
Job satisfaction of Greek university professors:
Is it affected by demographic factors, academic rank and problems of higher education?

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Abstract

This paper aimed, first, to investigate the overall job satisfaction of Greek higher education faculty members; relative empirical evidence is scarce in the international as well as the Greek literature. Second, it aimed to investigate how the faculty members assessed various aspects of the Greek higher education which are broadly pointed out as problems (e.g., university administration, big numbers of students, evaluation, funding, etc.) and to explore whether these problem assessments may have an impact on job satisfaction. Results showed that the Greek academics were moderately satisfied with their job; no statistical significant effects of the demographic factors (such as age, gender, working experience and marital status) were found. They assessed most of the problems under inquiry as very severe to quite severe. Their job satisfaction was significantly (negatively) related to specific problem assessments (e.g., dependency of universities on the State and political parties). Finally, the more satisfied faculty members assessed as less serious the higher education problems compared to their less satisfied peers.

Introduction

Job satisfaction is an attitude emanated from employees’ perceptions of their jobs or work environments and refers to the extent to which a person likes his/her job (Pool, 1997; Spector, 1997). The level of job satisfaction reflects - and is affected by - one’s work experiences as well as his/her present situation and future expectations. Job satisfaction is an attitude very sensitive to the features of the context in which it is studied. There is no model of job satisfaction applicable to all work settings as there are no general truths regarding the factors and the mechanisms accounting for such an elusive and subjective concept.

The majority of job satisfaction studies in the last 80 years, since it was pioneered, have focused on industrial and organizational settings. In the educational context, job satisfaction has been a frequently studied variable both in primary and secondary education teachers. However, empirical evidence regarding job satisfaction of higher education teachers is scarce in the international literature (Oshagbemi, 2003; Tack & Patitu, 1992). According to Pearson and Seiler (1983), this area has not received much attention because a high level of job satisfaction has generally been presumed to exist
in a university setting. Whether this presumption is true or not will be explored in the present paper.

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 characteristics of the academic profession are not frequently met in other professions, such as autonomy, freedom and flexibility as well as the teaching/research conflict, the tenure system which provides job (in)security, etc. (Kelly, 1989). According to Bellamy (1999, cited in Bellamy, Morley, & Watty, 2003), academics are mostly motivated by internal motives (e.g., autonomy, showing initiative, intellectual challenges) rather than exterior motives (e.g., financial or social rewards). According to Meyer and Evans (2003), their internal motivation and the particular importance they attribute to the characteristics of the academic profession (such as autonomy and flexibility) counterbalance the multiple requirements, the strong pressures, the animadversions and the poor financial rewards. Actually, flexibility and autonomy have been considered as key factors in becoming and remaining an academic (Bellamy et al., 2003).

As a result of the above, the academics’ job satisfaction appears to be related to internal rather than external dimensions of their professional activities. The content of the work itself (teaching/research), autonomy, flexibility, initiative behaviour, quality of interpersonal relations with colleagues and students, the feeling of “belonging” to a high social and educated community and, finally, the meritocracy and justice in the system of promotions (when they are present) have been pointed out as the main factors of job satisfaction of professors in higher education. On the other hand, empirical findings have shown that the academics are less satisfied with their financial rewards, their promotion and tenure matters (lack of meritocracy, incomplete or ambivalent evaluating criteria, etc.) but also their work conditions (Ambrose, Huston & Norman, 2005; Lacy & Sheehan, 1997; Ssesanga & Garrett, 2005; Ward & Sloane, 2000).

In general, there is a consensus among the researchers in this field regarding the motivation and the work-related factors that account for the academics’ job satisfaction.
satisfaction. However, the empirical data concerning the impact of demographic, institutional and personal factors on their job satisfaction are very confusing. The relative findings vary as to which of these factors (e.g., gender, ethnicity, job achievement, nature of work, salary, collegial relationships, rank and tenure) affect the level of job satisfaction of academics. The fact that the number of the relative studies is limited makes it harder to draw solid conclusions (Oshagbemi, 2003). We will briefly describe the most important of these findings for our study.

Most studies have found that male faculty members have higher levels of overall job satisfaction than their female peers, particularly in terms of benefits and salary received and promotion opportunities (Bilimoria et al., 2006; Hult, Callister, & Sullivan, 2005; Sabharwal & Corley, 2009). On the other hand, a few studies did not show any significant effect of gender on the overall job satisfaction (Smith & Plant, 1982. Ward & Sloane, 2000). Interestingly, it was found that female faculty members in higher academic ranks express more satisfaction with their jobs than their male peers (Okpara, Squillace, & Erondu, 2005; Oshagbemi, 1997).

Marital status can also have an impact on faculty satisfaction, but the results of the studies that explore their relationship are fairly inconsistent (Sabharwal & Corley, 2009). On the one hand, marriage has been shown to increase satisfaction levels for faculty members (e.g., Cetin, 2006; Hagedorn, 2000). Yet, other studies have shown that marriage can have a negative impact on faculty job satisfaction (e.g., Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988).

Rank and tenure are additional control variables for faculty job satisfaction (Sabharwal & Corley, 2009). Evidence shows that rank is a highly significant predictor of job satisfaction among academics, with full professors expressing greater job satisfaction than junior faculty members (Oshagbemi, 1997). Similarly, tenured faculty members have higher job satisfaction levels than untenured faculty members (Bender & Heywood, 2006). However, it must be noted that, in a study performed in Northern Cyprus, the level of job satisfaction of the academics did not increase with academic rank (Eyupoglu & Saner, 2009).
Higher education in Greece

The academic ranks of the faculty members employed in the Greek universities range from Lecturers (this post requires a PhD but is not tenured), Assistant Professors (it starts as a non-tenure post and becomes secure three years later, if a person successfully passes the evaluation), Associate Professors and Full Professors (these are tenure posts).

During the last 60 years, many attempts have been made to reform the Greek educational system in order to keep pace with the increasing demands and needs of a rapidly changing political, economic and social context. Despite the improvements that have been attained, most scholars assert that the system in the Greek higher education is still inefficient, it is characterized by excessive bureaucratization, over-centralization, strict hierarchical structures, formalism, and extensive legislation. In addition to the above, faculty members in the Greek universities have to struggle with severe budget limitations, lack of formal evaluation mechanisms, excessive numbers of student enrollments, and discontinuity of educational policies reforms (Bourantas, Lioukas, & Papadakis, 2001; Giamouridis & Bagley, 2006; Stamoulas, 2006). Although the reform of Greek higher education system is an imperative request to which all the involved parts agree (state, society, faculty, and economy), there is no consensus regarding as to how it should be implemented. The different interests and viewpoints of the involved parts in combination with the absence of trust, coordination and comprehension among them seem to sustain and occasionally make the current situation worse.

Aims of the present study

The aforementioned information aimed to portray a general picture of Greek higher education system that could be considered as the broad work environment of Greek academics. During their work life, faculty members in Greek universities often have to deal with problems such as the above, which may affect their overall job satisfaction. Although much has been written and discussed in the media about the
impact that such problems may have on the satisfaction and productivity of the Greek faculty members, there is no scientific support for these issues.

In the present study, our first aim was to investigate the job satisfaction of Greek faculty members. To our knowledge, this subject has not been addressed in Greece and no relevant empirical data are available. In addition, the effects of factors such as gender, age, professional experience in the university, academic rank and marital status on the job satisfaction of faculty members were explored.

Second, we aimed to investigate what the faculty members think of various aspects of higher education which are broadly pointed out as problems; specifically, we asked them to assess how serious each problem is for the effective functioning of higher education. The investigated problems concerned university administration, involvement of political parties in the university, big numbers of students, evaluation, funding, resource allocation, governmental control, syndicalism, etc. As in the above, the effects of the demographic characteristics of the faculty members on the severity assessments of the problems were investigated.

Our third aim was to explore whether the attitudes of the faculty members towards the problems of higher education may have an impact on their overall job satisfaction. Therefore, we aimed to investigate how job satisfaction is related to problem assessments and whether any of these problems can predict the level of job satisfaction of faculty members.

Method

Participants

In this study, 105 individuals belonging to the faculty of four universities located in North Greece participated in the study. Eighty of them were males (76.2%) and only 25 (23.8%) were females. Their age ranged from 30 to 63 years ($M = 44.1$ $SD = 7.5$) and their professional experience in the university ranged from 1 to 34 years ($M = 10.9$ $SD = 7.2$). In relation to their academic rank, 37 (35.2%) held the position of
Lecturer, 42 (40%) the position of Assistant Professor, and 26 (24.8%) belonged to the highest ranks of Associate and Full Professor (they were grouped together due to their small numbers). In relation to their marital status, 87 (82.9%) were married or lived with someone and 18 (17.1%) were singles, divorced or widows.

Measures

Participants were contacted via e-mail and were asked to fill in an inventory administered on-line. The inventory consisted of two parts: the first was designed to assess the perceived level of job satisfaction of higher education faculty members; the second was designed to investigate their attitudes towards some problems related to higher education.

The Job Satisfaction Inventory

This part of the inventory consisted of seven items inquiring how satisfied the faculty members were with their job (e.g., In general, how satisfied are you with your job? My career so far is corresponding to my qualifications). Participants were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale their level of agreement to each item (1 = Not at all and 5 = Absolutely).

In relation to the reliability of the scale, it was found that the Job Satisfaction Inventory (JSI) had a fairly good reliability (α = 0.79). To test for construct validity, a factor analysis was run to the data using a varimax rotation. It revealed that the structure of the JSI can be explained by one factor, demonstrating that this is a uni-dimension measurement of general job satisfaction. Therefore, the mean of the seven items was estimated for each participant as an indication of his/her overall job satisfaction.

The Problems of Higher Education Inventory

The inventory consisted of 18 problems of the Greek higher education that are likely to have an impact on job satisfaction of faculty members, such as university administration, politics, big numbers of students enrolled, evaluation, funding, governmental control, syndicalism, etc. (they are presented in Table I). Participants
were asked to assess how serious they think each problem is for the functioning of higher education using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all and 5 = Extremely). The Problems of Higher Education Inventory (PHE) was tested for its reliability and the latter was found to be quite satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.82$).

Results

The first aim of our study was to investigate how satisfied faculty members of Greek universities were with their job. According to their self-reports, their overall job satisfaction was a little above average ($M = 3.43$ in a 5-point scale, $SD = 0.70$). In relation to the effects of demographic characteristics, no significant differences were found between males and females, or between faculty members who were married or lived with someone and those who were singles, divorced or widows. Academic rank was not found to have any significant effect on faculty job satisfaction, although Lecturers reported a somewhat higher satisfaction with their job compared to the Assistant Professors and the Associate/Full Professors. Finally, age and professional experience of the faculty members had no significant correlations with their job satisfaction.

Our second aim was to explore how the faculty members assessed the various problems of the Greek higher education. According to their self-reports (see Table I), most of the problems under inquiry were assessed as very severe or quite severe; these related to poor funding ($M = 4.42$), dependency on the political parties and the state ($M = 4.25$), launching of new departments without long-term planning ($M = 4.16$), excessive numbers of student enrolments ($M = 3.84$), the non-academic attitudes of students ($M = 4.07$), lack of meritocracy and transparency in the academic functioning ($M = 4$), poor resource management ($M = 3.88$) and lack of evaluation procedures ($M = 3.84$). Few problems were assessed as moderately to quite severe and these related to the ineffective student enrolment system ($M = 3.51$), the introversion of the universities ($M = 3.58$), their failure to align with the demands and the needs of the society ($M = 3.3$) and a prevailing entrepreneurship in higher education ($M = 2.8$). It is reminded that the problems were assessed in a 5-point scale.
In relation to demographic effects, no significant differences were found in the way males and females assessed the severity of the problems. Few significant differences were found between the married/accompanied individuals and the singles, divorced and widows, but they do not seem to be psychologically meaningful.

The effect of academic rank was also tested and only few significant differences were found. Specifically, the Assistant Professors assessed as more severe problems the poor resource management by the universities as well as the election procedures in the university administration offices (Rectors, Deans, etc.); the Associate/Full Professors assessed as more severe the big number of students enrolled in each department.

Finally, the age of the faculty members showed few significant correlates with specific problem assessments: that is, proceeding age was positively correlated with the big number of students in each department ($r = 0.29, p < 0.05$), the loose implementation of the program of studies ($r = 0.24, p < 0.05$), and the lack of or deficient evaluation system of the universities and the faculty members ($r = 0.20, p < 0.05$). Significant correlations were also found between the above variables and the professional experience in the university of the faculty members, but when age was partialed out, the correlations were found non-significant.

The third aim of our study was to study how job satisfaction is related to problem assessments and whether any of these problems can predict job satisfaction of faculty members. To pursue this aim, first, the correlations between overall job satisfaction and each of the problem assessments were obtained. Only four correlations to job satisfaction were found significant: dependency of universities on the State and political parties ($r = -0.30, p < 0.05$), establishment of new departments without proper consideration ($r = -0.27, p < 0.05$), elections in administrative offices ($r = -0.20, p < 0.05$) and the “sectional” logic of the academics ($r = -0.20, p < 0.05$). That shows that the more satisfied the faculty members were with their job the less serious they assessed these problems to be. Moreover, a correlation of $r = -0.19$ was found
between overall job satisfaction and their mean problem assessment; although non-
significant, this correlation is in line with the aforementioned conclusion.

In order to further investigate the relations between job satisfaction and problem
assessments, we employed a K-means cluster analysis to classify participants into two
groups according to their job satisfaction reports: the first included the faculty
members who were satisfied with their job \( n = 56, \) overall job satisfaction \( M = 3.97, \)
\( SD = 0.37 \) and the second included those who were dissatisfied with their job \( n = 46, \)
overall job satisfaction \( M = 2.77, SD = 0.40 \). In the next step, an analysis of
variance was ran which revealed that the first group tended to assess as more
moderate the problems than the second group, although most differences were close
but did not reach the level of significance. Only the assessments of three problems
were significantly different between the two groups (see Figure 1): that is, the
satisfied faculty members assessed as less serious the dependency of the Greek
universities on the state and the political parties, the establishment of new
departments without long-term planning, the evaluation procedures employed for
faculty promotion.

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Figure 1
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Finally, in order to explore which of these problems can predict job satisfaction of
faculty members, a step-by step regression analysis was run, in which the dependent
variable was the overall job satisfaction and the independent variables were the 18
problem assessments of the faculty members. Results showed that only one problem,
the dependency of Greek university on the state and the political parties, can
significantly explain the variance of job satisfaction \( R = 0.25, R^2 = 0.06, \) \( beta = -\)
\( 0.25, t = -2.44 \). It must be noted that this problem was rated as the second more
severe by the faculty members.

Discussion and Conclusions

The issue of job satisfaction of the faculty members has been rarely studied in the
international literature and never before in Greece. Given the fact that the academic
profession is characterized by features that are not met in other professions, it is essential to study their job-related parameters per se, should we want to comprehend this professional group and, possibly, administer interventions for the benefit of the entire higher education (Conklin & Desselle, 2007).

This is the first study aiming at exploring the level of overall job satisfaction of the faculty members who are employed in the Greek universities. Results showed that Greek academics are moderately to quite satisfied with their job. It is interesting to note that a recent study of faculty members in Northern Cyprus reports same levels of job satisfaction (Eyupoglu & Saner, 2009). Similar results were also found in a previous study that examined aspects of academics’ satisfaction with their job across eight nations (Australia, Germany, Hong Kong, Israel, Mexico, Sweden, UK, USA) (Lacy & Sheehan, 1997). These consistent findings imply that, as professionals, the faculty members are generally content with their job in the university.

In relation to demographic variables, no significant effects were found of the factors of gender, age, previous experience in the university, marital status, or academic rank on the overall job satisfaction of the Greek faculty members. These findings are not in agreement with the results in most studies conducted in the western countries. Most of that research consistently reports that age and academic rank are strong predictors of the academics job satisfaction, with individuals of older age and higher rank being generally more satisfied with their job (Holden & Black, 1996; Near, Rice, & Hunt, 1978; Oshagbemi, 1997, 2003). Also, with few exceptions, in most studies, male faculty members report higher job satisfaction than their female peers (Bilimoria et al., 2006; Hult et al., 2005; Sabharwal & Corley, 2009). In our study, this finding was found not consistent to the results of the previous studies. Given the scarce evidence, we are not able to assume whether this is attributed to (a) our relatively small sample, in which not all Greek universities were represented, or (b) the Greek higher education system which is different than those of western countries in which most of the research has been conducted so far. Relevant research in eastern countries, in the future, may shed light to the aforementioned inconsistent findings. The findings reported in the Eyupoglu and Saner (2009) study conducted in Northern Cyprus strengthen this argument, as most of those findings are in line with ours.
For example, in our study, academic rank was not found to have any significant effect on faculty job satisfaction, although Lecturers reported a somewhat higher satisfaction with their job compared to the Assistant Professors and the Associate/Full Professors. Similarly, Eyupoglu and Saner (2009) found that overall and intrinsic job satisfaction of Northern Cypriot faculty members was not significantly dependent on their academic rank. Only the extrinsic satisfaction of the academics was affected by their rank, with Lectures and Full Professors reporting the highest levels. Intrinsic satisfaction refers to internal and occupational factors, such as achievement, activity, creativity, independence, variety, while extrinsic satisfaction refers to environmental conditions, such as company policies and practices, compensation, recognition, etc.

In the present study, job satisfaction was studied as a general attitude towards the job of Greek faculty members (Spector, 1997), of an intrinsic nature and which relates to ‘non-measurable’, symbolic aspects of the job, such as quality of interpersonal relationships, drive for recognition and self-realization, pleasure from the job itself, etc. (Kelly, 1989). Exploring their attitudes towards specific features of the job (e.g., environmental conditions) that may result in (dis)satisfaction was beyond the scope of the present study. Yet, it can be the subject for future research, as there is a lack of evidence regarding job satisfaction of the Greek academics. In addition, in future studies, care should be taken in order to obtain data from faculty members representing all the Greek universities and, possibly, the Technological Educational Institutes; the latter also belong to higher education but there are marked differences, among others, in the job parameters of their faculty members.

In the next step, we aimed to explore how the faculty members assessed the various problems of the Greek higher education and whether these assessment have an impact on their job satisfaction. It was found that most of the inquired problems were assessed as very severe or quite severe. Such problems (e.g., poor funding, dependency on the political parties and the state, establishing new departments without long-term planning, big numbers of student enrolments, lack of meritocracy and transparency in the academic functioning, poor resource management and deficient evaluation system) have often been included among the major shortcomings of higher education in various countries (e.g., Ambrose et al., 2005; Ssesanga & Garrett, 2005, see also Welch, 2005). It is interesting to note that the Greek academics
were not very much concerned with the prevailing entrepreneurship in higher education and they assessed that there is only a moderate failure of the Greek universities to align with the demands and the needs of the society. Their moderate assessments of the above problems indicate their openness in the currently strong trends common to both Greek and European higher education for the alignment of society and the workplace.

Results showed that the faculty members who were more satisfied with their job tended to assess as less severe the problems of higher education, in comparison to those who were less satisfied with their job. Finally, the regression analysis revealed that only one of the most severe problems of higher education, the dependency of Greek university on the state and the political parties can significantly predict the overall job satisfaction of the Greek faculty members. It is encouraging evidence to see that most of the major shortcomings of the Greek higher education, although they may be responsible for holding back the reform and sustaining the weak points in the Greek universities, do not significantly affect the level of academics’ job satisfaction. Further research in this topic could explore in depth the sources of (dis)satisfaction of the Greek faculty members and provide more evidence that could be used for the improvement of the current situation in the Greek higher education.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems of the Greek higher education are …</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. the poor funding and material/technical support of the universities</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. the dependency of universities on the State and the political parties</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. the weakness of the State to conceive the essential problems of universities</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. the “sectional” logic and practice characterizing many academics</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. the establishment of regional departments and postgraduate programs in an irregular manner characterized by the absence of long-term planning</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. the attitude of many undergraduates toward their studies</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. the occupation of academic positions by individuals with insufficient qualifications</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. the lack of meritocracy and transparency</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. the loose structural context which governs the materialization of undergraduate studies</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. the poor resource management by the universities</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. the lack of formal evaluation procedures and mechanisms in higher education</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. the excessive number of students enrolled in each department</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. the procedures followed for the election of administration offices in the university</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. the way in which evaluation and promotion of academics take place</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. the “introversion” of Higher Education Institutes</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. the enrolment system of secondary education graduates into higher education</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. the weakness of higher education to align with the demands and the problems of the modern society</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. the “entrepreneurism” of higher education</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table I:** The problems of the Greek higher education and their assessment as reported by the Greek faculty members
Figure 1: Mean assessments of higher education problems by faculty members with the higher and lower job satisfaction
References


