents, supervisors, educational supervision centres and the practice of professional development for teachers. The findings in this respect are similar to the findings of other studies such as those undertaken by Alonazi (2001) and Yaseen (1992).

It is often assumed that the job dissatisfaction of head teachers is largely related to salary and financial reward. This may be due to their attitudes with regards to their workload and responsibilities, resulting in feelings of unfairness as teachers with long service may get a higher salary than them. This finding is similarly to the studies of Alarami (1998), Team (1990) and Yaseen (1990).

In addition, a lack of financial resources was a common factor of dissatisfaction among secondary school head teachers, who believe that the school buffet was a good source of financial revenue when it was under school management. The shifting in the system that transferred the management of the school buffet to a private sector company deprived schools of this resource. This impacted negatively on the school environment. Surprisingly, a lack of financial resources did not appear in any of the studies that dealt with the issue within the context of Arab countries context; whereas this finding had been addressed in the study of Mercer (1997) within a British context and found to be a factor of dissatisfaction.

To sum up, this study points to some specific factors that might potentially increase the job satisfaction of secondary school head teachers in the city of Jeddah. In essence, most factors are related to morale and their relationships with educational
administration. A remedy to these factors will enable them to focus on their duties and responsibilities, and minimise dissatisfaction in order to increase the level of satisfaction.

**Conclusion**

This study highlights the complexities involved in understanding the job satisfaction of secondary school head teachers in a way that has clear implications for policy and practice. What is now needed is serious consideration as to how these factors may be meaningfully addressed through initiatives and efforts to improve job satisfaction among head teachers. The findings demonstrate that there is an urgent need for the Saudi Educational Ministry to recognise the fact that the quality of secondary school education is largely related to the job satisfaction of head teachers.

Thus, an objective of any Ministry of Education should be to maximise the satisfaction of head teachers and minimise their dissatisfaction, not only for the benefit of the head teachers themselves but also for the sake of students.

This study clearly identified the factors affecting the job satisfaction of secondary school head teachers in the city of Jeddah. However, further investigation should be carried out by developing a questionnaire that can explore factors of relevant strength and their association with demographic variables. This will be considered later as a part of this study.

**References**


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