

A STUDY OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE JOB SATISFACTION OF BEGINNING TEACHERS

Mark Morgan and Michael O'Leary
*Education Department,
St Patrick's College, Dublin*

Factors associated with teacher satisfaction among beginning teachers are investigated in a survey of 468 former students of a teacher education college who had spent between 6 and 18 months in the classroom. The survey identified school support, perceived self-efficacy, and curricular competence as important factors. Pre-entry characteristics, including quality of degree, were not. Neither was the grade level at which teachers were teaching. Teachers in smaller schools expressed higher levels of satisfaction. Teachers in schools serving disadvantaged communities did not differ from teachers in other schools in their reported level of satisfaction. However, the patterns of association with satisfaction differed in schools serving students in disadvantaged locations and in schools in other locations.

Identification of influences on job satisfaction among teachers would seem important at a time of concern with the recruitment and retention of high calibre teachers in the education system (Coolahan & Murphy, 2003). Moreover, there is a growing body of evidence that when teachers feel good about their work, pupil achievement improves (Spear, Gould & Lee, 2000). The study described in this paper focused on beginning teachers in an attempt to identify factors associated with levels of satisfaction. The factors investigated included academic background, grade level taught, school type, as well as personal and social factors.

Many of the relevant studies in this area have focused on the absence of job satisfaction, particularly on stress and burnout. Kyriacou (1987) defined 'stress' as the experience of unpleasant emotions (tension, frustration, anger, depression) resulting from aspects of work as a teacher and 'burnout' as the syndrome resulting from prolonged stress (physical and emotional exhaustion). The potential repercussions of such negative experiences are significant for the education system and for individual teachers (see, e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2003). There are indications that stress and dissatisfaction alter the learning environment and contribute to alienation and detachment of teachers, greater likelihood of leaving the profession, and negative health (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998).

A variety of organizational factors that are significant in influencing teacher stress and burnout have been identified. Particularly important are role conflict, role ambiguity, work overload, and classroom climate (Byrne, 1994). In the work by Chan (1998), it was shown that ways of coping with stress and negative events play an important role in mediating the effects of stressors. A mediational model (including coping strategies) was found to provide the best explanation among a sample of 412 teachers in Hong Kong.

Social and personal factors that might be especially important have also been identified. One of these indicates that immediate factors involving interpersonal interactions play an important role in teachers' experiences of their work. For example, in a study of job satisfaction among a nation-wide sample of American teachers, it emerged that while perceived support of management, colleagues and parents played an important role, salary played a relatively unimportant role (Perie, Baker, & Whitener, 1997).

A further line of research found that while traditionally defined personality attributes may not be especially worthwhile predictors of satisfaction, teacher self-efficacy may (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Self-efficacy differs from self-confidence or self-esteem in that it refers to the specific judgment of what a person can do in particular circumstances. Various aspects of teachers' self-efficacy have been shown to be powerful predictors of classroom performance and children's learning. In particular, teacher efficacy has been linked with readiness to try instructional experimentation, a desire to find better ways of teaching, willingness to work with students who are experiencing difficulties, as well as student achievement gains and affective development (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1996).

Also relevant to our investigation are studies in mainstream psychology of life satisfaction (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). In general, these studies have shown that major socio-demographic factors (gender, age, social background) have relatively modest influences on life satisfaction compared to personal and social factors. In particular, perception of control of events and availability of support play an important role in mediating the effects of stressful events and in the experience of life satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

There are important measurement issues pertaining to satisfaction and related experiences. One approach focuses on global measures (Spear et al., 2000). Another targets particular features of teachers' work such as interaction with children, parents, and colleagues, support structures, and conditions of employment (Perie et al., 1997). The study reported here utilises the latter approach.

Because so many young teachers begin their careers in schools serving disadvantaged communities, there was an opportunity in the present work to

compare the experiences of job satisfaction of teachers in these schools with the experiences of teachers in non-disadvantaged schools. Even though studies such as that conducted by Perie et al. (1997) found that the 'objective' conditions of employment related weakly or not at all to teachers' job satisfaction, it could be the case in Ireland that teachers in disadvantaged areas encounter more stressful experiences because of the economic and social circumstances in which their schools operate, and consequently tend to be less satisfied with their work.

METHOD

Participants in the study were the graduate cohorts of two years (2001 and 2002) at St Patrick's College, Dublin. Approximately 850 teachers graduated over these two years. Just over 80% were graduates of the three-year BEd course involving the study of Education/teaching and an academic subject. The remainder were graduates who had completed an 18-month programme in which Education was studied, and had been awarded a Post-graduate Diploma in Teaching. A questionnaire was sent to students' home addresses in January 2003. A total of 468 responded, giving a response rate of 53 percent.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into five sections and consisted of structured questions dealing with socio-demographic and background characteristics, satisfaction with work, perceptions of self-efficacy in teaching, perceived support, and perception of curricular competence.

Items measuring socio-demographic characteristics related to age, gender, Leaving Certificate Examination performance, academic subject studied for the BEd, teaching practice grade, and degree/diploma result. Other items focused on aspects of respondents' present school position including grade being taught, type of school (junior, senior, all grades), size (<3 teachers, 4-6 teachers, 7-10 teachers, 11+ teachers), location (rural, small town, urban), community served by school (mainly middle class, mainly working class, mixed), and whether or not the school was designated as having disadvantaged status.

Sixteen items assessed satisfaction with teaching focusing on a number of broad areas: (i) global satisfaction, (ii) salary and conditions, (iii) relationships with colleagues, the inspectorate, and parents, and (iv) features of professional development and teaching. For each area, respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert-type scale how satisfied they were with the feature in question. The response categories ranged from 'very satisfied' (5) to 'very dissatisfied' (1), and the score for each person was the mean of all of the items measuring satisfaction.

Measures of self-efficacy consisted of five scales adapted from the work of Pajares (1996): (i) efficacy in broad areas of teaching (e.g., 'Teach all the areas of the curriculum effectively'); (ii) helping students who have difficulties (e.g., 'Managing children who have a distracting effect on others'); (iii) creating a positive classroom climate (e.g., 'Having an atmosphere in my class where children feel happy'); (iv) working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., 'Teaching children who are not encouraged by their families'); and (v) persistence (e.g., 'Motivating myself to do my best when I feel lazy or tired'). For each item, respondents were asked to rate the confidence they had in their ability to succeed in each situation on a regular basis, on a scale of 0 (cannot do it at all) to 10 (certain I can do it). Mean scores were calculated for each of the scales.

Measures of curricular competence were obtained by listing 14 areas of the curriculum and asking respondents to indicate the extent to which they had experienced difficulties with each area since they began teaching. Response options ranged on a 5-point scale from 'very great difficulty' (1) to 'no difficulty' (5), i.e., a high score indicates no difficulty. The measure used in analyses was the mean score on the 14 items.

Finally, to obtain a measure of perceived support, respondents were asked to indicate satisfaction with the support currently available to them in teaching (one item). The score for each teacher on this 5-point scale was the measure used in analyses [very satisfied (5), very dissatisfied (1)].

Table 1 shows the number of items in each scale and its internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha). In all cases, the alpha values are greater than .80. While no attempt was made to establish the validity of the scales, similar scales have been used successfully in other studies (Pajares, 1996).

Table 1
Number of Items in Questionnaire Scales and Alpha Value of Scales

Scale	Number of Items	Alpha
Satisfaction with teaching	16	.81
Self-efficacy: Broad areas of teaching	7	.86
Self-efficacy: Helping students with difficulties	5	.85
Self-efficacy: Creating a positive classroom climate	4	.91
Self-efficacy: Working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds	4	.94
Self-efficacy: Persistence	4	.89
Curricular competence	14	.82

RESULTS

Socio-Demographic Characteristics, School Factors, and Job Satisfaction

Overall, factors such as gender, course attended (BEd or Post-graduate Diploma), or experience (whether teacher had one years experience or had just graduated) were not related to job satisfaction (Table 2). Comparisons were made based on type of school, gender of pupils, number of teachers in school, community being served by school, location of school, and whether or not the school had been designated as serving a disadvantaged community. A comparison was made of the reported satisfaction of teachers of different classes (infants to sixth classes).

No significant difference emerged with regard to any of these factors apart from school size (Table 3). Analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a statistically significant difference between teachers in schools of different size ($F=6.23$; $df = 3, 452$; $p<.001$). Teachers in schools serving different kinds of community (mainly middle, mainly working, or mixed class) expressed almost identical levels of satisfaction. Designation of a school by the Department of Education and Science 'as serving a disadvantaged community' was not associated with any difference in satisfaction. Grade level taught showed no clear association with level of satisfaction (Table 4).

Table 2
Mean Job Satisfaction Scores of Teachers, Categorized by Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Gender	Males	Females	Significance
N	41	420	
M	2.24	2.47	n.s.
SD	.47	.51	
Qualification	B.Ed.	Post-Grad.Dip.	
N	374	87	
M	2.42	2.59	n.s.
SD	.50	.53	
Experience	One year	Recently graduated	
N	206	255	
M	2.47	2.44	n.s.
SD	.51	.50	

Table 3
Mean Job Satisfaction Scores of Teachers, Categorized by Characteristics of Schools

Type of School	Senior only	Junior only	All classes	Significance	
N	73	86	275		
M	2.48	2.54	2.43	n.s.	
SD	.39	.53	.52		
Gender of students	Boys only	Girls only	Boys and Girls		
N	64	62	328		
M	2.35	2.40	2.51	n.s.	
SD	.55	.48	.50		
School Size	<3 teachers	4-6 teachers	7-10 teachers	>11 teachers	
N	17	42	58	339	
M	2.93	2.54	2.37	2.44	p<.001
SD	.46	.59	.49	.49	
School Community	Mainly middle class	Mainly working class	Mixed classes		
N	120	180	154		
M	2.43	2.49	2.44	n.s.	
SD	.52	.51	.49		
Designated Disadvantaged	Yes	No			
N	172	272			
M	2.44	2.48		n.s.	
SD	.49	.53			

Table 4
Mean Job Satisfaction Scores of Teachers, by Year of Graduation and Grade Level Taught

Grade Taught	Graduated in 2002		Graduated in 2001	
	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)
Infants	68	2.47 (.42)	74	2.53 (.41)
First/Second	53	2.45 (.49)	78	2.58 (.48)
Third/Fourth	43	2.48 (.50)	58	2.68 (.46)
Fifth/Sixth	39	2.50 (.47)	40	2.44 (.51)

Academic Achievement and Job Satisfaction

Satisfaction scores did not vary by respondents' results in their final college examination or with the 'points' that they obtained on the basis of their Leaving Certificate Examination performance (Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5

Mean Job Satisfaction Scores of Teachers, by Level of Degree/Diploma

Degree/Diploma	N	M (SD)
Pass	17	2.36 (.47)
Hons: 2.2	233	2.49 (.51)
Hons: 2.1	195	2.42 (.50)
Hons: 1	14	2.65 (.48)

Table 6

Mean Job Satisfaction Scores of Teachers, by Leaving Certificate Examination Points

Leaving Cert Points	N	M (SD)
<430	39	2.56 (.44)
430-455	41	2.55 (.53)
460-475	93	2.45 (.46)
480-495	115	2.45 (.48)
500-530	111	2.41 (.52)
>530	37	2.37 (.52)

Perceived Support, Self-Efficacy and Curricular Competence

The correlations between measures of self-efficacy, perceived support, and job satisfaction are presented separately in Table 7 for students who graduated in 2001 and 2002. For both years the correlation between job satisfaction and perceived support is higher than for any other measure. The correlation is higher for those in their first year of teaching (.62) than for those who graduated a year earlier (.50).

In contrast, the correlations between job satisfaction and self-efficacy measures (as well as curricular competence) are higher for those who had spent a year teaching (graduated in 2001) than for those who had graduated in 2002. With the exception of the measure of self-efficacy in working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds, the correlations are higher for those who had spent a year teaching. Taken together with the findings on perceived support, this suggests that while support may become relatively less important, perceived efficacy becomes more important as a determinant of job satisfaction.

Satisfaction and Teaching in Disadvantaged and Non-Disadvantaged Schools

It was noted above that the job satisfaction of beginning teachers did not differ in designated and non-designated disadvantaged schools. The question arises: are the factors associated with satisfaction also similar? In other words, is perceived support more or less important in disadvantaged than in other schools?

Table 8
Correlations between Job Satisfaction, Perceived Support, Self-Efficacy, and Curricular Competence for Teachers in Schools Designated as Disadvantaged and in Other Schools

	Designated Disadvantaged							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Job satisfaction		.52**	.28**	.29**	.08	.17*	.12	.38**
2. Perceived support			.14	.27**	.09	.19*	.07	.22**
3. Self-efficacy: Broad areas of teaching				.64**	.48**	.56**	.40**	.52**
4. Self-efficacy: Helping students with difficulties					.41**	.48**	.30**	.46**
5. Self-efficacy: Creating a positive classroom climate						.46**	.27**	.29**
6. Self-efficacy: Working with disadvantage							.43**	.38**
7. Self-efficacy: Persistence								.34**
8. Curricular competence								
	Not Designated Disadvantaged							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Job satisfaction		.59**	.36**	.39**	.32*	.27**	.30**	.38**
2. Perceived support			.14*	.17**	.04	.05	.04	.29**
3. Self-efficacy: Broad areas of teaching				.68**	.66**	.48**	.56**	.46**
4. Self-efficacy: Helping students with difficulties					.61**	.54**	.50**	.34**
5. Self-efficacy: Creating a positive classroom climate						.43**	.55**	.31**
6. Self-efficacy: Working with disadvantage							.51**	.37**
7. Self-efficacy: Persistence								.38**
8. Curricular competence								

* p<.05
 ** p<.01

The correlations between job satisfaction and perceived support and curricular competence are similar for designated and other schools (Table 8). However, the correlations between job satisfaction and self-efficacy are stronger in non-designated schools than in disadvantaged schools. The difference is quite consistent and in some cases substantial. For example, the correlation between job satisfaction and self-efficacy in creating a positive classroom climate is not significant for beginning teachers in schools designated as disadvantaged but is for teachers in other schools ($r=.32$).

We know that teachers in schools designated as disadvantaged did not differ from teachers in other schools in terms of the composite measure of satisfaction. We also know that the pattern of correlations differs for measures of self-efficacy. However, neither of these findings sheds light on whether the scores on the variables used to predict satisfaction differed in the two types of school. Thus, while it might be, for example, that support was a predictor of satisfaction in designated and non-designated schools, it might not be the case that the absolute level of experienced support was the same in each type of school.

Table 9
Mean Scores of Teachers on Measures of Perceived Support, Self-Efficacy, and Curricular Competence in Designated Disadvantaged and Non-Designated Schools

	Schools Designated M (SD)	Schools Not Designated M (SD)
Perceived support*	2.50 (1.03)	2.43 (1.08)
Self-efficacy: Broad areas of teaching**	7.04(1.12)	7.15 (1.23)
Self-efficacy: Helping students with difficulties**	6.20 (1.31)	6.44 (1.43)
Self-efficacy: Creating a positive classroom climate**	8.35 (1.13)	8.39 (1.26)
Self-efficacy: Working with disadvantage**	8.28 (1.29)	6.79 (1.87)
Self-efficacy: Persistence**	7.60 (1.17)	7.49 (1.21)
Curricular competence***	4.35 (.87)	4.34 (.79)

* Scale: 1 (Very dissatisfied) to 5 (Very satisfied)

** Scale: 0 (Low self-efficacy) to 10 (High self-efficacy)

*** Scale: 1 (Very great difficulty) to 5 (No difficulty)

The highest self-efficacy score is in the realm of 'creating a positive classroom climate' while the lowest is in the domain of 'helping students with

difficulties'. In relative terms, the mean efficacy score of beginning teachers for 'working with disadvantage' in schools designated as disadvantaged is high (8.28) compared to mean scores on other dimensions of self-efficacy (Table 9).

Differences are not significant for six of the seven measures, including perceived support and curricular competence. However, a statistically significant difference emerged with regard to the perceived efficacy in 'working with disadvantage'. Teachers in disadvantaged schools rated their efficacy higher than teachers in schools not designated ($p < .01$).

CONCLUSION

The study described in this paper sought to establish the extent to which beginning teachers' job satisfaction was related to their academic backgrounds, the kinds of schools in which they were teaching, or social and personal factors. The findings indicate that demographic and school factors, with the exception of school size, did not impact greatly on job satisfaction. Teachers in small schools reported a higher level of satisfaction than teachers in larger schools.

Teachers' own academic performance was not related to their job satisfaction. However, in interpreting this outcome, it should be borne in mind that the majority of respondents had achieved a very good Leaving Certificate performance.

Perceived level of support was the single most important predictor of satisfaction, and this was the case in both disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged schools. Furthermore, satisfaction with support was a better predictor of satisfaction for teachers who were just beginning to teach than for those who had begun a year earlier. When teachers were asked about the groups from whom they derived most support, they most frequently cited classroom teachers in the same schools. This suggests that the social-personal dimension of support may be especially important as opposed to mere information.

The importance of self-efficacy and of perceived support is in line with the findings of a recent study of teachers in the first three years of their career which focused on factors associated with decisions to leave or stay teaching (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Two factors were of special importance in the comparison of those who left and those who stayed. The first was a sense of efficacy, i.e., teachers believed they were achieving success with their students. This did not represent a need for constant or complete success, but rather a general belief that they were making a difference. The other important factor in the decision to stay teaching was the availability of support structures. It is particularly interesting that this support was not merely about the availability of mentors (almost all had

been assigned paid mentors), since mentoring seldom delivered the person encouragement, advice, or feedback on teaching. What seemed critical was a professional culture in which teachers of all levels of experience shared in collegial and collaborative efforts.

Our findings are also in line with those of a study of the factors that discriminate between teachers experiencing high and low job satisfaction levels in Northern Israel (Bogler, 2002). That study showed that occupational perception, including belief that they could change people, and a supportive style of leadership by the school principal had a significant effect on job satisfaction. The study also found that characteristics of schools such as location and size were not especially important.

Our findings also reinforce findings of other studies regarding the importance of teacher self-efficacy, most of which have been concerned with student achievement, persistence, and goal-setting. It has been shown, for example, that teachers with a low sense of instructional efficacy take a pessimistic view of students' motivation, and rely on extrinsic inducements and negative sanctions to get students to study (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990).

In considering our findings in a broader context, we may note Bandura's (1997) view that self-efficacy measures should focus on a circumscribed set of circumstances, while some conceptualizations and efforts to measure self-efficacy attempt to cover a wide array of events that encompass nearly all features of the teaching role (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). In the context of this debate, it is interesting that the self-efficacy measure of 'working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds' showed a pattern that was different from other measures of self-efficacy among teachers who were and who were not teaching in designated schools, thus supporting the view that self-efficacy measures should be specific rather than all-embracing.

Our findings may be considered in the context of recent work in social psychology on general life satisfaction which has drawn attention to some important principles underpinning experiences of satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999). These include the finding that expectations and aspirations influence satisfaction in addition to actual occurrences, and that adaptation to events results in a levelling effect in satisfaction despite differences in actual environments. It is especially interesting that the work on life satisfaction revealed very little difference when socio-demographic differences, including gender, social background, education, and age-group, were analysed (Diener et al., 1999). On the other hand, some dynamic interpersonal and intrapersonal variables were found to be important predictors of life satisfaction. Our findings on teachers' job satisfaction are broadly in line with the findings on life

satisfaction. This is especially the case with regard to social support which consistently emerges as a critical factor mediating influences on life satisfaction and subjective well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

A number of issues arise from our findings. One of the most important relates to the conceptualization of satisfaction. The multi-faceted nature of the measure in the present work does not identify the features that are most appropriate to measure for particular purposes. Another limitation arises from the sample chosen. All our respondents were graduates of one college and in the early stages of their teaching careers. Given that factors associated with satisfaction changed from the first to the second year of teaching, a study of teachers at varying points in their careers, and with different experiences of teacher education, would be of interest. Another issue meriting investigation is the relationship between teacher satisfaction and other outcomes such as student achievements.

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