

Case Study of University Environment Factors Influencing Faculty Job Satisfaction in Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City

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Abstract

Faculty satisfaction is the most significant aspect in higher education and is important for the improvement and effectiveness of the higher education system. Several studies have examined the job satisfaction of academic members in higher education in developed countries and evidence from developing countries like Vietnam is seriously lacking. The purpose of this study was to examine university environment factors influencing faculty job satisfaction in Vietnam. The study used a questionnaire to survey 200 faculty members and an e-mail interview with 10 out of 200 those working full-time in the five member universities of Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City. The findings of this study found that faculty members were most satisfied with faculty promotion mechanism and least satisfied with their salaries. University environment factors namely leadership style, campus landscape, and administrative efficiency had significantly positive effects on faculty job satisfaction. Recommendations were also discussed in this study.

Keywords: university environment factor, faculty job satisfaction, Vietnamese higher education, developing country.

1. INTRODUCTION

In many developing countries, the teaching force is mired in bureaucracies and centralized education systems that support neither the effective performance of teachers nor their career progression in their job (VSO, 2002). If these faculty members are not satisfied with their profession, they will not be able to increase their performance and will not contribute to higher education. Thus, increase in job satisfaction could lead to more effective performance and employees are less likely to leave the organization. According to Truell, Price, and Joyner (1998), highly satisfied faculty will generally be innovative and motivated to establish and maintain an environment conducive to learning.

University faculty teaching is one of the most stressful occupations, requiring in-depth knowledge, and with pressure to teach and research, and to continually improve educational attainment and experience. Faculty dissatisfaction will affect the quality of an education system. According to Chen (2006), quality in teaching and learning can only be enhanced if faculty members are satisfied and

content. To achieve quality education and cultivate creative faculty members, faculty job satisfaction is an important key; its various dimensions should be studied because satisfaction contributes highly in productivity and performance of individuals to the organization (Macerinskiene & Vaiksnoaraite, 2006).

Gunlu et al. (2010) also found that job satisfaction contributes to efficient services and high performance, and will increase organizational productivity. On the one hand, an understanding of the factors involved in job satisfaction is crucial to improving the happiness of workers (Okpara et al., 2005). On the other hand, an understanding how to improve job satisfaction can improve work quality and results. Job satisfaction also has implications for management or worker relations both in general work areas and in specific areas such as education (Eyupoglu & Saner, 2009). Thus, job satisfaction is a key factor to retain and satisfy employees. It is therefore important to identify factors related to job satisfaction. Therefore a detailed understanding of job satisfaction is the key to improving the well-being of a large number of working individual, and job satisfaction has become a major topic and a continuing topic for research studies.

Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002) estimated that the numbers of 7,855 articles have examined the topic of job satisfaction during the period of 1976 – 2000. The reason for this interest is that work takes up such a significant amount of a person's life, and by increasing an individual's overall satisfaction with his or her work life improves the overall well-being of the individual, the organization, and the society (Staples & Higgins, 1998). Several studies have examined the job satisfaction of academic members in higher education in developed countries; unfortunately, evidence from developing countries is seriously lacking; this is a gap which needs to be filled (Eyupoglu & Saner, 2009; Hean & Garrett, 2001; Ssesanga & Garrett, 2005).

Very few studies have been conducted in the area of job satisfaction in Vietnamese higher education sector. Garrett (1999) also believes that here is a need for more data to be gathered from developing countries, and for the theories to be tested in different cultural contexts and different professional, social and economic environments. The purpose of this study was to examine university environment factors influencing faculty job satisfaction in Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM) which contribute most to their satisfaction as well as contribute to fill the gap in the literature regarding Vietnam and other developing countries. The study is designed to answer two questions: 1) What is the general level of faculty job satisfaction in Vietnamese universities? 2) How is faculty job satisfaction affected by university environment factors?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of Job Satisfaction

There is no universal definition of the concept (Aziri, 2011; Evans, 1997), most of the definitions that exist in literature have a common theme. Different authors have different approaches towards defining job satisfaction. In Luddy (2005), job satisfaction is as the emotional reactions and feelings towards different aspects at work of the staff, which emphasized the causes of job satisfaction

including job title, level of supervision, relationships with colleagues, job content, the structure of the organization, and so on.

The most common definition of job satisfaction in organizational research is from Locke (1976), who described job satisfaction as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences. Job satisfaction is an attitude developed by an individual towards his or her job and job conditions. Thus, it is an emotional response to various dimensions of the job (Rastgar et al., 2012). Job satisfaction is concerned with the position emotions of employees towards the various aspects of the work and to what extent the results obtained meet their expectations from their job position.

2.2 Measurement of Job Satisfaction

There are many instruments available for measuring facets of job satisfaction. The Job Descriptive Index (JDI) was developed by Smith et al. (1969) which refers to five job aspects: type of work, the pay, the opportunities for promotion, the supervision, and the co-workers on the job. The INDSALES of Churchill et al. (1974) assesses satisfaction with customer, promotion, pay, company policy work, supervisor and co-workers. The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) by Weiss et al. (1966), and the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) by Spector (1985) are theoretically suitable for most jobs. Weiss found that the MSQ consists of twenty dimensions of the job measuring satisfaction: ability utilization, achievement, activity, advancement, authority, company policies and practices, compensation, co-workers, creativity, independence, moral values, recognition, responsibility, security, social service, social status, supervision-human relations, supervision-technical, variety, and working conditions. On the other hand, Spector found that the JSS based on nine subscale facets: pay, promotion, supervision, benefits, rewards, operating conditions, co-workers, work itself, and communication.

Other studies of higher education have used different factors to measure job satisfaction. For example, Oshagbemi (1997) employed eight dimensions to measure satisfaction with respect to different components of university teachers' overall job satisfaction in the United Kingdom: teaching, research, administration and management, present pay, promotions, supervisor behavior; behavior of co-workers and working conditions. Kusku (2003) measured faculty job satisfaction in Turkey using the seven determinants: general satisfaction, management satisfaction, colleagues, other working group satisfaction, job satisfaction, work environment and salary satisfaction. Ssesanga and Garrett (2005) measured university faculty job satisfaction in Uganda using nine general factors: teaching, research, governance, remuneration, opportunities for promotion, supervision, co-worker's behavior, working environment and overall conditions. Chen et al. (2006) measured faculty job satisfaction in a private university in China using six factors: organization vision, respect, result feedback and motivation, management system, pay and benefits and work environment.

2.3 University Environment Factors and Job Satisfaction

University faculty can contribute greatly if they get maximum job satisfaction in the workplace. Blegen (1993), Glisson and Durick (1988) found that organizational environment factors are the factors affecting faculty job satisfaction. Faculty job satisfaction has also been shown to be affected greatly by university environment variables including school leadership, collegial and student relationship, and university climate (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Hagedorn, 2000; Zhou & Volkwein, 2004).

Several studies have shown a link between job satisfaction and working conditions in the organization as a university (Kinzl et al., 2005; Newsham et al., 2009; Veitch et al., 2005). Ward and Sloane (2000) found that working environment has positive effect on university faculty job satisfaction. Many researchers also found supporting evidence about the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational culture (Arnold & Spell, 2006; Chang & Lee, 2007; Mansoor & Tayib, 2010). Change in the organizational culture affects the job satisfaction of employees and it also changes their behavior and attitudes. Huang and Chi (2007) found that if the employees are satisfied with the organizational culture, it will motivate them to work hard and raise organizational performance. Another factor that influences job satisfaction is human resource (such as compensation, empowerment, promotion, performance evaluation, and so on). It is assumed that human resources are closely associated with the level of job satisfaction (Bos et al., 2009; Galanou et al., 2010; Jiang et al., 2011).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Dependent and Independent Variables

A dependent variable is a criterion or variable that is to be predicted or explain (Zikmund, 2003). Faculty job satisfaction is the dependent variable in this study. It consists of five dimensions namely salaries, bonus and welfare, faculty promotion, in-service teaching training, and in-service research training. Faculty members rated their level of satisfaction on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “very dissatisfied” to 4 = “very satisfied”.

An independent variable is a variable that is expected to influence the dependent variable (Zikmund, 2003). In the study, personal factors are the independent variables. It includes development aim, leadership style, campus landscape, and administrative efficiency. The purpose of selecting these factors in this study is to identify university environment factors which cause low satisfaction levels among faculty members in VNU-HCM.

3.2 Sample

The survey instrument was distributed to 230 faculty members at the five member universities of Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM) namely the University of Technology, the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, the University of Science, the University of Information Technology, and the University of Economics and Law, of which 200

were returned, for an 87% return rate. In addition, 200 faculty members in VNU-HCM completed the survey instrument. The 10 of these were chosen for open-ended questions which were done using e-mail interviews.

Out of the 200 faculty members, 72.5% were male. Respondent age distribution was 27% under 30 years old, 61% 30 to 40 years old and 12% over 40 years old. 45% of respondents were single. For respondent educational attainment, 11% held bachelor's degrees, 42.5% had master's degrees, and 46.5% held doctoral degrees. For length of employment in faculties' current position, 11.5% had less than one year, 21% had from 1 to 5 years, 36.5% had from 6 to 10 years, 22.5% had from 11 to 15 years, and the remaining 8.5% had held their positions for 16 years or more. Of those who responded to the survey, 57.5% received their highest degrees in Vietnam, 18.5 % in Asian countries, and 24% in Western countries. Overall, 43% of the respondents taught in technology related areas, 24.5% in social sciences and humanities, and 32.5% in natural sciences.

3.3 Data Analysis Methods

All data used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 13.0 software to process the data analysis. This study employs statistical methods of descriptive analyses and multiple regressions to analyze the data. Descriptive analysis is conducted to understand the general level of job satisfaction of faculty members in VNU-HCM. To study the key factors of university environment factors which significantly affect job satisfaction, multiple regressions analysis is used for this study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Level of Faculty Job Satisfaction in VNU-HCM

The survey used a four-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 = very dissatisfied to 4 = very satisfied. In terms of Table 1 the findings indicated faculty members were most satisfied with the faculty promotion mechanism ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.11$), followed by in-service teaching training ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.93$) and in-service research training ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.81$). Faculty members in VNU-HCM were least satisfied with their salaries ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 0.76$) and followed by bonus and welfare ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 1.08$).

Table 1. The Results of Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) of Faculty Job Satisfaction in VNU-HCM

Faculty Job Satisfaction Dimensions	Scores range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rank
1. Salaries		2.16	0.76	5
2. Bonus and welfare		2.51	1.08	4
3. Faculty promotion	1 - 4	3.25	1.11	1
4. In-service teaching training		2.86	0.93	2
5. In-service research training		2.84	0.81	3

This study used the five dimensions to measure faculty job satisfaction, namely salaries, bonus and welfare, faculty promotion, in-service teaching training, and in-service research training. It found that respondents were most satisfied with faculty promotion mechanism. Some of the main reasons of faculty promotion satisfaction include the creation of opportunities for career advancement among faculty members, the expression of professional development, and the defining of seniority and achievement for faculty promotion as essential. Faculty members feel that the promotion process in their organization is fair and feasible. As one faculty member explained,

I feel very satisfied about the faculty promotion mechanism in my organization. When you have seniority and merit, you have a chance for promotion in their organization.

Promotion is an important aspect of an employee's life. Universities have used promotion as a reward for high productivity. However, promotion is only a useful form of compensation when faculty attaches significant value to it; if not, then salaries increments are better rewards for more exertion (Malik, Danish, & Munir, 2012). This study found that faculty members in VNU-HCM were least satisfied with their salaries. Reasons for low satisfaction include inadequate for high daily costs and many obligations. One faculty member admitted,

Faculty salaries are often based on the state payroll system, it is not flexible as in the private universities. Faculty members in higher education institutions are required to have high qualifications such as M.A and Ph.D. degrees, but they only receive the equivalent pay of a bachelor's degree in a private company. I think that salaries of young faculty members are particularly incommensurate with their positions compared to outside companies. This will affect the lives of young faculty. Thus, they must find other work, resulting in reduced quality of teaching.

According to the regulations of the Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam, faculty members must teach 280 hours per year (MOET, 2008). If faculty members do not have enough teaching hours, they must participate in other work to fulfill their obligations such as practicum, lab supervision, directing theses, doing research, and so on. This regulation is a very difficult problem for young lecturers who do not have extensive teaching experience, qualifications or knowledge of a broad area. Faculty members at VNU-HCM are under high pressure due to the complexity of their work. However, their monthly salary can be very low. Therefore, university administrators need to review and change policies to enhance salaries needs of faculty members.

4.2 The Regression between University Environment Factors and Faculty Job Satisfaction in VNU-HCM

The regression model proposed by this study explained 35% of faculty job satisfaction in VNU-HCM ($R^2 = 0.350$). Table 2 demonstrates that most university environment factors, except development aim, had significant effect on faculty job satisfaction. University environment factors including leadership style ($\beta = 0.253$, $p < 0.01$), campus landscape ($\beta = 0.188$, $p < 0.01$), and

administrative efficiency ($\beta = 0.430, p < 0.001$) had a positive effects on faculty job satisfaction in VNU-HCM.

Table 2. The Results of Multiple Regression Regarding Faculty Job Satisfaction and University Environment Factors

University environment factors	Beta(β)
Development aim	-.142
Leadership style	.253**
Campus landscape	.188**
Administrative efficiency	.430***
R square (R^2)	.350

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

In terms of university environment factors, the study found that administrative efficiency is the most significant factor affecting faculty job satisfaction. Previous studies (Judge & Church, 2000; Maghrabi, 1999; Syed et al., 2012) found that faculty job satisfaction may affect their perceptions of improvement and effectiveness of the university. Combining the result of this study with previous studies suggests that the correlation between administrative efficiency and faculty job satisfaction are good. One faculty member said,

Administrative issues in school as policies, regulations, school reports, assessment learning of student outcomes, and so on are very important and close relationship to faculty members. In my opinion, however, the administrative efficiency of university in Vietnam is not high and complex.

When administrative efficiency is high, faculty members are usually very satisfied. Faculty members with low job satisfactions have more negative attitudes toward school administration and often leave their positions. The reverse is also true. Unfortunately, little research is available concerning the correlation between faculty job satisfaction and personal and university environment factors. It is clear that there should be more research on this topic in order to better understand the reasons for these correlations. This study contributes to filling research gap in this area.

5. CONCLUSION

Job satisfaction also plays an important role in improving the financial standing of institutes and understanding the faculty job satisfaction are an important organizational goal of any university. Job satisfaction is concerned with the position emotions of employees towards the various aspects of the work and to what extend the results obtained meet their expectations from their job position. High job satisfaction is needed in educational organizations in order to motivate and maximize the use of professional resources and creativity.

This study shows areas where VNU-HCM can increase faculty satisfaction by increasing faculty salaries and maintaining the quality of faculty promotion mechanism. On one hand, therefore,

faculty promotion mechanism will continue to maintain and develop the implement current policies for faculty members. On the other hand, pay scale need to be re-examined within school of current institutional policies, regulations and make the necessary changes in the policies and practices to enhance faculty job satisfaction by policy makers and university administrators in VNU-HCM.

The findings of this study also showed that administrative efficiency had significant positive effects on faculty job satisfaction. Policy makers and university administrators in VNU-HCM should focus on improving administrative efficiency rather than other factors in the process of constructing a universal intervention to enhance faculty job satisfaction in VNU-HCM.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will enable university administrators and policy makers to modify their human resource management policies and practices to develop better work environments and cultures to improve faculty job satisfaction. Furthermore, it also help them to understand university faculty job satisfaction in order to guide and to improve employees' activities in a desired direction or teachers' attitudes, zeal, and enthusiasm, which all affect the quality of education. This study can also contribute to fill the gap in the literature regarding Vietnam and other developing countries.

6. LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations. First, the data obtained through questionnaires were all self-reported by the participants. Second, this study was conducted at the five member universities of VNU-HCM – one of the most prestigious universities in Vietnam. Finally, since only faculty members in VNU-HCM were used as samples in this study, it cannot be generalized to all faculty members in Vietnam.

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