

Teacher satisfaction: some practical implications for teacher professional development models

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INTRODUCTION¹

Ever since the 1930s, Organizational Psychology has been devoting a great deal of attention to the study of job satisfaction. This has happened for three main reasons: historical and/or cultural (from both a historical and a cultural viewpoint, increasing value has been attached to the quality of life at work, which is regarded more and more as a space of personal development); functional (not only for its intrinsic value as psychological variable directly affecting behaviour, but also because job satisfaction is a construct with implications and consequences on other attitudes, at individual as well as at organizational level); and practical (it is a variable which can be easily measured and used).

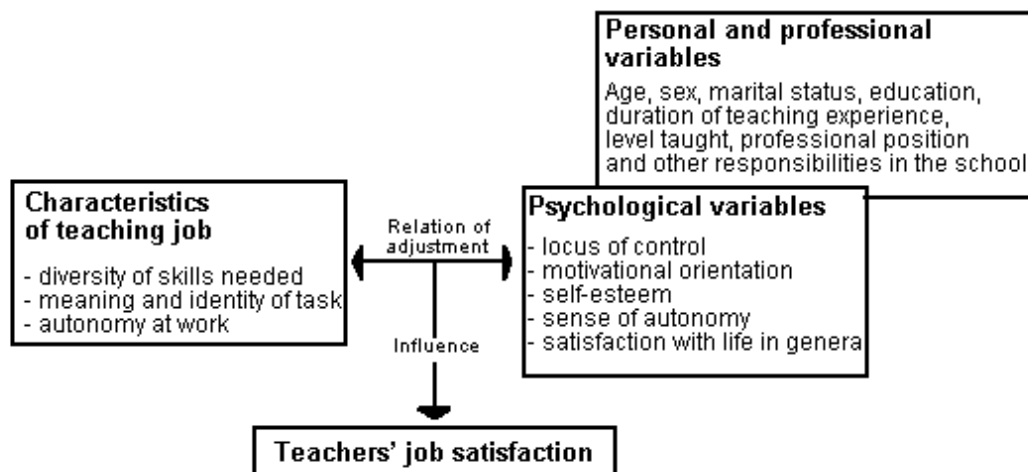
For a number of years, also teacher job satisfaction has been recognized as extremely important for implementing any type of education reform, for involving the teacher in life-long learning, for the quality of the teaching-learning process, and for satisfaction with life in general.

This is the framework of the present empirical study, conducted with the objective of clarifying the aspects of teaching to be encouraged and the psychological processes to be promoted so as to obtain the best possible adjustment (as condition of satisfaction) between teachers' personal features and a professional activity requiring very specific characteristics.

1. Research Question

Taking into account the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) and the Theory of Work Adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984), we devised a theoretical model which constitutes the starting point of our research and is illustrated in chart 1.

Chart 1 - Exploratory conceptualization of a model of adjustment in teaching



According to such conceptualization, the feeling of well-being in teaching would be influenced by the

degree of adjustment between a professional activity we consider challenging, potentially innovative and involving a variety of skills, and some of the teacher's psychological variables. Professional and personal variables could influence, albeit indirectly, such psychological constructs.

A review of the existing literature enabled us to verify that a predominantly internal locus of control, an intrinsic motivational orientation, a positive self-esteem, a certain degree of autonomy at work and satisfaction with life in general were some of the teacher's personality features involved in the adjustment relation underlying the above model.

The personal variables included in the model were age, sex, marital status, and education; as regards professional variables, we considered aspects such as level taught, professional position, duration of teaching experience as well as other responsibilities in the school.

The theoretical framework outlined above represented the basis for the formulation of our **research question**, which is centred around the assessment of the predictive efficacy of psychological constructs and of socio-demographic variables in teachers' job satisfaction.

Thus the present empirical study was conducted with the following **objectives** :

- assess the relative contribution of factors intrinsic to work (such as how interesting and challenging the job actually is) and of those which are extrinsic (pay, promotions, physical working conditions) in Portuguese teachers' satisfaction;
- assess the predictive efficiency of some psychological constructs (such as self-esteem, locus of control, motivation to work, etc.) in teachers' satisfaction;
- assess the predictive power of personal variables (such as age, sex, marital status, and education) and professional variables (level taught, duration of teaching experience, professional position) in teacher satisfaction.

2. SOME METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

This cross-study was based on a **sample** of 752 teachers working in the Portuguese 2nd and 3rd cycles of primary and secondary education in 20 schools, selected randomly, of the Western region. The average age of the teachers in the sample was 34,5 years and their average teaching experience was 9,7 years. Most of them had a university degree (Portuguese licentiate degree) (73,4%); 57,3% were tenured teachers at their schools; of these, 75,3% had other responsibilities besides teaching (for instance, group director, i.e., teacher responsible for a specific group of students or level coordinator).

To measure the **independent variables** of psychological nature we used especially Likert-type scales (except for the locus of control, which was evaluated through a forced-choice scale with two alternatives), whose names and authors are contained in the table 2.

Table 2 - Independent psychological variables

Variable	Scale
Satisfaction with life in general	The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985)
Motivational orientation	Work Preference Inventory (Amabile et al., 1985)
Self-esteem	Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)
Teacher's sense of autonomy	Teacher Autonomy Scale (Pearson & Hall, 1988)
Locus of control	Teacher Role Survey (Maes & Anderson, 1985)

To measure the **dependent variable** of our study, we used a professional satisfaction tool devised by Lester (1982) on the basis of Maslow's and Herzberg's theoretical models - the *Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire* (TJSQ), a Likert-type scale of 5 points.

Some of the tools were previously translated and adapted to the Portuguese teaching context. After analysing the items and studying their reliability and validity, these tools turned out to be internally consistent and well-defined by the items, and they presented factors which were logically congruent with those mentioned in the literature. In other words, the measurements applied in our study revealed satisfactory psychometric characteristics, suggesting that all these instruments evaluate the variables they seek to measure in a consistent manner, as can be seen from the table 3².

Table 3 - Psychometric characterization of instruments (i.v.)

	Factorial structure	α
SWLS (5 items)	Unidimensional (satisfaction with life in general)	.85
WPI (21 items)	F1 – intrinsic motivation (n=13)	.80
	F2 – extrinsic motivation (n=8)	.67
	TOTAL WPI	.75
TRS (24 items)	Low degree of interpretability	.81
ROS (10 items)	Unidimensional (self-esteem)	.81
TAS (17 items)	F1 – general autonomy (n=10)	.79
	F2 – autonomy in the curriculum (n=7)	.63
	TOTAL TAS	.77

The same can be said about the *Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire* (TJSQ), instrument used to measure teachers' satisfaction. As can be seen in the table 4, the TJSQ also presents a factorial structure consistent with that present in the literature, and includes the five following factors: 1. nature of work itself; 2. personal rewards; 3. physical working conditions; 4. relationship with colleagues; 5. relationship with management bodies. As regards the values of alpha per factor, these can be considered highly adequate, especially if we take into account the fact that 2 of them comprise only 8 items. An alpha value of .91 for the total TJSQ translates a fairly good reliability.

Table 4 - Psychometric characterization of instruments (d.v.)

Factorial structure		α
TJSQ (70 items)	F1 – nature of work itself (n=21)	.86
	F2 – personal rewards (n= 19)	.85
	F3 – physical working conditions (n= 8)	.89
	F4 – relationship with colleagues (n= 14)	.84
	F5 – relationship with management bodies (n=8)	.88
TOTAL TJSQ		.91

3. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

We will now present the main result of our research on the basis of the established working hypotheses. The **first hypothesis** was the following:

- aspects intrinsic to work (such as it being interesting and the sense of responsibility and achievement it provides), as compared to extrinsic factors (such as salary and promotions), seem to have more influence on satisfaction in the teaching profession.

To test such assumption empirically, we used Fisher's Z transformation, a statistical test suitable to evaluate differences between correlations. The results obtained allow us to conclude that the nature of work itself (F1 in TJSQ) is more significantly associated with teachers' job satisfaction than the remaining factors.

The **second hypothesis** was that psychological constructs (such as motivation, sense of autonomy, self-esteem, and locus of control) present a greater predictive value for teacher job satisfaction than socio-demographic variables (such as age, sex, education, and professional position).

To test this hypothesis, we opted for a hierarchical regression model³. A review of the relevant literature showed that psychological constructs could have a greater predictive value in teacher job satisfaction than socio-demographic variables. For this reason, we decided that in the model of hierarchical regression we should introduce first the independent psychological variables (*locus* of control, satisfaction with life in general, sense of autonomy, self-esteem and motivation), and then the socio-demographic ones (first the professional and then the personal ones), to check whether they revealed any additional predictive efficiency (even though they are considered less important)

A synthesis of the main conclusions resulting from the resolution of the hierarchical regression equation when applied to the results obtained for 752 teachers in the sample is contained in the table.

Table 5- Presentation of results for TJSQ

Variables	Predictores	Adjusted R ²
Total TJSQ	PV	45.3%
	PV + SDV	47.6%
		Sig Ch = .000
Nature of work itself(F1)	PV	42,1%
	PV+SDV	44.7%
		Sig Ch = .000
Personal rewards(F 2)	PV	25.7%
	PV+SDV	30.7%
		Sig Ch = .000
Physical working conditions (F 3)	PV	7.3%
	PV+SDV	11.3%
		Sig Ch = .000
Relationship with colleagues (F 4)	PV	18%
	PV+SDV	18.1%
		Sig Ch = .505
Relationship with management (F 5)	PV	12.1%
	PV+SDV	18.4%
		Sig Ch = .000

PV= psychological vars; SDV= sociodemographic vars

The different hierarchical regression equations (calculated for job satisfaction in general, measured by the TJSQ, and for its five subscales), led us to the global conclusion that psychological variables have more predictive power than socio-demographic variables in analysing teacher job satisfaction. Thus, the personality features studied seem to play a more relevant differentiating role in explaining teachers' satisfaction than the classical variables, which, however, still explain a significant part of this satisfaction.

In practical terms, we see, for example, that as regards job satisfaction in general (measured by TJSQ), psychological variables explain 45,3% of the variance of teacher job satisfaction; when we add socio-demographic variables, the percentage of variance explained rises to 47,6%, a 2,3% difference which, however, represents a significant increase, if we take into account the value of Significant Change (Sig Ch). A similar rationale can be applied to the different subscales of the TJSQ, except for F4, where only psychological variables seem to have a significant predictive power.

The results obtained allow us to confirm our research hypotheses and match the theoretical assumptions and the empirical data at the basis of our study. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the results obtained reveal:

- a greater importance of the intrinsic dimension of work (such as the fact of being mentally interesting and challenging, of giving an individual a sense of-achievement and a certain diversity and autonomy);
- a greater efficiency of the constructs related to personality features (such as locus of control, self-esteem and intrinsic motivation) in predicting teachers' job satisfaction *vis-à-vis* socio-demographic ones.

4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The data obtained from the present research have some clear practical implications, showing how important it is to implement a system of incentives which develops not only the extrinsic aspects (remuneration, opportunity for career advancement and personal recognition) but also the intrinsic components of teaching. However dealing with a progressively "enriched" job presupposes certain personality features: Thus, there is a great need for preparing teachers for job enrichment. Such preparation can be facilitated by setting up selective mechanisms to enter the teaching profession based on personality criteria.

In our view, the results obtained show that programmes for teacher professional development (including initial and continuing education) must give greater relevance to the structuring of strategies to help build and develop personality skills. These should be selected among those which lead to a better adjustment to the teaching practice and context and, consequently, to a feeling of well-being and satisfaction.

In sum, the results allow us to emphasize the indispensability of working on the present or future teacher's personality, attitudes, affections and emotions to create a feeling of success and well-being in a markedly

relational profession. Therefore, the personality traits of a potential teacher have to be given a great deal of attention from the very moment he or she enters the teaching profession. Though personality skills can be developed through special programmes, an early identification/screening of candidates clearly unsuitable for the teaching profession represents an invaluable contribution. These individuals might thus be redirected towards professions which better match their competences and motivations, while at same time the education system will be spared many dissatisfied and disillusioned teachers.

Both in initial and continuing education, "teachers' psychological training programmes must aim especially at changing attitudes and cognitions" (Gonçalves, 1986, p. 21). This should be done through a process of self-knowledge allowing to modify the irrational beliefs in the reality of education which frequently interfere with an adequate, effective and gratifying teaching activity.

CONCLUSION

At a time in which education reforms are being revised and redirected, we hope our study has contributed to a better, albeit still partial, understanding of the factors more frequently associated with a teacher's sense of achievement and satisfaction. On the other hand, we have tried to emphasize the influence of some personality dimensions on the experience of a better adjustment to an activity we consider challenging, diversified and potentially innovative.

Empowering teachers in the exercise of job enrichment can be a major challenge for vocational training and development programmes, which must therefore seek to focus their attention on the psychological conditions more likely to generate teacher job satisfaction, in an effort of balanced articulation among the multiple facets of teacher professional growth and personal dimension.

In sum, we have to try to operationalize some of the skills required for the adequate and gratifying exercise of a profession whose social function is increasingly more demanding. At the same time we must try to analyze the way in which the different phases and components of professional development should interact in a necessarily eclectic training practice, so as to maximize the conditions conducive to teacher well-being. This is one of our major objectives stemming from the fact that our study has clearly shown the relevance of personality features for the feeling of satisfaction in teaching.

Since the ability to appreciate the privileges of teaching seems to depend chiefly on some personality skills, I would like to conclude by stressing the idea that we "need teachers who feel optimistic **in** and **about** their job", as one of the necessary conditions to experience more satisfaction in teaching.

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Notes:

1. This article seeks to systematize the main results of an empirical study included in the Ph.D. thesis in Education Sciences (specialization in Educational Psychology) presented by the author at the Department of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Coimbra, on 4 June 2001.
2. Two aspects require further investigation: the subscale of "extrinsic motivation" of WPI and the one of "curricular autonomy" of TAS.
3. Multivariate statistics allowing a succession of analyses, in which the same dependent variable is used, while predictor variables are introduced in a certain order.

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