

# “Job satisfaction among academic employees in institutions of higher learning”

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# JOB SATISFACTION AMONG ACADEMIC EMPLOYEES IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

## Abstract

The factors affecting job satisfaction of academic employees, with specific reference to the National University of Lesotho (NUL) were analysed. Understanding the factors that affect academic performance is pivotal for satisfactory levels of performance by higher education institutions. Satisfactory working conditions at universities like NUL can provide the impetus to attract well qualified academics. Six areas pertaining to working conditions, relationship with colleagues, access to resources, job security, recognition and advancement were focused on analyzing job satisfaction among academic employees at the National University of Lesotho. A concurrent approach of both quantitative and qualitative techniques was used. The target population of 156 respondents completed a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, version 22.0, while thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. The findings of the study highlighted salaries as a factor influencing job satisfaction. Further, insufficient financial resources to support teaching, learning and research at the NUL impacted job satisfaction. Over and above dissatisfaction with benefits, allowances, lack of equipment, as well as poor institutional management, there was collegiality with heads of departments, working as a team. The findings are valuable to university administrators and academics to consider for improving job satisfaction among employees.

## Keywords

satisfaction, factors, employees, institutions, affecting, higher learning, job

## JEL Classification

J4, J8

## INTRODUCTION

Higher education has become a vital instrument used by national initiatives to bolster innovation and performance across academic sectors (Bloom, Canning, & Chan, 2006, p. 1). Providing quality education in teaching and learning has become a critical role of higher education institutions. In African countries like Lesotho, universities have become the key drivers for enhancing education, thus empowering African academics to also play an active role in the global community of scholars (Bloom et al., 2006). Institutions of higher education must ensure that they are able to attract and retain an effective and committed workforce. This is largely dependent on quality of teaching and learning. Further, staff retention is influenced by not only experience and expertise, but also by attractive remuneration and benefits for academic staff. This not only boosts the morale of academics, but also enhances their performance, a driver for enhanced academic performance (Bloom et al., 2006). It can be contended that the overall performance of a university depends on academics and ultimately their level of commitment and job satisfaction. Therefore, at the National University of Lesotho, job satisfaction is a crucial consideration if management is serious about performance and productivity of academic employees to ensure quality teaching and learning.

## 1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Higher education institutions in Africa face obstacles in providing quality education, research and service, which is needed for growth and development (Mothman, 2009). Lesotho recognises education as a fundamental driver of development in the country. Education ensures the availability of highly skilled manpower to alleviate poverty and promote economic growth. Issues such as low salaries, lack of promotion and lack of fringe benefits have been cited by public educational institutions as some of the challenges facing employees, especially within the Lesotho higher education context. This has impeded the quality of higher education through well-programmed and structured curriculum improvements, as well as the improvement of management efficiency and effectiveness in higher learning institutions (Mashau, Steyn, Van der Walt, & Wolhuster, 2008).

## 2. AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to investigate the factors affecting job satisfaction of academic employees at the National University of Lesotho. The aim of the study was explored by focussing on the following objectives:

- to investigate the external factors influencing job satisfaction of academic staff;
- to investigate the internal factors influencing academics' job satisfaction;
- to identify strategies that promote job satisfaction among academics.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of national educational systems and how academics function within these systems should be clearly understood by administrators and managers of higher education institutions, since universities can be regarded as one of the most important institutions within a country that contributes to growth and development (Khalid, 2012). Academic attributes in higher education vary greatly in terms of gender, age, level of ed-

ucation, as well as the type of institution worked for. Therefore, management within higher education institutions should have the understanding, knowledge, and experience regarding not only academic attributes prevalent within their institutions, but also the expectations and conditions of service of academic staff (Brevis, Cronje, Smit, & Vrba, 2011). While expectations in terms of what really motivates academics differ, their responsibilities regarding research, teaching and learning, and community engagement are becoming increasingly similar (Bhutto & Anwar, 2012). Research, teaching and learning, and community engagement, which are becoming increasingly important in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, commonly describe academic functions (Arimoto & Daizen, 2013). These multiple responsibilities impact job satisfaction and performance of academics.

Many authors argue that job dissatisfaction is related to both internal and external factors. According to Ololube (2010), a strong predictor of job dissatisfaction is inequitable treatment of employees. This can be considered as one of the drivers of employees seeking employment elsewhere, as inequities is frequently aligned to unfairness in the work environment (Adekola, 2012). According to Subramanian and Saravanan (2012), job satisfaction or dissatisfaction is a continuing area of interest, with research generally alluding to satisfied workers being more productive and likely to be retained within the organization for long, whereas dissatisfied workers will be less productive and more inclined to resign.

An understanding of academic practice is integral for enhancing the quality of education and subsequently producing competent graduates (Du Toit, 2014). According to Noordin (2009), without the expertise of academic staff, successful educational programmes will cease to exist. Commitment, effort, involvement and academic professionalism are core competencies required for successful academic practice. Arguably, it is incumbent on university management to provide a conducive university climate that reinforces job satisfaction among academics.

In essence, job satisfaction remains a crucial human resource dimension that needs organisational support, if optimal employee performance

is the ultimate target underpinning overall success (Tennant, McMullen, & Kaczynsk, 2010). Eyupolgu and Saner (2009) support this view, contending that a positive university climate does not only increase job satisfaction among academic staff, but also the overall productivity of the organization.

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A mixed method approach was used, encompassing quantitative and qualitative data analysis to investigate job satisfaction among academic staff at NUL. The case approach was used to provide an in depth understanding of phenomena, as NUL is the only public high education institution in Lesotho.

### 4.1. Research instrument (MSQ)

The MSQ questionnaire was used to measure the extent to which participants were satisfied with their current jobs. Aspects relating to working conditions, relationship with colleagues, security, recognition, advancement and access to resources were included in the research instrument. The rationale for using the MSQ as a survey instrument was based on the fact that it covers 20 facets, focusing on more specific scales pertaining to job satisfaction. Further, in a research study by Toker (2011), which used the MSQ to investigate job satisfaction of academic employ-

ees at the University of Turkey, it was argued that the survey instrument covered both extrinsic and intrinsic factors relating to satisfaction. For example, extrinsic satisfaction focused on aspects of work that have minimal to do with the work itself, such as pay. Conversely, intrinsic satisfaction drew on aspects relating to the actual nature of the job, like determining peoples feelings about the work they do. Therefore, the MSQ was a preferable research instrument, as it enabled the researcher to identify both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects contributing to job satisfaction among academics.

Table 1 illustrates the 5 areas addressing job satisfaction that were covered in the survey instruments.

### 4.2. Target population

The total number of staff employed at NUL is 780, which includes both academic and non-academic staff. However, this study focused only on academic staff, which comprised of 162 females and 212 males, constituting a population of 374 academics employed in seven faculties.

### 4.3. Sample method

Using a probability sampling technique, the researcher identified specific strata's (departments) by means of stratified random sampling, whereby only two departments were selected per faculty,

**Table 1.** Summary of questionnaire

Research area	Statements (refer to Table 2)
Academic working conditions	Statements 1-6
Relationship with colleagues	Statements 7-11
Access to resources	Statements 12-17
Job security	Statements 18-23
Recognition	Statements 24-28
Advancement	Statements 29-33

**Table 2.** Interview questions

What do you find satisfactory being an HOD?
What areas of job satisfaction would you like to improve?
What are some of the challenges academics face?
Which of the following factors require attention to enhance job satisfaction: fringe benefits, promotions, rank, workload, working conditions?
How can teamwork and cooperation be improved?
What reasons would motivate you to resign from NUL?
What factors would motivate you to continue working at NUL?
To what extent does satisfaction impact efficiency and effectiveness at NUL?
What are some of your experiences regarding overall job satisfaction at NUL?

with the exception of the Faculty of Humanities, from which four departments were selected. This sampling technique was used, because the researcher was able to obtain estimates of each stratum (department), in addition to the population sample.

#### 4.4. Sample size

The sampling frame was constructed from a list of lecturers, obtained from the selected departments, using Supercool Random Number Generator software. This software randomly picks the number, depending on the scale the researcher uses. Therefore, the sample consisted of 140 participants for the questionnaire-based survey, and 16 interviews, conducted with the HOD's of the same departments that constituted part of the stratified random sampling.

## 5. QUESTION ADMINISTRATION

Personally administered questionnaires that consisted of closed-ended questions were structured on a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree). Open-ended interviews were also conducted with the HOD's of the departments selected that constituted part of the sample.

### 5.1. Analysis of research data

Once the data were collected, the information obtained was captured using the SPSS (22.0) version. The data captured were double checked in order to ensure that there were no capturing errors. Once this had been done, a number of analyses were undertaken including descriptive analysis in the form of frequencies and bivariate analysis which involved using Chi-square tests. The analyses are descriptions, relationships, comparisons, as well as predictions. The questionnaire was analyzed statistically by using SPSS and results were presented in Excel software diagrams.

### 5.2. Limitations

This study did not include other universities in Lesotho; therefore caution should be exercised re-

garding generalization of the results. Further research needs to be done to cover other institutions of higher learning in the country.

### 5.3. Reliability and validity

The results were found to be very significant at between 0.75 to 0.90.

### 5.4. Research findings

#### Quantitative analysis

This section provides the key findings from the conducted research.

In terms of academic working conditions, the majority of respondents disagreed with statements 1(38.9%), 3(82.9%) and 5(45.7%). However, the majority of respondents (12.4%) remained neutral for the Statement 2: NUL has satisfactory benefits. Further, the majority of respondents agreed with statements 4(36%) and 6(56.6%).

Regarding relation with colleagues, the majority of respondents agreed with statements 7(65.1%), 8(69.8%) and 11(45.7%). 41.1% of the highest number of respondents (41.1%) for statement 9 remained neutral. There was a high level of disagreement (85.4%) for statement 10.

With reference to access to resources, the highest level of disagreement were with statements 13(94.5%), 14(91.4%), 15(90.6%) and 16(71.9%). The majority of respondents agreed with Statements 12(65.9%) and 17(35.2%).

In terms of job security, the highest level of agreement was with statements 19(49.6%), 21(77.5%), 22(86.8%). Respondents showed high levels of disagreement with statements 18 (50.8%) and 20 (41.1%), while the majority of respondents (42.5%) for statement 23 remained neutral.

In the category relating to recognition, the majority of respondents disagreed with Statements 24(48.4%), 25(76.7%), 26 (63.6) and 28(49.6). Respondents showed high levels of agreement with statement 27(43.4%).

**Table 3.** Findings of the study

Statement	Total of response	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. NUL has strong values that support academic excellence	129	–	50(38.9%)	39(30.2%)	40(31%)	–
2. NUL has satisfactory benefits	35	–	11(8.4%)	16(12.4%)	8(6.2%)	–
3. NUL has satisfactory salaries	128	–	106(82.9%)	13(10.1%)	9(7%)	–
4. NUL has managers as good mentors	128	–	38(29.6%)	44(34.4%)	46(36%)	–
5. NUL conditions in the respective departments allow the respondents to perform to a high standard	129	–	59(45.7%)	42(32.6%)	28(21.7%)	–
6. NUL level of confidence, in terms of skills and competencies of other employees	129	–	20(15.5%)	36(27.9%)	73(56.6%)	–
7. NUL staff communicate with each other on academic issues	129	–	12(9.3%)	33(25.6%)	84(65.1%)	–
8. NUL staff work as a team in their different departments	129	–	12(9.3%)	27(20.9%)	90(69.8%)	–
9. NUL academic staff plan and coordinate their efforts as an institution	129	–	38(29.5%)	53(41.1%)	38(29.5%)	–
10. NUL staff do have good relations with other academics in their departments	125	–	110(85.4%)	9(7%)	6(4.7%)	–
11. NUL staff morale is boosted within the selected departments	129	–	18(14.2%)	52(40.2%)	59(45.7%)	–
12. NUL has adequate financial administration to support teaching, learning and research	129	–	13(10.1%)	31(24%)	85(65.9%)	–
13. NUL staff have the necessary tools/equipment to perform tasks	124	–	122(94.5%)	4(5%)	2(1.6%)	–
14. NUL staff receive funding to support their advancement	134	–	118(91.4%)	10(7.8%)	6(1.8%)	–
15. NUL gives them opportunities to develop their skills and competencies	129	–	117(90.6%)	6(4.7%)	6(4.7%)	–
16. NUL staff feel their workloads are manageable	129	–	93(71.9%)	17(13.3%)	19(14.8%)	–
17. NUL supports the use of different types of technology to improve teaching, learning and research	128	–	41(32%)	42(32.8%)	45(35.2%)	–
18. NUL staff feel free to express their opinions, without worrying about negative responses	129	–	66(50.8%)	48(37.5%)	15(11.7%)	–
19. NUL staff have job security at the NUL	129	–	42(32.6%)	23(17.8%)	64(49.6%)	–
20. NUL staff have clearly defined reasons for their existence at the NUL	129	–	53(41.1%)	30(23.3%)	46(35.7%)	–
21. NUL staff believe their jobs are important for the overall output of the University	129	–	9(7%)	20(15.5%)	100(77.5%)	–
22. NUL staff still want to be employees at the NUL	128	–	3(2.3%)	14(10.9%)	111(86.8%)	–
23. NUL staff believe there is a sense of stability and continuity in their departments	130	–	32(14.4%)	55(42.5%)	43(33.1%)	–
24. NUL staff are rewarded for working hard at the NUL	129	–	63(48.4%)	40(31.3%)	26(20.3%)	–
25. NUL staff receive recognition for the work that they do	129	–	99(76.7%)	20(15.5%)	10(7.8%)	–
26. NUL staff do a better job, they have greater chances of getting ahead	129	–	82(63.6%)	30(23.3%)	17(13.2%)	–
27. NUL staff are happy with regard to recognition and motivation to enhance their achievements	129	–	47(36.4%)	26(20.2%)	56(43.4%)	–
28. It rewarding to be academics at the NUL	129	–	64(49.6%)	39(30.2%)	26(20.2%)	–
29. NUL staff are encouraged to undertake research at the NUL	129	–	101(78.1%)	22(17.2%)	6(4.7%)	–
30. NUL staff are happy with regard to working conditions that support their advancement	129	–	79(61.2%)	15(11.6%)	35(27.1%)	–
31. NUL staff perceive that opportunities exist for training and development at the NUL	129	–	96(74.2%)	18(14.1%)	15(11.7%)	–
32. NUL staff have strong research profiles	130	–	51(39.5%)	55(42.6%)	24(17.8%)	–
33. NUL staff feel there are opportunities for them to be promoted at the NUL	129	–	70(54.3%)	41(31.8%)	18(14%)	–

In terms of advancement, the majority of respondents disagreed with statements 29(78.1%), 30(61.2%), 31(74.2%) and 33(54.3%). However, the majority of respondents (42.6%) remained neutral for the statement 32: NUL staff have strong research profiles.

### 5.5. Qualitative analysis

Heads of departments (HODs) concurred with academics that they are able to work as a team, which motivated them to continue working at NUL. In this regard, Noordin (2009, p. 122) argues that poor relationships can jeopardize university functioning. Apart from enjoying flexible working hours, HODs indicated that there is nothing satisfactory about being an HOD.

Majority indicated that low salaries was one of the major reasons for job dissatisfaction. Further, inadequate or lack of benefits and allowances, further accentuated the problem of remuneration.

There was consensus that while there are financial resources to support teaching, learning and research, academics do not have the necessary resources to support advancement. Promotions was also cited as a challenge, with respondents indicating that if benefits and remuneration of satisfactory, then promotion would not really be a problem.

Majority of respondents were dissatisfied with the overall working conditions, workloads, benefits and remuneration. They urged that if these issues were not given urgent attention, then there can be an exodus of academics or resistance.

While academics and HODs indicated satisfactory levels of communication, HODS believed that this can be strengthened through more teambuilding activities and departmental meetings.

Better working conditions was commonly cited as a reason for resigning. Since many of the employees are employed on contract, the non-renewal of their contract will force them to seek employment elsewhere. However, commitment to student interest was given as the main reason for remaining at NUL. Another reason given for continued employment at NUL was family commitments and difficulty in securing jobs elsewhere.

Most of the respondents agreed that job dissatisfaction affected effectiveness and efficiency. It was postulated that dissatisfied employees cannot perform at their optimal levels.

## 6. GENERAL DISCUSSION

The concurrent approaches highlight higher levels of job dissatisfaction than satisfaction among academics at NUL. This is reiterated by Malik, Nawab, Naeem and Danish (2010, p. 7) who state that organizational understanding of what contributes to job satisfaction is integral for commitment, high levels of morale and productivity. Since academics are at the coalface of academic delivery at universities, their perceptions of job satisfaction needs to be considered if universities are to remain the portals of growth and development, both locally and internationally. This is supported by Smerek and Peterson (2007, p. 230) who argue that management at HEIs need to continuously determine academic needs and provide the requisite avenues to fulfil such needs.

Inadequate opportunities for advancement of academics at the NUL impacts on the university achieving the objectives of the University's Strategic Plan (2007–2012), which envisages a doubling of research income by the year 2012. The lack of opportunities for advancement, not only affects the overall productivity of academics at the university but also overall advancement within the institution. Further, as postulated by Qasim, Cheema and Syed (2012, p. 34), dissatisfied employees may use poor working conditions to retaliate or resign from the institution.

Research points to job security being an important motivational driver for job satisfaction. Findings by Munir et al. (2014, p. 4496) and Siddiqui and Saba (2013, p. 229) highlight job security as one of the factors influencing job satisfaction among academics. Majority of employees do not feel free to express themselves, without fear of rebuttal. While the majority believe that they have job security, it can be implied that this can be compromised if they express themselves freely.

There is also a perception of no opportunities for training and development. However, the NUL's Localization and Training Board (LTB) (2013) in-

dicates that allowances are given to academics for staff development leave (SDL) on a full-time basis. This training board showed that there is almost one fellow per faculty being given the opportunity to further their studies and still receiving 100 percent of their Dependents Allowance (DA) for the first two years of study and 60 percent for the remaining years and extensions, if any. However, academics still feel that there are no opportunities for them to be promoted. This is shown by a 54.3 percent rate on their responses to this statement. While NUL's Strategic Plan alludes to expanding research capacity, the responses point to unavailable resources to support research enhancement at the university.

Research by Tizikara (1998, p. 35) highlighted some of the following causes of job dissatisfaction among employees: inadequate teaching space, insufficient instructional materials and the number of students in class. It can be concurred that good relations and team work is crucial for academic and institutional progress.

High levels of responses that hard work is not recognised and not rewarded can attribute to job dissatisfaction, as postulated by Castillo and Cano (2004, p. 26) that recognition and good relationships are important for job satisfaction qualitative.

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## CONCLUSION

The study has highlighted some of the critical factors affecting job satisfaction of academic employees at the NUL. This study brings new theories into perspectives with regard to managing job satisfaction among academic staff at universities. The importance of these theories is not only on the issue of managing them, but also having understanding and getting information of what motivates them to stay longer at universities.

Management at the NUL should implement academic support services for continuous professional development of academic employees. This will assist the university in having competent people, with good experience, while still being employed within the University. The image and brand of the university will therefore be enhanced, as well as contributing to competitiveness in the education sector, at national and international levels. The university should use technology to improve teaching, learning and research, which are fundamental aspects for the success of HEIs. Therefore, this study recommends that the use of technology, as additional support to teaching and learning, and the improvement of research in the university, needs implementation of technology by staff members, as this will ensure they remain motivated with their job.

Being the first study of this nature involving NUL, the practical implications of this study will benefit university management and all other relevant stakeholders.

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