Job Satisfaction and Mental Wellbeing among High School Teachers in Malaysia

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Job satisfaction plays an important role in regard to teachers' continuation in the teaching profession. School-based factors such as relations with colleagues, parents, and student behavior are important factors that contribute to teachers' fulfillment in their workplace. This study examined the relationship between job satisfaction and wellbeing among high school teachers in Malaysia. A total of 111 full-time high school teachers (99 females, 12 males) from two schools located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, completed measures of the Teacher Job Satisfaction Scale and Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale. Data were analyzed using correlation coefficient and regression analysis. The results indicated significant positive correlation between teachers' job satisfaction and wellbeing. More specifically, teachers' satisfaction with students' behavior and students' parents were significant predictors of mental wellbeing. This study highlighted job satisfaction that teachers themselves may have for positive personal relationship with co-workers, students, and student's parents, providing further understanding of the contribution of job satisfaction to teachers' mental wellbeing. This study helps complement previous studies by providing a further understanding on the contribution of job satisfaction to teachers' wellbeing in the Malaysian context.

Keywords: Job satisfaction, High school teacher, Wellbeing, Educational research, Malaysian teachers

Teachers play a vital role in the development of students' academic achievements. Teachers are also contributors to social transformation and are regarded as individuals who shape future leaders. Thus, teachers' involvement in the field of education is multifaceted, as they undertake not only teaching but also matters related with curriculum, students, parents, the school community and departmental initiatives (Korkmaz, 2007). In recent years, policymakers and educators around the world have taken initiatives to understand issues related to the professional status of teachers, quality of teaching, teacher retention, and shortage of teachers in the field of education (Gao & Trent, 2009; Struyven, Jacobs, & Dochy,

2013; Weissblei, 2013). Studies have indicated that teachers who experience greater wellbeing are more likely to implement teaching methods that encourage students' autonomy and reduce custodial control (Acton & Glasgow, 2015; Zee & Koomen, 2016). In addition, teachers who experience higher levels of job satisfaction are those who feel more empowered within the organization (Duan, Du, & Yu, 2018).

In Malaysia, studies have indicated that teacher retention is strongly associated with high levels of job satisfaction (Abdullah, Uli, & Parasuraman, 2009; Mukundan & Khandehroo, 2010). Over the years, efforts to address job satisfaction of teachers have led to various educational reforms designed to improve the status of teachers in Malaysia (Lee, 2018). It is important to determine how teachers feel about their role in the field of education, as this has serious implications to meet their psychological wellbeing as well as contribute to the overall attrition rate within this profession. Job satisfaction refers to a sense of fulfillment, gratification, and satisfaction from working in an occupation (Locke, 1969). Researchers (Mathis & Jackson, 2004) have found that teachers who are less satisfied with their jobs are more likely to leave the teaching profession, because the attitudinal nature of job satisfaction implies that an individual would tend to stay with a satisfying job and quit a dissatisfying job. In concept, job satisfaction indicates the degree to which the expectations in a person's psychological contract are fulfilled in response to the physical and social conditions of his or her workplace (Ivancevich, Olekalns, & Matteson, 1997; Pool, 1997). Therefore, job satisfaction is important in regard to teachers' continuation in the teaching profession. Teachers who do not feel a sense of belonging in the school may contribute to higher attrition rates in the profession. On the other hand, schools play an important role in cultivating a sense of belonging

among teachers as well as students (Duan et al, 2018; Leow, Leow, & Wong, 2019). Hence, school culture plays a significant role in affecting teachers' job satisfaction as well as wellbeing.

According to Dinham and Scott (1998), the sources of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction may be classified into three domains: (1) intrinsic reward of teaching, (2) factors extrinsic to the school, and (3) school-based factors. The intrinsic rewards of teaching concern the actual work of teaching, working with students, as well as seeing students learn and develop, all of which are intrinsic motivation for becoming a teacher and a main source of satisfaction among teachers (Scott, Stone, & Dinham, 2001). Factors extrinsic to the school include imposed educational change, external evaluation of schools, negative portrayal of teachers in the media, and a decrease in the status in teaching. School-based factors or contextual variables at school may include relations with colleagues and parents, student behavior, and the values emphasized at the local school (Pepe, 2011; Pepe, Addimando, & Veronese, 2017). The present study focuses on the latter, which looks at relations between these school-based factors and how they relate to teachers' job satisfaction and in turn affecting teachers' mental wellbeing.

In retrospect, job satisfaction in teaching is derived from the gratification of higher order needs, such as positive social relationship rather than lower order needs, such as paid incentives (Sylvia & Hutchinson, 1985). In fact, recent research showed that interpersonal relationships play an important part in the environment where teachers work (Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt, & Vanroelen, 2014). Teachers who establish stronger interpersonal relationships in their profession may prove to stay on the job compared to those who do not have strong relational ties in the workplace. Moreover, satisfaction with

regards to establishing positive relationships with co-workers, parents, and students mitigates some of the adverse effects of teaching work (Cano-Garcia, Padilla-Munoz, & Carrasco-Ortiz, 2005; Gavish & Friedman, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017), the need for relatedness refers to a feeling of being connected to others and maintain a satisfying relationship with one's social circle. Teaching is an inherently interpersonal and caring profession (Noddings, 2013). The need to experience strong interpersonal relationships is central to human psychological functioning (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Thus, teachers are individuals who are in constant contact with students as well as peers in their everyday job. Teachers' feelings of belonging to the school, where they are teaching, have not been systematically studied in research related to teachers, whereas students' sense of belonging to the school has been shown to be positively related to motivation (Leow, Lee, & Lynch, 2016; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009), satisfaction (Lee & Teh, 2016), and academic wellbeing (Nisbet, Zelenski, & Murphy, 2011).

The relational aspect of job satisfaction and feeling a sense of belonging to the school among teachers are important in several ways. Firstly, there is broad consensus among researchers that the most common source of job satisfaction among teachers is their relationship with students (Pepe & Addimando, 2013). Teachers' relationships with students are often listed as top contributing factors toward teachers' job satisfaction (Split, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). Studies conducted on teachers' motivation to enter teaching have shown that the opportunity to work closely with students is a strong motive for entering and staying in the profession (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Klassen, Al-Dhafri, Hannok, & Betts, 2011). Such motives are more intrinsic in nature. However, problems with classroom management and disruptive student behavior are not only important causes of teacher attrition early in the career (Split et al., 2011) but also appear to be factors contributing to teacher stress and emotional wellbeing later in the career (Tatar & Horenczyk, 2003). Thus, a strong teacher-student relationship leads to greater engagement and positive emotions between students and teachers (Klassen, Perry, & Frenzel, 2012), which may lead to higher levels of job satisfaction for teachers.

Secondly, workplace relationships play a crucial role in the work organization (Ellickson & Logsdon, 2001). Employee wellbeing is greatly embedded in a system of social exchange among supervisors, subordinates, and co-workers (Kim, Lee, & Wong, 2016; Obschonka & Silbereisen, 2015). In particular, the relationship between employees and their co-workers has been found to be positively related to employees' overall job satisfaction (Biggio & Cortese, 2013; Hausser, Mojzisch, Niesel, & Schulz-Hardt, 2010; Luchman & González-Morales, 2013) because meaningful and satisfying relationship with others predict human flourishing and psychological wellbeing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Simon, Judge, & Halvorsen-Ganepola (2010) conducted a study to investigate the effects of attitudes towards co-workers and daily wellbeing. Results of their study found that job satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between daily co-worker satisfaction and life satisfaction, suggesting that job satisfaction plays a significant role in the wellbeing of school teachers (Simon, Judge, & Halvorsen-Ganepola, 2010).

Finally, in line with the current thinking about social aspects of teachers' job satisfaction, the third dimension focuses on the relationship between teachers and students' parents. The teacher-parent relationship quality points to the affective quality of home-school connection, which

emphasizes trust, mutuality, affiliation, support, shared values, expectations and beliefs between the teacher and parents concerning the wellbeing of the student (Vickers & Minke, 1995). Studies have explored the importance of parental involvement for children's school achievements, suggesting that families should actively involve themselves and to be included in the school processes (Fan & Chen, 2001; Houtenville & Conway, 2008; Jeynes, 2007, 2010). Recent findings also indicated that the relationship between teachers and parents significantly predicted teachers' motivation and job satisfaction (Kiran & Sungur, 2018). Therefore, parents' trust and support play a vital role in teachers' satisfaction in the teaching profession and wellbeing.

Wellbeing is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon, which encompasses eudaimonia and hedonic (Deci & Ryan, 2001; Ryff, 1989). Mental wellbeing is one aspect of wellbeing that describe positive states of being, thinking, behaving and feeling. Moreover, mental wellbeing covers both perspectives of wellbeing: 1) the hedonic perspective, which focuses on the subjective experience of happiness (affect) and life satisfaction; and 2) the eudaimonic perspective which focuses on positive psychological functioning, good relationships with other people and self-realization (Tennant et al., 2007). The present study attempts to capture a wide concept of wellbeing by examining teacher's mental wellbeing, which comprises both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives of wellbeing.

Despite the widespread studies on teachers' job satisfaction, there have been relatively few studies that have tested teachers' job satisfaction in respect to relational satisfaction with co-workers, students, and parents in predicting mental wellbeing. To this end, studies on teachers' job satisfaction is also limited in Malaysia. Thus, this study aimed to explore the relationship between job satisfaction and mental wellbeing among high school teachers in Malaysia. We hypothesized the following:

H1: There will be a positive association between teachers' satisfaction with co-workers' and teachers' wellbeing,

H2: There will be a positive association between teachers' satisfaction with students' behavior and teachers' wellbeing, and

H3: There will be a positive association between teachers' satisfaction with parents and teachers' wellbeing.

Method

Participants

The sample in this study consisted of $N = 111$ (male = 10.8%; female = 89.2%) full-time high school teachers in two secondary schools located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The teachers were between 20 to 59 years old ($SD = 9.18$, $M = 40.9$). The sample comprised of teachers who graduated with a high school certificate (1.8%), diploma (3.6%), bachelor's degree (85.6%), and post-graduate degree (9%). The data collection was administered in the schools by a trained researcher.

Measures

The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS, Tennant et al., 2007). The original 14-item WEMWBS scale measures participants' mental wellbeing during the past two weeks (e.g., "I've been feeling relaxed"). Responses were made on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time). Studies have indicated that the WEMWBS has good validity and reliability for measuring mental wellbeing (Tennant et al. 2007). The WEMWBS yielded good internal consistency, with $\alpha = .91$.

Teacher Job Satisfaction Scale (TJSS-9, Pepe, 2011; Pepe, Addimando, & Veronese, 2017). The TJSS-9 is a questionnaire aimed at measuring job

satisfaction that has been specifically developed for use in educational contexts. The TJSS-9 is composed of three dimensions: satisfaction with co-workers (3 items), satisfaction with parents (3 items), and satisfaction with students' behaviors (3 items). The items are rated on a 5-point scale (1 = very unsatisfied, 5 = very satisfied). Reliability for satisfaction with co-workers ($\alpha = .84$), satisfaction with student's behaviors ($\alpha = .84$), and satisfaction with parents ($\alpha = .74$) as estimated by Cronbach's alpha yielded good internal consistency.

Results

Table 1 shows the zero order correlations between the study variables as well as statistical means and standard deviations. Results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between teacher's satisfaction with co-workers and mental wellbeing ($r = .23$, $p < .05$). Similarly, the relationship between teachers' satisfaction with student's behavior and mental wellbeing also indicated a significant positive relationship ($r = .38$, $p < .01$). Finally, the results also indicated that there was a relationship between teachers' satisfaction with parents and mental wellbeing ($r = .28$, $p < .01$).

Table 1: *Zero order correlations and descriptive statistics (N = 111)*

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Satisfaction with co-worker	-			
2. Satisfaction with student's behavior	.18	-		
3. Satisfaction with parents	.26**	.20*	-	
4. Wellbeing	.23*	.38**	.28**	-
M	4.00	2.88	3.04	3.52
SD	.62	.61	.54	.52

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

Multiple linear regression was used to examine teachers' mental wellbeing and job satisfaction (see Table 2). Results indicated a significant regression equation between teachers' job satisfaction domains and mental wellbeing, $F(3, 107) = 8.949$, $p < .001$, and accounted for 21% of the total variance in teachers' mental wellbeing. The regression analysis indicated that satisfaction with students' behavior was found to have a positive coefficient, which significantly predicted teachers' mental wellbeing ($\beta = .32$, $p < .01$). Further, the regression analysis results showed that satisfaction with parents significantly predicted teachers' mental wellbeing ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$). However, results showed that satisfaction with co-workers was not a significant predictor of teachers' mental wellbeing for the samples in our study.

Table 2: *Results of Linear Regression Analysis with Mental Wellbeing (N = 111)*

Variables	B	Std. Error	β	t	p-value
Satisfaction with co-worker	.10	.08	.12	1.65	.177
Satisfaction with student's behavior	.27	.08	.32	3.59	.001**

| Satisfaction with parents | .18 | .09 | .19 | 2.26 | .040* |

Note. **, $p < .01$, *, $p < .05$.
$R = .45$, R2 $= .21$, $F = 8.949$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

The present study examined the contribution of job satisfaction in predicting mental wellbeing among high school teachers in Malaysia. Specifically, our study focused on the relational aspect of job satisfaction. According to theoretical models of relationships, teachers' emotional involvement with co-workers, students, and students' parents are driven by a basic psychological need for relatedness or communion. Results from this study provided evidence to support the proposition that teachers' job satisfaction are important predictors of teachers' mental wellbeing. Teachers' job satisfaction is also influenced by the relational aspect of their profession with people whom they have contact on a daily basis.

By examining job satisfaction on a relational aspect, we may learn more about the mechanisms that can potentially be used to promote teachers' sense of motivation and mental wellbeing in their workplace. Teachers who perceive higher levels of interaction with their students tend to feel more related and have higher levels of job satisfaction. Therefore, higher levels of job satisfaction can be an important indicator to improve teachers' attrition rate (Virtanen, Vaaland, & Ertesvåg, 2019).

The first hypothesis predicted a significant positive relationship between teachers' satisfaction with co-workers and teachers' mental wellbeing. Although bivariate correlations indicated a significant relationship between teachers' satisfaction with co-workers and teachers' mental wellbeing ($r = .24$, $p < .05$), results from the regression analysis showed that teachers' satisfaction with co-workers did not significantly predict teachers' mental

wellbeing. Gil-Monte (2005) argued that within organizations, there are processes of contagion among workers' emotions in such a way that a bad environment, as experienced by one person, can be passed on to others by personal relationships (Rodríguez-Mantilla & Fernández-Díaz, 2017). Based on the correlation results, we suggest that job satisfaction ties to teachers' relationships with their co-workers and is associated to teachers' mental wellbeing. Organizational climate plays a vital role in employees' job satisfaction. When working environments are conducive and positive, teachers will then develop a sense of belonging and relatedness with their peers within the organization (Makhathini & Van Dyk, 2018), which may directly impact their job satisfaction. Besides, school culture and school effectiveness also directly impact teachers' job satisfaction. Teachers are more motivated to work in positive school cultures. In turn, teachers' job satisfaction impact school cultures as well as teachers' emotions towards their profession (Duan et al., 2018).

Consistent with previous findings, our results supported the second hypothesis. The result of our study found that teachers' satisfaction with students' behaviors were positively correlated with teachers' mental wellbeing ($r = .36$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, regression analysis indicated that teachers' satisfaction with students' behaviors was a significant predictor of teachers' mental wellbeing ($\beta = .33$, $p < .01$), accounting for unique variance in teachers' mental wellbeing. Again, this is consistent with previous findings, which suggested that teachers' relationship quality with students has been an important source of teachers' mental wellbeing (Milatz, Lüftenegger, & Schober, 2015; Virtanen et al., 2019). When teachers feel more related to their

students, they experience higher levels of job satisfaction, which may in turn contribute to their positive mental wellbeing. The present findings further strengthened our understanding on teachers' job satisfaction. It could be argued that teachers spend most of their working time in the classroom, which makes teacher and student relationships the most likely element to fulfil the need for belongingness and satisfaction (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Interpersonal relationships with students as a source of fulfilment of the need for belongingness could, thus, aid our understanding for teachers' job satisfaction and wellbeing. Furthermore, frequent interaction with students may also improve interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, which can impact teachers' perceived job satisfaction (Virtanen et al., 2019) and overall mental wellbeing.

Finally, the results of this study supported the third hypothesis. We found that teachers' satisfaction with parents was positively correlated with teachers' mental wellbeing ($r = .31$, $p < .01$). Results from the regression analysis further strengthened our hypothesis, indicating that teachers' satisfaction with parents positively predicted teachers' mental wellbeing ($\beta = .21$, $p < .05$). As demonstrated in past findings, the pressure and demands from students' parents positively predicted teacher burnout and are indirectly related to job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). Teachers who feel emotionally burnt out experience many different types of stressors in the profession, one of which is relations with parents (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Thus, mediating processes may need to be put in place to provide teachers avenues of managing parent-teacher relationships. Teachers are vital for social transformation. Hence, studies should examine factors that may contribute to the overall job dissatisfaction to improve the overall

sentiments of teachers in their profession on a long-term basis (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017).

Limitations and Future Implications

There were few limitations to our study, some of which might serve to inform future research. First, our study was derived from a fairly small sample size, which could potentially increase the margin of error in our findings. Second, our sample consisted of predominantly female participants due to an over-represented female population in the teaching profession in Malaysia. As such, overall results are not to be directly generalized to teachers in Malaysia as a whole. Third, the data for this study was drawn from a cross-sectional sample. Hence, future studies would benefit from the use of longitudinal or qualitative designs to gather more in-depth information with regards to teachers' job satisfaction and mental wellbeing in the Malaysian context. Fourth, our study relied on self-reported measures, which allowed for the possibility of our results being influenced by common method variance. This concern may be somewhat mitigated by participants having to provide multiple ratings of each attitudinal construct and by the centering of variables around individuals' mean scores. Such centering removes many between-individual differences that can bias responses. Despite the limitations, the current study highlighted the importance of teachers' job satisfaction and mental wellbeing in their workplace in Malaysia.

This study helps complement previous studies by providing a further understanding on the contribution of job satisfaction to teachers' mental wellbeing in the Malaysian context. Specifically, this study highlighted job satisfaction that teachers themselves may have for positive, personal relationships with co-workers, students, and student's parents, which is associated to teachers' mental wellbeing. The implications of our findings are important for educators and policymakers

alike. Teaching is a stressful occupation (Kyriacou, 2000). Therefore, improving teachers' sense of job satisfaction can help reduce costs associated with high levels of teacher stress that include teacher absenteeism and teacher illness (Billingsley & Cross 1992). In many cases, teachers are the agents of change, and having an insight in teachers' mental wellbeing might add to the dissemination of intervention programs in schools as well as reduce the attrition rate among teachers (Lochman, 2003). Future studies may also examine other relational aspects such as trust (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2012), organizational commitment (Ahmad, Komal Javed, & Hamad, 2014) in impacting teachers' level of job satisfaction and mental wellbeing, as these are important elements in building a sense of belonging as well as relatedness with students, parents, and peers for teachers.

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