

A Phenomenological Study on Faculty Job Satisfaction in the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the experiences and perceptions of job satisfaction among faculty members at KU. Utilizing a qualitative research approach, the study employed a phenomenological design. Thematic and content analysis methods were used to analyze the qualitative data obtained. The sample comprised 12 faculty members who participated in the study. The qualitative findings revealed a range of experiences and perceptions among KU faculty members regarding their job satisfaction, compensation, and training opportunities. While many participants expressed positive sentiments towards their job roles and the compensation they receive, there were also negative perspectives highlighted. Recommendations were proposed to address areas for improvement, aiming to enhance the overall job satisfaction of faculty members at KU. It is anticipated that the insights derived from this research will inform policymakers within higher education institutions, enabling them to implement strategies aimed at improving job satisfaction, compensation practices, and training opportunities for faculty members.

Keywords: Job Satisfaction, Compensation Pay, Training, Motivation, Academic Faculty

Introduction

In contemporary times, the role of faculty members has evolved to encompass greater responsibilities and challenges. Unlike in previous centuries when their duties were primarily confined to the classroom, faculty members now contend with additional tasks mandated by entities such as the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the Commission for Academic Accreditation, and university administrations. These expanded responsibilities present numerous challenges that can impact faculty members' job satisfaction.

Several studies, including those by Alemu & Pyktina (2020); Alfaki & Alkarani (2021); Al Serhan & Houjeir (2020), have underscored the significance of compensation and training opportunities in influencing faculty job satisfaction. This underscores the importance of

understanding faculty members' perceptions of job satisfaction, given their pivotal role in implementing educational strategies and policies and driving changes within the UAE's education sector.

Faculty members are integral to the realization of the UAE's educational objectives, as they shape the development of future generations while educating and preparing current ones. Consequently, it is imperative to grasp faculty members' feelings and perceptions regarding their job satisfaction. The erosion of job satisfaction among faculty members poses a significant challenge, prompting reforms and inspections aligned with the UAE Education Strategy to enhance satisfaction levels.

This emphasis on faculty satisfaction is reflected in the integration of faculty satisfaction assessments into the UAE's compliance inspection framework for higher educational institutions.

Background of Study

Faculty members face significant stress and demands in their roles within higher education, despite their evident dedication (Al Serhan & Houjeir, 2020). Serving as educators, mentors, and advisors, they bear responsibility for fostering student learning (Khan, Mumtaz, & Rakhman, 2020). The profession of academia presents formidable challenges in delivering high-quality education (Al Kurdi, 2021). Over the past two decades, there has been a notable proliferation of educational institutions, particularly in higher education, across the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Ababneh, 2020). According to the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) in the UAE, there are now 76 licensed institutions under its purview (CAA, 2018), indicating a corresponding rise in the number of academics.

Job satisfaction is paramount within the higher education work environment (Information Resources Management Association, 2017), as educators' productivity and commitment are closely linked to their satisfaction levels (In, 2016). Recognizing the need for enhanced job satisfaction, the UAE has made significant strides in improving the quality of higher education, albeit with challenges in effective implementation. The Dubai Education Exhibition & Conference (2014) highlights the UAE Government's acknowledgment of education as a pivotal enabler for achieving Vision 2021, emphasizing smart learning and human capital development.

Both His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Ruler of Abu Dhabi and President of the UAE, and His Highness Sheikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Ruler of Dubai, Prime Minister, and Vice President of the UAE, have voiced support for educational development and infrastructure enhancement. The Ministry of Education and Youth in the UAE has outlined a vision of high-quality education, emphasizing the cultivation of fundamental skills such as citizenship, communication, and adaptability, in line with societal and economic needs (Kirkpatrick, 2017). The increasing demand for quality education (Dubai Education Exhibition & Conference, 2014; Soomro & Ahmad, 2012) places added pressure on faculty to realize the objectives of "Education Vision 2020" (Kirkpatrick, 2017).

Literature Review

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to the emotional state stemming from staff members' experiences in the workplace (Perera, 2019). It encompasses individuals' thoughts and feelings regarding their job and the rewards they receive for their efforts, with higher levels of satisfaction correlating with improved job performance and overall well-being (Stewart & Brown, 2019).

Compensation, as described by Gheaus & Herzog (2016), encompasses all forms of remuneration, whether in the form of goods or money, provided directly or indirectly in exchange for work performed by employees. Heathfield (2012) further defines compensation as a fixed amount paid by employers to employees in return for their labor. The study's findings suggest that inadequate compensation can lead to emotional dissatisfaction among individuals. Training is characterized as the deliberate and structured process aimed at modifying an individual's behavior through various learning events, programs, and activities to equip them with the necessary competencies, skills, abilities, and knowledge for job satisfaction (Shohamy et al., 1992). It enables staff members to acquire the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to fulfill their job responsibilities, consequently shaping their attitudes and behaviors (Robert, 2017). Studies by Ganai et al (2019); Paposa & Kumar (2019) emphasize the role of training in enhancing staff members' capabilities and job satisfaction.

Compensation Pay

Numerous studies have emphasized the pivotal role of compensation in shaping job satisfaction, as individuals often remain in their positions due to satisfaction with their pay (Dulebohn & Werling, 2007). In the contemporary landscape, there is heightened emphasis on compensation as a key component of benefits packages. This focus stems from the recognition that adequate compensation fulfills individuals' financial needs, thereby enhancing overall job satisfaction and incentivizing commitment to work.

Salary, as highlighted by Muguongo et al (2015), represents a crucial aspect of compensation, serving as a means for individuals to align with organizational objectives and contribute effectively to organizational success. Ababneh (2020) further investigated the interplay between job satisfaction, organizational commitment, trust, met expectations, and the availability of job opportunities, finding that salary expectations significantly influence faculty members' intentions to remain in their roles. However, while salary meeting expectations was a factor, it did not overwhelmingly contribute to faculty members' intent to stay.

Moreover, research conducted by Welch et al (2019) underscores the importance faculty members attribute to salary, highlighting widespread dissatisfaction in this regard. Consequently, low job satisfaction among faculty necessitates attention to improving benefits and ensuring job security. The dissatisfaction stemming from inadequate compensation can lead to faculty turnover, indicating discontent with salary levels and associated consequences.

Training

Training refers to the deliberate and structured efforts aimed at modifying an individual's behavior through various learning events, programs, and activities, with the goal of attaining the necessary competencies, skills, abilities, and knowledge for job satisfaction (Shohamy et al., 1992). It is the means through which staff members acquire the requisite capabilities to effectively execute their roles (Robert, 2017). Through training initiatives, individuals gain knowledge, skills, and abilities, and adapt their attitudes and behaviors accordingly, constituting an organized process geared towards capability acquisition and maintenance. This process is intricately linked with job satisfaction, as it aligns individuals with both current job requirements and future professional aspirations, such as preparing individuals for potential advancements or promotions. Thus, training is viewed as a strategic approach to meet both present and future job-related needs.

Research Methodology

There are various methods and procedures used in this research study to investigate, explore and analyze the data so research questions can be answered. This s provides research methodology of this study. For this study, qualitative research design is selected because the focus of the research is on exploration of faculty experiences of job satisfaction. It will be studied the lived experiences of faculty concerning satisfaction of job based on in-depth reflective description.

Instruments (Questionnaire)

During phenomenological interviews, the researcher plays a dual role as an interpreter and guide, assisting participants in exploring their lived experiences. However, there exists a risk that the qualitative researcher may unintentionally inject their own assumptions, beliefs, and biases into the data analysis process, potentially skewing the results.

To counteract this possibility, the researcher employs strategies such as rigorous questioning, active listening, and full disclosure to neutralize personal biases. In this study, specific measures are taken to tackle these challenges. The researcher actively collaborates with faculty members to validate the accuracy of the collected data and information. Additionally, the integration of pertinent and substantial quotations from participants serves to bolster the credibility, validity, and transferability of the findings. Subsequent to each interview, faculty members are given the opportunity to review the summarized information for precision, ensuring that their viewpoints are faithfully portrayed.

The continuous communication and guidance offered by faculty members play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of the study and refining its thematic elements (Lingard, 2019). This collaborative approach fosters a more comprehensive comprehension of participants' lived experiences while mitigating the potential influence of researcher bias.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This study employs a qualitative approach for data analysis and interpretation. Utilizing qualitative methods allows for a comprehensive exploration of previously unknown insights, particularly through the analysis of interview data. By engaging with focus group participants via interviews, this study can gather detailed information, facilitating flexibility in the research process. The research objectives and questions necessitate a study conducted in a natural setting, focusing on understanding the meanings and experiences of participants, who in this case are faculty members, within their specific contexts. This involves examining the actions, situations, and events in which participants are involved, considering the interplay of various factors, such as the causes of job satisfaction among faculty members. The research questions will be systematically addressed by presenting and analyzing the collected data in a narrative format. This research study employs thematic content analysis of interviews, focus groups, documentation, and observations to elucidate the specific nuances related to the identified problem and issue, such as faculty members' job satisfaction. Furthermore, narrative data presents an opportunity to delve into the detailed context, revealing events that influence faculty members' decisions and shape their professional lives. Transcripts from interviews and focus groups will undergo analysis using a thematic and content analysis approach. The study involves developing textural descriptions followed by the creation of structural descriptions based on the data collected from faculty members and thematic analysis, (Anderson, 2019).

Result and Discussions

The interview results revealed both favorable and unfavorable themes relevant to the research inquiries. Faculty members contributed their perspectives and experiences, aiding in the interpretation of questions and offering guidance regarding job satisfaction, training opportunities, and compensation. Consequently, diverse faculty participation unveiled similar themes and trends highlighting positive and negative experiences.

In Table 4.3, a summary of faculty perceptions regarding compensation pay is presented. This includes categories such as strongly positive comments, positive comments, neutral comments, no comments, negative comments, and strongly negative comments, along with the corresponding number of participants and their percentages. All faculty members actively engaged in sharing their views on compensation pay, resulting in a full participation rate of 100%.

Constituents	Number of Participants (N=12)	Percent of Total
Strongly Positive Comments	2	17%
Positive Comments	6	50%
Neutral Comments	0	0%
Did not Comment	0	0%
Negative Comments	3	25%
Strongly Negative Comments	1	8%

Similarly, Table 4.4 outlines a summary of faculty perceptions concerning training opportunities. It encompasses categories like strongly positive comments, positive comments, neutral comments, no comments, negative comments, and strongly negative comments, along with the corresponding number of participants and their percentages. All faculty members participated in sharing their thoughts on training opportunities, demonstrating a complete participation rate of 100%.

Constituents	Number of Participants (N=12)	Percent of Total
Strongly Positive Comments	3	25%
Positive Comments	6	50%
Neutral Comments	0	0%
Did not Comment	0	0%
Negative Comments	1	8%
Strongly Negative Comments	2	17%

Conclusion

The research study delved into faculty members' perceptions at KU, revealing predominantly positive experiences. Job satisfaction was reported by 75% of participants, citing enjoyment in teaching and student interactions. Compensation was perceived as generous, though improvements tied to performance were suggested. Regarding training, workshops were preferred for enhancing job-specific competencies and confidence. However, the work environment was noted for interruptions and noise levels, with recommendations for

individual offices to improve comfort. Overall, while satisfaction prevailed, opportunities for enhancement in compensation, training, and workspace were identified.

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