

Job Satisfaction of Hong Kong's Part-time English Language Teachers

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A modified version of the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) questionnaire was administered to a sample of 802 part-time English language teachers of six institutions to assess their job satisfaction with respect to their work, pay, opportunities for promotion, supervision, and colleagues. A total of 264 questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 33%. The second part is the qualitative study in which 30 part-time teachers out of 264 respondents (11.4%) were selected by random sampling and interviewed to provide in-depth understanding of their experiences and development over the period. Consistent with most research findings, it was found that small to moderate correlations were observed between the facets of job satisfaction and 12 selected demographic variables. Results of the study supported the importance and need for increasing the supply of English language teachers. Institutions should provide more opportunities for transfer to full-time posts and promotions among teachers by refining the career ladder. Recommendations for increasing the job satisfaction of the Hong Kong part-time English language teachers are proposed.

Key words: professional and continuing education; job satisfaction; English language teachers

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Job Satisfaction of Teachers

Job satisfaction has probably attracted more research than any other dependent variable in the field (Staw, 1984, p. 630). Because of its ease of measurement, as well as the continued dependence of the field on attitudinal surveys, satisfaction measures have played some roles in a very large proportion of organizational research studies. A great number of studies contained some documentation or examination of job satisfaction. However, not many of these studies were conducted in educational setting. Most of them were conducted in business and industrial settings (Locke, 1976). There has not been much local research in the area of job satisfaction among Hong Kong teachers. In 1996, Wu investigated factors contributing to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction among secondary school teachers. Motivators was considered to be of higher importance than hygiene factors. Interpersonal relations with students was perceived as the most important factor contributing to job satisfaction while work itself was perceived as the most important factor contributing to job dissatisfaction. Ip (1985) found that teachers were satisfied with autonomy and personal growth but were not satisfied with their colleagues and supervisors.

Wong (1989) examined the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to change jobs among teachers. These results showed that about half of the respondents intended to change job or school if alternatives were offered. Teachers surveyed by Wong were usually dissatisfied with low commitment to their profession. On analysis of responses from 275 Hong Kong secondary school teachers, Wong (1989) came to the conclusion that teachers' job satisfaction was not high. His findings revealed that teachers were slightly satisfied with income, job nature and colleagues. Teachers' affective evaluation on social prestige, school principal and students seemed to be neutral. The most noticeable finding was that teachers were quite dissatisfied with promotion opportunities. This can be compared with the overseas research conducted by Conley, Bacharach, and Bauer (1989).

Another recent study by Wong and Li (1995), which sampled 40 Hong

Kong aided secondary schools with over 600 teachers, indicated that rank, participation in decision making, student quality, workload and variety in school activities were significant predictors of teachers' job satisfaction. Wu and Watkins (1994) conducted a study on the validity of the modified version of the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) among Hong Kong teachers. Results indicated that the modified version of JDI supported the internal consistency reliability and internal validity of the instrument. Wu (1996) found that among the five facets of job satisfaction of JDI, teachers were most dissatisfied with supervision and opportunity for promotion but they were rather satisfied with colleagues.

Method

The operational population under study was the population of part-time teachers of English language courses in six Hong Kong tertiary institutions with Professional and Continuing Education (PCE) departments, namely The University of Hong Kong, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, City University of Hong Kong, and Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education. The sample was taken from PCE teachers during the autumn term of 1997 and spring term of 1998. They must have taught in the English language courses for at least two terms, not necessarily in consecutive periods. As a consequence of the two selection criteria, the total number of teachers selected to take part in the research was 802. As in the original population from which the sample was drawn, English language teachers were not distributed evenly in different levels. The sample of 802 teachers could be categorized according to different variables in order to show the distribution frequency of demographic characteristics of PCE teachers in the sample.

The quantitative part of this study is a cross-sectional survey which collects data from the sample at a particular period of time in order to produce a general picture of PCE English language teachers. The instrument was based on the modified version of JDI by Wu and Watkins (1994). Fol-

Following the collection of 264 questionnaires, a random sample of 30 part-time English language teachers (11.4%) from the respondents were selected for an interview. Nunnally (1989) has suggested that it is wise to select subjects randomly and that a sample must consist of a sufficient number of subjects. Though more subjects means greater reliability, Rowntree (1981) agrees that 10% of the population is considered a reasonable random sampling percentage as the intention for this qualitative study was specifically to further explore the experiences and development of part-time teachers who have returned the questionnaires. Therefore, the population for this qualitative study is defined as 264 part-time English language teachers who have returned their questionnaires to the researcher. In order for it to be representative, each individual of the population has an equal chance of being chosen for the sample. To avoid bias, it is advised by Ferguson and Takane (1989) to employ a mechanical method of selecting a random sample. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to write down only their contact phone number. In-depth understanding of the sample was acquired through semi-structured interviews in which the researcher asked a number of questions to 30 respondents according to an interview schedule on the phone. The justification of research methods, the assumption as well as the procedures in conducting the research were also discussed.

Research Instrument

The JDI has been documented as the most frequently used instrument to measure job satisfaction (Yeager, 1981). It yields adequate consistency coefficients and high internal consistent reliabilities. It also shows fairly high test-retest reliability (Norvell, Bell, & Hills, 1988). With respect to validity, the JDI has consistently given high estimates of convergent and discriminate validity (Johnson, Smith, & Tucker, 1982). JDI research also indicates good predictive validity for a number of job withdrawal behavior, such as absenteeism and turnover (Mitchell, 1985). In practice, the instrument takes less than 20 minutes to complete (Kerr, 1985).

The original questionnaire of JDI consists of five parts. Each part measures one particular area of job satisfaction of the respondents. The five areas are: Work, Pay, Promotion, Supervision, and Co-workers. In general, JDI is a well-constructed instrument with proven quality to measure job satisfaction. However, modifications can be made to allow for the general meaning of an item, cultural differences, technological advance and functional specialization. It seemed that a pilot survey would be profitable to determine how the JDI could be modified to best fit the purposes of the present research. A local study of job satisfaction among teachers conducted by Wu (1996) showed that the modified JDI version was proven to have high coefficients of reliability and validity. Therefore, the present questionnaire was adopted from the modified format of the JDI developed by Wu and Watkins (1994), and permission for adopting the questionnaire in this study has been sought accordingly. The modified format is superior to the original one in that it is shorter. This feature was most advantageous to researchers who, on the one hand, intended to investigate several parameters at the same time and, on the other hand, wanted to keep the questionnaire reasonably short.

Results and Discussion

Inconsistent results were obtained for the means of some scales. It might be fruitful to explore individual item means to determine where the discrepancies came from and why such discrepancies existed. For the sake of readability and comprehensiveness, only the three items (for each scale) with the highest scores and the three items (for each scale) with the lowest scores are presented here.

Table 1 shows the three items with the highest scores within each scale. All items could take a mean score between 0 and 3. Among all 74 items in Part A, the items "insecure" (item mean = 2.68) and "income adequate for normal expenses" (item mean = 2.54) under the scale of "Pay" were two items with the highest item means. Except for the scale of "Promotion," where only one item mean approached 2, all item means in the other four

scales lay between 2.11 and 2.68. Standard deviation for all items in Table 1 was around 1. It is possible to obtain more information about the sources of dissatisfaction by examining individual item means.

Table 1 Three items with the highest item means for each scale in Part A

Scale	Item description	Item mean	S.D.
Work*	Useful (to society)	2.52	0.89
	Important	2.37	1.11
	Simple	2.28	1.13
Pay*	Insecure	2.68	0.79
	Income adequate for normal expenses	2.54	0.83
	Not barely live on income	2.17	1.15
Promotion*	Not dead-end job	1.90	1.16
	Promotion does not depend on who you know	1.67	1.21
	In-discriminatory promotion policy	1.59	1.24
Supervision#	Polite	2.46	1.03
	Not quick tempered	2.38	1.05
	Not lazy	2.32	1.14
Colleagues#	Not stupid	2.45	0.91
	Kind-hearted	2.17	1.05
	Helpful	2.11	1.09
	Pleasant	2.11	1.12

Notes: (1) All items can have item means ranging from 0 to 3. The item means are presented in descending order within a scale, with the largest value listed first.

(2) A tie is found between the item means of "helpful" and "pleasant". Both items are included in the table under the scale of "Colleagues."

* Scale with mean score below middle range score indicates dissatisfaction.

Scale with mean score above middle range score indicates satisfaction.

Table 2 shows the three items with the lowest scores within each scale. Particular attention should be paid to those scales with scale means below the "neutral point." Under the scale of "Work," teachers seemed to be dissatisfied with their endless workload and stress arising from the job. Among all 74 items in Part A, the items "income provides luxuries" and "good fringe benefits" under the scale of "Pay" had extraordinarily low item means as well as small standard deviation. It shows that most teachers in the sample were extremely dissatisfied with these two aspects of pay. All three items under the scales of "Promotion" and "Work" had relatively low item means when compared with the three items under the scales of "Supervi-

Table 2 Three items with the lowest item means for each scale in Part A

Scale	Item description	Item mean	S.D.
Work*	Too much to do	0.39	0.76
	Endless (workload)	0.42	0.89
	Stressful	0.51	0.88
Pay*	Income does not provide luxuries	0.06	0.41
	No good fringe benefits	0.13	0.51
	Not well paid	0.69	1.12
Promotion*	Irregular promotions	0.31	0.69
	Opportunity somewhat limited	0.37	0.87
	Mo good opportunities for promotion	0.39	1.02
Supervision[#]	Do not tell me how I am doing	0.68	1.04
	Not around when needed	0.82	0.93
	Does not know job well	1.37	0.91
Colleagues[#]	Not ambitious	0.69	1.01
	Not smart	1.34	1.03
	Not knowledgeable	1.36	0.99

Notes: (1) All items can have item means ranging from 0 to 3. The item means are presented in ascending order within a scale, with the smallest value listed first.

(2) The wording of all positive items are reversed to enhance the readability.

* Scale with mean score below middle range score indicates dissatisfaction.

[#] Scale with mean score above middle range score indicates satisfaction.

Table 3 Mean and variance of item means for each scale in Part A

Scale	Mean	Item means			
		Minimum	Maximum	Range	Variance
Work	1.41	0.41	2.49	2.11	0.38
Pay	1.51	0.07	2.68	2.65	0.91
Promotion	0.85	0.26	1.88	1.59	0.33
Supervision	1.80	0.76	2.44	1.62	0.19
Colleagues	1.79	0.71	2.42	1.72	0.21

sion" and "Colleagues." It indicates that irregular and limited opportunities for promotion seem to be the main source of dissatisfaction. All but four items (0.76 for "too much to do", 0.69 for "irregular promotions", 0.51 for "no good fringe benefits" and 0.41 for "income also not provide luxuries") in the table had its standard deviations around 1.

Table 3 shows the mean and variance of item means for each of five scales in Part A. A wide range and large variance for the item

means within the scales of "Work" and "Pay" in Part A suggested that some high-scored items were offset by other low scored items within the same scale. This resulted in a weighted scale mean around 1.5. If, within the same scale, the responses to about half of the items lay in one extremity and the responses to the other half of the items lay in another extremity, the interpretation of the scale mean (to indicate degree of satisfaction in that facet) might be problematic. This might perhaps partly explain the inconsistent findings in absolute levels of satisfaction, where Part A and Part B gave different results under the scales of "Work" and "Pay."

Since the mean scores of Major Subject Taught of Part A in Section Three of the questionnaire were calculated from 18 items, exploring individual item means might help to determine the reasons leading to the discrepancies. Table 4 shows the distribution of individual item means of major subject taught. Items with higher mean scores indicated a positive correlation with job satisfaction, while items with lower mean

Table 4 Individual item means of major subject taught

Item	Mean	Frequency		
		Score 0	Score 1	Score 3
Important	2.9	2	10	192
Routine	1.5	24	120	60
Satisfying	1.8	8	114	82
Boring	1.5	12	130	62
Interesting	1.3	2.1	18	34
Students' learning attitude	142	38	44	132
Professional	2.1	34	38	132
Respected	1.5	28	106	70
Stressful	0.7	106	78	20
Pleasant	1.1	14	168	22
Useful (to society)	2.4	10	46	148
Tiresome	0.4	132	66	6
Too much to do	0.8	101	70	33
Challenging	1.6	2.1	28	24
Teacher-student relationship	100	60	76	120
Frustration	1.7	16	110	78
Simple	1.8	22	94	88
Endless (workload)	0.5	142	46	16
Sense of achievement	2.3	18	42	144

scores indicated a negative correlation. The mean scores ranged from 0 to 3. There were five items with item means greater than 2 and four items with item means less than 1. The three items with the highest individual item means were "important" (2.9), "useful" (2.4) and "sense of achievement" (2.3) and the three items with the lowest individual item means were "stressful" (0.7), "endless (workload)" (0.5) and "tiresome" (0.4).

As to the interview results, there is quite a strong view that achievement implies the success of teaching, and the success of teaching means the teaching goes in the right direction. The responses of some interviewees throw light on this perception.

- R1:** "Promotion and increased pay themselves are not that important. However, promotion to me is a form of recognition. In other words, the supervisor appreciates what I have done." (recognition)
- R2:** "I am satisfied when my students show improvement under my help and both the supervisor and course leader approve and appreciate my teaching." (recognition)
- R3:** "I feel satisfied when I get a good feedback from students and see they improve in language skills." (achievement)
- R4:** "I am satisfied as long as my teaching is effective, welcomed by students and appreciated by colleagues." (recognition and achievement)
- R5:** "I will be much dissatisfied if none works with me. Without their support, I can do nothing." (recognition and achievement)
- R6:** "The most important of all is the recognition received from all different people in the institution and everything goes on as I plan. I know that I can really help my students." (recognition and achievement)
- R7:** "When I receive admiration and observe positive change from my students, I can be assured of my ability and the worth of my teaching work." (recognition, achievement as a reflection of ability and worth of work)

- R8:** “I am satisfied when my work is fruitful as planned. Good feedback on teaching, group tutorial and individual consultation can assure my ability.” (achievement as a reflection of ability)
- R9:** “Establishing a good rapport with students makes me feel that I have chosen the right career. Students’ willingness to learn from me and take me as a learning model tell me that I have good personal qualities and I am capable. I feel exceptionally happy about these.” (achievement as a reflection of ability and self-worth)

Furthermore, in case of under-achievement, recognition or support from other persons in the school still can assure the worthiness of the PCE English language teachers. With such support, future improvement or achievement can be anticipated. The interview responses below give a good portrait of this:

- R1:** “I need the support from the supervisor and course leaders. When I am criticized or complained by my students, I would query whether I am going in the right way or not. If I can gain support, I can be assured that I am working in the right direction. Only if I am in the right direction can I be confident of trying again and making improvement next time even though I fail at the moment.”
- R2:** “I feel most dissatisfied because the other non-English course colleagues criticize that language teaching is not cost-effective. Such prejudiced views they hold make me feel that we can hardly accomplish our teaching aims in future. In a nutshell, I am not able to get any opportunity to make any improvement to attain success.”

From the above responses, it would therefore highly probable that the lack of both achievement and recognition would ruin the anticipation of future success and the conception of worthiness of the work. This certainly leads to job dissatisfaction that can be demonstrated clearly by the following responses:

- R1:** “I feel unhappy when the learning problems of my students become

worse. It will be much worse if students lodge complaints against my teaching.”

R2: “Dissatisfaction comes mainly from the negative comments from the supervisor and course leaders and the failure to deliver a language activity. These bring no justification to my hard work. It seems that one criticism can deny the worth of all my work.”

In order to show the relative importance of each of the sixteen factors listed in Table 5, the table is formulated to indicate the number of references made by the respondents to each of the factors from Herzberg's checklist.

Though each factor was mentioned more frequently by different respondents, the common factor could be indicated by the valid percentage. In other words, the higher the valid percentage, the more significant it would become a common factor. It is obvious from Table 5 that both achievement and recognition are the main factors to both job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, recognition has a stronger weighting in bring-

Table 5 Weighting of Herzberg's factors in resulting job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction of the respondents

Factor	Valid percentage	
	Satisfaction	Dissatisfaction
Recognition	45.0	26.7
Achievement	24.8	36.6
Possibility of growth	3.5	0.0
Advancement	1.4	1.2
Salary	2.5	2.4
Interpersonal relationship (superior)	0.0	0.0
Interpersonal relationship (subordinate)	0.0	2.6
Interpersonal relationship (peer)	1.6	0.8
Supervision (technical)	2.5	0.0
Responsibility	2.5	7.6
Company policy and administration	4.6	8.4
Working conditions	3.2	5.6
Work itself	4.7	5.5
Factors in personal life	1.2	0.0
Status	2.5	0.0
Job security	0.0	2.6

ing about job satisfaction whereas lack of achievement bears a stronger weighting in leading to job dissatisfaction.

Recommendations

Firstly, PCE departments should find ways to reduce the heavy workload of English language teachers. This study showed that among the 18 items that constituted the score of job satisfaction of major subject taught (see Table 4), four of them had a score of under 1 (the neutral score should be 1.5) - "endless workload" (0.5), "too much to do" (0.8), "tiresome" (0.4), and "stressful" (0.7). Tiresome ranked first. The next frequently mentioned factor which bothered teachers most in teaching the major subjects was the heavy workload. In the study, the scores on items concerning the workload of English language teachers were low, which indicated low satisfaction. Complaints on heavy workload, particularly about the marking of students' assignments, were received from teachers. English language teachers have to mark a variety of assignments, of which marking of composition was the most tedious and time-consuming one. This can be solved if PCE departments can decrease the teacher-student ratio in English language classes. The interviewees reported that reducing two periods per cycle could not compensate the workload on marking students' assignments such as composition. They complained that they had to sacrifice their family time to finish the endless marking as a result of the guidelines suggested in the Education Commission Report No. 6. The report discussed the decline in students' English language standard and suggested that English language teachers should put extra time and effort in the preparation of teaching materials and in the marking of students' assignments (Education Commission, 1995).

Secondly, PCE departments should provide more enrichment programs for teachers, especially on topics about teacher-student relationship. Among the factors that bothered teachers most in teaching major subjects (see Table 4), students' learning attitudes and teacher-

student relationship were frequently mentioned by the respondents. This finding was consistent with both local and overseas research on job satisfaction of teachers. A study by Savage (1967) showed that good personal relationship with students was found to be a motivation, an essential factor contributing to job satisfaction. A local study by Wong (1988) showed that interpersonal relationship with students was perceived as the most important factor contributing to job satisfaction. Yee (1990) also stated that teacher-student relationship was highly related with job satisfaction of teachers. In the interviews with teachers, they said that they were trained academically and professionally, but not in managing interpersonal relationship with students. Senior teachers even found that they had generation gap with students. They were in need of seminars to broaden their minds, to have a better psychological preparation, and to have better techniques to improve teacher-student relationship. Educational programs should be conducted for both supervisors and teachers to inculcate in them a proper attitude and understanding of students' learning so that a more supportive and understanding relationship can be developed. A better teacher-student relationship can enhance job satisfaction of a teacher. Thus, PCE administrators should organize more programs to enrich teachers' knowledge in the area of handling teacher-student relationship.

Lastly, supervisors should be invited to take part in conferences discussing the significance of educational research in the improvement of educational practice. To meet the drastic challenge of the 21st century and the impact of China resuming its sovereignty over Hong Kong after 1997, new educational innovations are badly needed in the coming few years. Adequate fieldwork research is essential for the success of any new educational innovation. However, conducting any fieldwork research that involves schools should require the cooperation of supervisors. It may be the responsibility of the administrators in PCE departments of various institutions to organize seminars for the supervisors. Through participating in those conferences and seminars, supervisors can be expected to acquire a more positive

attitude toward the role of educational research in educational practice. Relevant resources should also be provided to enhance teaching effectiveness.

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