



Examining job satisfaction factors toward retaining Malaysian TVET instructors in the teaching profession

Muhd Khaizer Omar^{1*}, Abdullah Mat Rashid¹, Mohd Hazwan Mohd Puad¹

¹Universiti Putra Malaysia

*Corresponding author E-mail: khaizer@upm.edu.my

Abstract

The teaching profession in Malaysia has continued to be valued due to the continuous effort and commitment by teachers within the education profession and their desire to benefit better education for future generations. Indeed, the teaching profession has evolved to become a recognised benchmark towards the nation's vision to develop human resource capital. However, despite the recognition, teachers are noticeably struggling in their attempt to provide high-quality teaching services. Many studies have reported many of the issues within the teaching profession and environment that exists. Many of the issues include severe depression, anxiety, demotivation, and behavioural issues. Consequently, many of these issues also become the reasons why teachers inevitably leave their chosen profession, either voluntarily or pressured by the educational environment and system. As a result, a study to understand the issues for their departure, and more importantly the factors contributing to job satisfaction and retention have investigated in this study. A target population targeting Malaysian training instructors at the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) educational institutions were selected to participate in a survey. Descriptive and correlational studies were employed to determine job satisfaction the factors among TVET instructors and to identify the factors contributing towards job satisfaction and retention. The findings indicate that most instructors are satisfied with their teaching job. However, many are struggling and not coping with voracious issues brought about through present workloads, student disciplinary problems, and vague expectations from key stakeholders in the TVET system. The findings from this study will further help in determining the perspectives of the instructors and the factors that have attracted them to remain in their chosen profession and to enable them to enjoy their teaching profession and career.

Keywords: Job Satisfaction, Retention, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Instructors

1. Introduction

Within the teaching profession, many studies have been undertaken to understand the main reasons why teachers are leaving the profession. While, many of the reasons may be attributed to retirement, relocations, and career changes there are further reasons why, for such a credible professional, teachers are leaving [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]. In fact, many of the reasons based on published studies highlight many of issues being associated with school politics, time demands, inadequate salaries, limited benefits, little opportunity for advancement, excessive workloads, high-stakes testing, extended working hours, disruptive student behaviour, poor leadership and administration within schools. The more significant reasons include: the perception and views of teaching as a temporary profession, and the frustrations associated with motivating apathetic students [1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9].

Many of the reasons and factors identified have provided further evidence towards the importance of ensuring job satisfaction in respective roles of teachers and the need to improve teacher retention given the requirement of TVET to produce quality teachers [2, 9]. Notably, teachers are struggling to adapt to the ever-rising changes and issues associated with the need for higher levels of standardisation and accountability within the profession, with many of these changes hindering their ability to provide quality educational experiences to those whom they teach. The core or

fundamental business of teaching has been challenged many times, resulting from the various administrative overheads and tasks that are considered both unnecessary and unwarranted which are imposed upon the teachers. The constant pressure placed on teachers has become one of the primary the reasons why teachers are changing positions and their employment, or worse, leaving the workforce entirely. Mertler's study [9] highlighted in a study that the overall rate for teacher job satisfaction was only 26 percent, which emphasises a disturbing if not worrisome scenario. Also, the attraction surrounding teaching (i.e. attractiveness towards the profession) and the level of remuneration further adds to the reasons why teachers are leaving their substantive positions, schools and ultimately, the profession. The localities of where they teach can further influence their socio-economic status and overall well-being. A study by Gomba [2] listed five factors as for why teachers should remain in teaching: (a) the need to support their families, (b) job security, (c) unmarketable, (d) the support from colleagues and administration, and (5) self-sacrifice leadership by principals. It is evident from the findings of this study that teachers themselves and their careers are suffering. Clearly, they are not reaping any enjoyment from their profession, but instead, are teaching to earn money and for other intrinsic or extrinsic influences. Indeed, teachers are not only failing to strive and develop in their chosen profession but are sadly often associated with severe depression (not chronic) and becoming disinterested and detached from their job.

However, all the mentioned reasons do not represent TVET instructors. Therefore, it is essential to investigate and examine from TVET instructors who are teaching in Malaysia, why they continue to remain as instructors and what are the motivating factors. Understanding job satisfaction of TVET instructors and retention will help ensure the quality of the TVET programs and experience are further strengthened and sustainable. The change within the educational paradigm, especially in the TVET system will encourage, rather than force TVET instructors to adapt to new educational programs and the introduction of new and revised TVET curriculum. Frequently, TVET instructors have been unfairly treated concerning the clarity surrounding their field of expertise and technical-based specialisation. Moreover, some instructors are required to attend special teacher training courses to satisfy the skills and aptitude needed for the Malaysian Skills Certificate. Therefore, the factors described, may in the majority of cases, contribute to instructor dissatisfaction especially regarding the accreditation of graduate skills and the level of knowledge expected from TVET institutions to gain employment.

2. Literature review

Studies specifically on teacher job satisfaction and retention among TVET instructors who are actively teaching in Malaysia are limited. Importantly, the justification surrounding the definition of the TVET remains unclear given the many issues associated with the teacher certification program among TVET instructors. Following up on this point, in several TVET institutions in Malaysia, there were several cases reported where instructors were requested to teach subjects that did not fall under their area of specialisation. Notably, the different specialities and attributes of TVET instructors, including their core-skills and practical experiences also contribute to the research findings [10, 11, 12]. A separate case investigated the issues surrounding the TVET institutions mandate, where teachers who were absent from technical programs before attending their teacher certification program, were asked to participate in related technical programs designated by TVET. Accordingly, this action while appearing to be imposed upon teachers, did assist them to acquire the required theoretical and practical knowledge expected of TVET institutions in supplying semi-skilled employees based on the Malaysian Skills Certificate (SKM) level.

Many research studies have been undertaken to understand why teachers are leaving the teaching profession even though it may be recognised as a promising career and stable profession. Some studies have reported that teachers are leaving the profession during their early years of teaching. Studies have also highlighted that teachers are exposed to enormous job-related stresses that contribute towards becoming disassociated and demotivated towards their chosen profession, adding to their consequential departure from teaching [13]. Interestingly, recent evidence reported that approximately 530 teachers in Malaysia suffer from some form of mental illnesses. Importantly, this number alone equates to at least 0.128 percent of teachers and is a further indication of the need to help support their needs with mental health care [14]. Indeed, this is a further indication that has contributed towards the number of cases of teachers leaving the profession.

Nonetheless, there are additional internal and physical factors that contribute towards the decision of teachers to discontinue teaching and leaving the profession [15, 16, 17]. A study by Feng [16] revealed that most teachers are teaching beyond their area of specialisation and notably this factor has likewise become a key factor for teachers leaving. Also, teachers were frequently discredited because they were not considered to be an expert in certain teaching assignments that were given to them by the school's administration. This finding is consistent with Boyd et al regarding high school teachers, especially those teachers switching careers, who were struggling to adapt (in the context of teaching) after requested to teach outside of their respective areas of speciality [10, 11]. Importantly, teaching without the knowledge of a

specific area or subject and knowing what to prepare, (i.e. pedagogical context) will demotivate the teacher even further.

In a separate study by Morton, Williams, and Brindley they found pre-service teachers who were categorised as career-switchers left teaching during their early years partly because of the frustrations, naivety, and lack of pedagogical knowledge [12]. Indeed, this finding was not just limited to those schools employing career-switchers as teachers. The number of teachers who attended traditional certification programs were found to be incompetent in specific subject areas and consequently ended up leaving the teaching profession [17]. Notwithstanding, there are quite a few studies that have been carried out internationally that support this finding. For example, research conducted among Canadian teachers found similar problems associated teaching specialisations and work assignments given and requested by school administrators [15]. Müller, Alliata, and Benninghoff suggested there were three factors for the reasons why teachers remained in the teaching profession: (1) feasible job scope, (2) positive working environment, and (3) opportunities for career advancement and promotion [18]. Many studies have been carried out on teacher job satisfaction, albeit many of the findings are related to traditional teaching. For example, Abdullah, Uli, and Parasuraman investigated job satisfaction on secondary school teachers in the district of Tawau, Sabah, Malaysia [19]. The findings indicated that the role of gender, academic achievement by grade or by non-graduate teachers, their level and position within the school environment were also indications as to whether teachers were satisfied with their profession. In a separate study, Ghavifekr and Pillai found that the organisational climate of the school played a significant part in determining the job satisfaction of teachers' in Malaysia [20]. The finding is consistent with the past study by Müller, Alliata, and Benninghoff who agreed that a healthy working environment creates and promotes a positive atmosphere within the school system [18]. In general, personal growth and achievement, the enormous workload, and remuneration are among the main reasons that influence the job satisfaction of teachers' in Malaysia schools [21, 22].

Promulgating the recent findings on teacher job satisfaction and the main reasons for teachers to remain and depart from the teaching profession offers a better understanding of the viable solutions to solve teacher attrition. Therefore, the research conducted in this study aims to understand further the factors relating to job satisfaction of TVET instructors' and how likely that TVET instructors' will leave the profession. Given the number of TVET instructors' leaving the profession is unknown, or about the level of clarity of the teacher certification program, and value it brings to TVET teachers in a school placement system, this research will aid in further understanding and help to prevent teachers leaving the profession, especially in technical-based subjects. Furthermore, due to a limited number of research studies specifically in determining the level of job satisfaction and retention among TVET instructors', this study will additionally help towards improving the quality of education for the younger future generations especially in preparing semi-skilled employees in Malaysia.

3. Theoretical perspective

The theoretical framework developed to investigate job satisfaction and retention of TVET instructors' in Malaysia has been adapted from Adam's Equity Theory (AET) of motivation [23]. Accordingly, this theory was extended from the existing theories of Maslow and Herzberg, aiming to provide a similar balance [24, 25]. The motivation of an individual is directly related to his or her perception of equity, justice, and the fairness of management. The higher an individual's impression of the management's fairness, the higher the motivation level of the individual, and vice-versa. While assessing reasonableness, the worker will often consider their contribution (as far as a commitment) to an outcome or result (as far as remuneration/reward, salary) and furthermore, is similar to the circumstances of other individuals.

In the context of the school environment, teachers are exposed to the manner in which the school is administered, including the perceptions of students to them as teachers in the classroom. The job satisfaction of teachers is frequently measured based on their work outcomes or output which will influence their personal growth, career advancement, responsibility, recognition and promotion. Importantly, these issues serve as critical ‘motivators’ to encourage teachers to remain in the teaching profession. Furthermore, the acknowledgement and appreciation displayed by the employer for these results develop into primary ‘motivators’ as defined by Herzberg [24, 25]. Accordingly, if managed appropriately and positively, these motivational factors will spread across teaching services supporting equity, fairness, and the level of justice exhibited either by the school’s administration function (i.e. concerning promotion, reward) and influencing student attitude and behaviour (i.e. performance, less disruptive, friendliness). Conversely, if the opposite exists, teachers will be more likely to leave the teaching profession.

4. Research objectives

This study is supported by following two objectives:

- To determine job satisfaction factors of Malaysian TVET instructors; and
- To examine the relationship between job satisfaction factors and the main reasons why TVET instructors remain in the TVET educational system.

5. Methodology

The quantitative component of the mixed-methods study was adopted in this study. The research was undertaken using a convergent parallel design where both quantitative and qualitative questions were combined in a single survey instrument. Accessing the data to obtain the teaching population; a mobile phone application, “Telegram” (messaging application) was used. A total number of 446 teachers who were registered users of “Telegram” from selected 80 TVET institutions in Malaysia were selected to participate in the study. The permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD), of the Ministry of Education Malaysia. A set of the questionnaires along with the proposal outlining the purpose of the study was also provided to the EPRD as part of the standard procedures required for researching educational institutions in Malaysia. The questions for the survey were replicated from a study by Perrachione, Rosser, and Petersen instrument and Johnsrud and Rosser who studied explicitly job satisfaction and retention. An email request was also sent to the instrument’s developer to obtain their permission [5, 26]. Next, the instrument was distributed online using an online survey tool called Qualtrics. The period for data collection was set to occur over a two-month period between November and December 2017. Three email reminders were sent to instructors to complete the survey within the specified time required. The survey questionnaire consisted of five sections. The first part (Section A), composed of 25 questions, and asking questions relating to job satisfaction based on the 7-point Likert type scale: strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree nor agree, somewhat agree, agree, and strongly agree. Section B comprised of three questions indicating the intentions to remain in teaching, using the same rating scale. Section C consisted of a series of questions further asking about job satisfaction but allowing for more details to be provided given the ‘open-ended’ questions that were presented. Section D consisted of three questions regarding the decisions about leaving the teaching profession and moving to another career and the contributing factors. Section E consisted of 11 demographic questions including gender, marital status, age, ethnicity, and age when entering the teaching profession, their highest degree and academic level attained, ethnicity, present teaching position, content area, teaching experience, and the teacher’s certification program. In answering the questions, the

respondent could skip or omit from answering any question. It was anticipated that the questionnaire would be completed within 30 minutes and that each respondent could only respond to the survey once. Furthermore, as a control measure, the IP address of the respondent was used to avoid the respondent from completing more than one questionnaire.

6. Findings

As mentioned, data collection was to be completed within a two-month period with email requests sent out to a total number of 446 instructors, inviting them to participate in the survey. Although the response rate was only 34.98 % (156 teachers), it was considered to be an excellent result. Details of the findings are shown below.

6.1. Demographics

Descriptive analysis was conducted to define the instructor profile. Each variable reported 80 (51.3 %) responses to demographic questions out of 156 overall respondents. The remaining 76 respondents had decided not to answer any of the demographical questions. It was also not mandatory to answer these questions. The frequency of each variable was obtained from the respondent's feedback received for each demographic question as stated in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic profile for descriptive analysis

Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	40	50
	Female	40	50
Marital Status	Single	12	7.7
	Married	66	42.3
	Widowed/ Divorced	2	1.3
Race	Malay	70	44.9
	Chinese	5	3.2
	Indian	2	1.3
	Others	3	1.9
Age	35 years and below	48	30.8
	36 – 45 years	20	12.8
	46 – 55 years	12	7.7
Age when entering teaching profession	25 years and below	39	25
	26 – 35 years	40	25.6
	36-45 years	1	0.6
Highest degree earned	Diploma in Teaching	1	0.6
	Bachelor Degree	67	42.9
	Master Degree	11	7.1
	Doctorate Degree	1	0.6

6.2. Job satisfaction factors

A set of 25 job satisfaction factors in the form of a statement were asked in the instrument to determine the dominant factor for job satisfaction associated with teaching. There were 91 respondents (58.33 %) who answered this section. Each statement was set applying the 5-point Likert type scale: strongly disagree, disagree, less agree, agree, and strongly agree. Table 2 lists the top five job-satisfaction factors received from the respondents, presented as the mean, from the descriptive analysis.

Table 2: TVET instructors' teaching job satisfaction factors

Rank	Job Satisfaction Factors	Mean	S.D.
1	I make a conscious effort to coordinate the content of my courses with that of other teachers	4.36	.68
2	I believe that the amount of tardiness and class cutting by students interferes with my teaching.	4.27	.91
3	The level of student misbehavior in this school interferes with my teaching	4.04	.99
4	The principal lets me know what is expected	3.89	.91
5	I understand clearly the goals and priorities for my school	3.89	.91

6.3. Retention

Each respondent was asked questions regarding their retention plans with each of their answers needing to satisfy the following three conditions: (1) "I plan to remain in this position", (2) "I plan to remain in this school", and (3) "I plan to remain in this profession". The five-point Likert type scale: strongly disagree, disagree, less agree, agree, and strongly agree, again was used to enable each respondent to answer the questions. The results of the three conditions are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 : TVET instructors' retention plan

No.	Retention Plan	N	Mean	S.D.
1	I plan to remain in this position	88	3.23	1.09
2	I plan to remain at this institution	88	3.30	1.24
3	I plan to remain in this profession	88	4.30	.83
Overall Mean of Retention Plan			3.61	

6.4. Job satisfaction factors and retention plans

The job satisfaction factors that were expected to lead towards the retention plans of the instructors were examined using multiple linear regression analysis. The predictors were collected from the 25 job satisfaction factors, also used as predictors, and were used as the data to perform the linear regression analysis. From the 25 job satisfaction factors, there were eight factors at the significant level of $p < .05$:

- (B1) "The principal lets me know what is expected";
- (B2) "Routine duties and paperwork interfere with my teaching";
- (B3) "My principal enforces school rules for student conduct and backs me up when I need it";
- (B4) "Rules for student behaviour are consistently enforced by me in this school, even for students who are not in my class";
- (B5) "I understand clearly the goals and priorities for my school";
- (B6) "I am given the support I need to teach students with special needs";
- (B7) "I believe that the amount of tardiness and class cutting by students interferes with my teaching"; and

(B8) "I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school".

The criterion variable was derived from the calculated mean values of the instructors' retention plan (see Table 3).

The linear combination of the job satisfaction factors was found to be significantly related to the instructors' retention plan, $F(25, 62) = 5.500, p < .000$. The sample multiple correlation was found to be 0.69, thereby indicating that approximately 48 % of the variance of the instructor retention plans were accounted for by the linear combination of job satisfaction factors. The equation for the current coefficient analysis is given below:

$$\text{Predicted Retention} = .375 (B1) - .184 (B2) - .314 (B3) + .320 (B4) + .337 (B5) - .271(B6) + .173 (B7) + .298 (B8) + .967$$

Table 4 presents the indices showing the relationship between each job satisfaction predictor with the dependent variable, and average retention plan. Three out of eight bivariate correlations between the job satisfaction factors and the retention plan were found to be negative, and the five indices were statistically found to be significant at $p < .05$. Although each variable was statistically significant, judgments about the relative importance concerning four of the five of the predictors were difficult to determine due to the small regression coefficient, and low correlation with the dependent variable. Furthermore, only one predictor was reported as meaningful as an 'influencing' factor displaying a moderate positive relationship (B8): "I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school."

7. Findings

Notably, the job satisfaction of teachers was an important indicator to identify whether a teacher would remain teaching. The findings from the study depicted many reasons to indicate each respondent's job satisfaction level and the main reasons why they wished to continue teaching. Furthermore, the descriptive analysis importantly ranked and identified the top five job-satisfaction factors, which are in agreement with the literature and identifying the extrinsic and intrinsic factors that contributed towards job satisfaction [27, 28, 29]. Indeed, instructors were found to be equally motivated by ensuring that the relevant curriculum was aligned with current practices and teaching methods. The results also agreed with the literature regarding the 'motivation' to teach, being a fundament and supportive argument.

In this study, the present findings correlated with many management and leadership aspects adopted within educational institutions. Within the school and educational environment, the leadership role of the principal is vital in motivating and supporting teachers to experience positive job satisfaction within their respective positions. Shaw and Newton investigated the impact of servant leadership, and if positively applied by administrative managers and principals, will inevitably support teacher retention and job satisfaction in educational institutions [29]. Moreover, teacher job satisfaction would inevitably flourish. This is further supported in a study by Bogler and Nair stating that 'Principals' who can constructively interact with teachers and students alike, will positively motivate students, and specifically teachers and their job satisfaction (i.e. care factor) [28].

Student disciplinary issues and disruptive behaviours have been recognised as one of the longer-standing problems in educational institutions (i.e. schools). The TVET educational institutions are constantly being badgered and harassed with student disciplinary problems, often leaving teachers facing the dilemma in constructively performing their teaching role within the learning environment. Understandably, students come from various backgrounds with attitudes that are often culturally motivated and entirely different, often resulting in excessive disciplinary issues which further contribute towards teacher anxiety and stress levels.

Student conflicts, add to a dysfunctional environment and provocation, and sometimes the bullying of parents towards teachers will also cause teachers to leave their profession [30]. Moreover, teachers continue to struggle with student conflict, and adverse encounters and notably could become much worse in the future without the needed support of school administrators and Principals. Furthermore, from the descriptive and regression analysis undertaken in this study, it is evident that teacher work overloads coupled with additional and often unnecessary tasks outside the scope of their teaching roles and responsibilities have become one of the major influential factors towards reduced job satisfaction. Moreover, the analysis regarding job satisfaction and motivation within an adverse school environment will tend to increase instructor

attrition rates [27]. Managing and coping with the stress associated with teaching is also heightened with the issues brought about by the lack of teaching materials and resources, coupled with excessive workloads and the inclusivity of educational institutions. Moreover, the problems related to TVET institutions in providing training and induction programs left many instructors experiencing severe anxiety and depression as indicated in the survey. This was also highlighted by Skaalvik and Skaalvik, pointing out stress and the workload of teachers must be increasingly tolerated, especially if they are also required to attend meetings, or perform paperwork outside of their regular teaching responsibilities and working hours [30].

Table 4: The Coefficients, Bivariate, and Partial Correlations of the Six Job Satisfaction Predictors with Retention Plan

No.	Predictors	Standardized Regression Coefficient (β)	p value	Correlation between each predictor and the retention plan	Correlation between each predictor and the retention plan controlling for all other predictors
B1	The principal lets me know what is expected	.41	.00	.47	.37
B2	Routine duties and paperwork interfere with my teaching	-.20	.04	-.07	-.25
B3	My principal enforces school rules for student conduct and backs me up when I need it	-.40	.01	-.35	-.33
B4	Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced by me in this school, even for students who are not in my class	.36	.01	.45	.31
B5	I understand clearly the goals and priorities for my school	.37	.01	.54	.34
B6	I am given the support I need to teach students with special needs	-.31	.00	.17	-.37
B7	I believe that the amount of tardiness and class cutting by students interferes with my teaching	.23	.02	.03	.30
B8	I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school	.40	.00	.55	.42

8. Conclusion

Therefore, in conclusion, to enhance instructor retention in the TVET school and institutional environment, rudimentary actions are urgently required to ensure the longevity of TVET curriculum and programs in schools. The degree of negativity imposed by teachers on TVET curriculum must be addressed and improved to ensure that educational programs do not suffer and become second-rate. Notably, in a positive light, TVET has positively contributed to becoming one of the major producers of skilled and semi-skilled employees in both developing and non-developed countries. Also, to ensure the future of skilled workers provided by TVET institutions, it is vital that the curriculum and teaching are maintained and well served. The job satisfaction of TVET instructors is equally, if not more critical within the context of job satisfaction and retention, not only looking at it from an external perspective but also through addressing the intrinsic values as well.

Nonetheless, the predetermination factor directly relating to why teachers are leaving the profession based on the findings of the survey and results formulated in this study by teaching instructors must be considered both from a practical and constructive viewpoint. Further, given the challenges and obstacles faced by some of the TVET instructors to enforce the influence and outcomes for TVET in Malaysia, regrettably, this may also

adversely influence other unintentional factors and 'mind-sets' such as enforcement policies if schools and teachers do not adopt TVET curriculum. Finally, while TVET instructors may be industry based practitioners, it may be difficult for TVET institutions to replace them, and therefore retaining them through support and motivational programs and proper training and induction may aid in boosting their teaching creativity.

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