

Inner-city Independent Schools Educators' Job Satisfaction and Their Motivation to Quit

T P Maforah

Tshwane University of Technology

This study aims to investigate the levels of job satisfaction of educators in the inner-city independent schools Of Johannesburg and their motivation for leaving their jobs. A quantitative method was used for the study. A questionnaire was distributed to 100 educators from five schools that were randomly selected from a sample of twenty inner-city independent schools that were conveniently and purposefully selected within a 5km radius of each other. The theoretical framework of the research was based on needs theories by Maslow and Alderfer. The results show that the educators have a high level of dissatisfaction, as a result of the lack or inadequate satisfaction of lower-end needs. The educators also show low motivation to perform their jobs due to inadequate satisfaction of higher end needs. A number of propositions to the principals, the Directors and owners of the schools about ways that will increase the level of job satisfaction and reduce staff turn-over were made at the end of this discussion.

Keywords: Inner-city, Independent Schools, educator, job satisfaction, Needs theories

The topic of educator satisfaction or more frequently, their job dissatisfaction has received increased media attention and is continuing to do so. The media coverage has been concerned with claims that the education profession is demoralised and suffering from diminished job satisfaction (Davids & Makwabe 2007:1) job satisfaction within the education profession is of significant importance for the employer as it is becoming more difficult to keep educators motivated once they are in the profession. Educator retention is a growing area of concern in both special and general education. Studies conducted by different individuals show that a significant number of educators are leaving the profession or considering leaving their professions (Billingsley & Cross 1992:453). Educator retention is a source of concern in South Africa and the government is currently looking at ways to retain educators within the teaching profession.

An early study by Kestener (1994:39) show that about half (50%) of all new teachers leave the field during the first five years of teaching, and approximately 80% after 10 years. One of the worrying factors in South Africa is the report that was released by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), commissioned by the Department of Education, which points out that while 20 000 new educators are needed every year, only 6 000 qualify. Out of these, only 4 000 enter the system in South Africa, while the rest leave to teach in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia and Dubai (Govender 2008:1). The number of trainee educators has also been shrinking over the years in South Africa, due to the closing of teacher colleges in the 1990's. In the early 1990's there were close to 100 000 educators in training. In 2002 there were about 12 000, of whom 3 000 were to graduate that particular year (Pretorius 2002:29). The shrinkage in the

number of educators entering the system creates a problem in that some leave the profession. The South African government has since decided to open three of the closed teacher colleges to try and increase the number of educators in the system. In 2009 there were 6 937 graduates in education, followed by a 14% increase in 2010 to 7 937. These numbers are still a far cry from the number of educators required in the system, added to that, is the challenge of new entrants who are offset by those who leave the profession or the country.

Some of the educators that qualify get absorbed into the Independent School's sector. The Independent School sector in South Africa is diverse, ranging from informal settlements to well-established schools serving richer communities and making financial profit. These schools may be religious or secular, big or small, rural or urban. In 2000, there were more than 2000 Independent Schools enrolling 1, 23 million learners. About 75 of these schools serve poor communities in and around Johannesburg and are located in the informal settlements and the inner-city. This sector is growing rapidly as it is seen as a cheaper alternative by parents who cannot afford the expensive private schools (Bot 2000:126). What is of significance here is that the educators in these schools do not receive payment from the government and obtain their salaries from the owners/directors of the schools they work for. The schools are different in size, location and enrolment. This means that the salaries differ from one school to the other. The common feature for all the Independent Schools however, is the fact that educators receive salaries far less than their counterparts in public schools and receive minimal to no incentives and benefits.

Studies have been conducted on job satisfaction of educators but little has been researched on inner-city Independent School educators and their job satisfaction. It is for this reason that this study adds

value to the ongoing discourse on job satisfaction of educators. The main research question was: *Which factors promote the level of job satisfaction among educators of inner-city Independent Schools?* This study used as a conceptual framework Needs/ Content theories by Maslow and Alderfer.

Conceptual and theoretical framework

Job satisfaction has been a subject of interest and research for some time. Employers have always been interested in how to keep their employees satisfied so as to increase performance and retention. The underlying issue that prompted the studies on job satisfaction and human behaviour in general has been the *hedonistic philosophy* that states that all organisms have a tendency to move away from any harmful, painful or unpleasant stimulus (Jordaan & Jordaan 1989: 651). Content theories have been largely used by researchers to determine the level of job satisfaction of employees. The underlying principle with content theories is that employees have needs that are a driving force of how they behave. Abraham Maslow developed one of the most popular needs theories to determine job satisfaction of employees. He suggests that people normally seek satisfaction and are motivated through a hierarchy of needs. Maslow distinguished between five groups of needs, namely basic physiological, security/safety, social, esteem, autonomy and self-actualisation needs. The needs are arranged in hierarchical order, starting with relative pre-potency needs. The lower order needs are the basic physiological, security and safety needs. The higher order needs are social/ esteem, autonomy and self-actualisation needs. According to Maslow, the lower order needs have to be satisfied before the higher order needs can be met. Thus, it is not possible to satisfy the higher order needs before the lower order needs. This means that people act to fulfil the needs that are important to them at a

particular time. The partial or full satisfaction of a lower-order need, (with an assurance of the satisfaction of such a need in the future), results in the arousal of a higher-order need. According to Maslow, when a need has been satisfied, it ceases to motivate behaviour (Maslow 1954:2; Schaefer 1977:6; Rosenbaum 1982:18; Fourie 2004:57).

The lower order needs are considered by Maslow to have low motivation potential for educators. Fulfilment of the lower order needs does not result in increased job satisfaction and performance but rather in lowered job dissatisfaction, whereas the higher order needs have potential to increase the level of job satisfaction and motivation to do the job. Matlawe (1989: 12 -14) talks about the satisfaction of lower needs being a prerequisite for satisfying higher order needs. For instance, the basic physiological needs are satisfied through employment and remuneration. Security needs imply the need for stability, order, protection and freedom from fear and anxiety. Social needs are satisfied when one has full acceptance of the group. The higher order needs like esteem are brought about by a sense of achievement, adequacy and capacity, coupled with recognition for the work done. Self-actualisation is defined by Steers (1979:44), as what an individual *can* be and *must* be. Maslow felt that not many people reach the level where self-actualisation is the primary motivator. According to Goble (1972:97), self-actualisation can be attained through the following attributes; meaningfulness, self-sufficiency, effortlessness, playfulness, richness, simplicity, order, justice, completion, individuality, aliveness, beauty, goodness and truth.

One of the earliest empirical attempts to test Maslow's theory was Alderfer. Alderfer's theory condenses Maslow's five hierarchical levels into three. This theory is widely regarded as the Existence-Relatedness-Growth (ERG) theory. The existence needs encapsulate the

physiological needs, as well as the security needs as presented by Maslow. They include the need for food, shelter, and if employed, the need for a reasonable salary, and for good working conditions. Alderfer, unlike Maslow, sees the need to satisfy both the physiological and security needs as the same and thus there is no reason to separate the two. The relatedness need is the same as Maslow's social needs. This refers to how we relate to others and the need to be loved and esteemed by others. The growth needs according to Alderfer encompasses the self-esteem, as well as self-actualisation as portrayed by Maslow. This is where an individual indicates the need to develop to the best of their ability (Pinder 2008:76; Sargent 1990:7 & Steers 1979:33)

According to Sargent (1990:8), Alderfer's ERG theory works in more or less the same way as Maslow's needs theory. Individuals move on from satisfying their existence needs to relatedness needs, followed by growth needs. The fundamental difference is that whereas Maslow suggests a linear movement from lower to higher order needs which is regarded as the satisfaction-progression process, Alderfer further suggests what is regarded as the frustration-regression hypothesis. This means that failure to satisfy a need renders it less important and the focus goes to another need in any direction, up or down. For instance, if an individual feels that his/her growth needs are not being satisfied, he/she can regress to the relatedness or existence needs. Whereas with Maslow, an unsatisfied need activates one to strive for that particular need.

The needs theories as espoused by Maslow and Alderfer indicate that employees have needs that affect their level of job satisfaction. Perceived satisfaction of lower end needs can result in lowered job dissatisfaction but not necessarily an increase in job satisfaction. An increase in job satisfaction results in enhanced job performance. The higher end

needs are regarded as bringing about an increase in job satisfaction and thus leading to improved performance. This study will look into the need's satisfaction of the inner-city independent schools educators and the kind of impact that this has on their satisfaction levels, performance and retention.

Method and data collection

The quantitative research approach was used for this study. A questionnaire was developed to focus on factors that represent specific job related items that satisfy educators. The questionnaire was piloted to check the relevance of the questions, and the validity of the instrument was tested through follow-up unstructured questions. The reliability of the instrument was addressed through the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient. The questionnaire comprised of three parts: Sections A, B, and C and employed the Likert scale.

The sample population consisted of 100 inner-city Independent School educators from five (5) randomly selected inner-city schools. The sample came from a population of twenty (20) inner-city Independent Schools within five kilometre radius of each other in the Johannesburg city centre. Prior permission was obtained from the managing directors/ owners, as well as the principals of the schools in question. All participants were assured of the confidentiality of information and that they were not compelled to be respondents and could withdraw at any time during the investigation. The questionnaires were answered anonymously and individually, and put in separate envelopes and handed over to the researcher. As mentioned above, responses were received from 100 educators and were all used in the sample. The responses from the questionnaires were statistically analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Section A which comprised the biographical results, shows that 76% of the respondents were between twenty and forty years of age. Males and females were almost equally represented, with males at 45% and females at 55%. 59% of the respondents had between three to nine years of experience as educators. 73% of the respondents had either a Diploma in education or a Bachelor's degree. Section B was designed to reflect on factors that affect the level of job satisfaction of the educators. The questions covered both extrinsic and intrinsic factors that affect the educator's level of job satisfaction. The variables included were the physical environment, reward system, interpersonal relationships, autonomy, communication, involvement in decision making, status in community, responsibility, choice of teaching and support they get. Section C had a total of 10 questions that investigate educator attrition, their stress level and satisfaction level. Respondents were also requested to write down any additional comments they had on the matter at hand.

Results

The needs theories as espoused by Maslow and Alderfer will be the focus in the analysis of the results. The principle of the needs theories is that all employees have needs and that the degree to which these needs are met, will determine their level of job satisfaction and motivation to do the job. The lower end needs (extrinsic) and higher end needs (intrinsic) will be looked into in relation to job satisfaction and motivation by educators to do the job.

Basic physiological needs

Results show that there is a moderate to high positive correlation between job satisfaction and salary, as well as fringe benefits. Thus the better the salary and fringe benefits, the greater the job satisfaction and vice versa. The results in

the study show that 87% of the educators are dissatisfied with their salaries, while a huge 93% are dissatisfied with the fringe benefits. The comments from some of the educators on salaries and fringe benefits were:

“I love being a teacher with all my heart but the salary I receive is so low and discouraging that I am having second thoughts about being an educator.”

“...what makes our situation worse as inner-city schools educators is how low our salaries are as compared to our counter-parts in the public schools.”

“The other day I was thinking about how after 9 years as an educator in an inner-city Independent School I will be going home after retirement with nothing to show. If I had been working in a public school I would have pension, accumulated paid leave and in the meantime having a housing subsidy and medical aid. The fact that I will take my bag and nothing else gives me the chill in my stomach.”

The results further show a positive and significant but low correlation between job satisfaction and the level of security educators have in their jobs. That is to say that the more secure educators feel, the more satisfied they are. The results however show that 75% of the respondents noted that they never or seldom feel secure in their jobs. Comments from some of the educators indicate the following:

“Our employment contracts are renewed each year, one is never sure if there will be work or not. It always depends on enrolments and government subsidies.”

“The owners of the schools ignore fair labour practice. Employees are sometimes dismissed at a moment’s notice. Educators do not even have Union representation.”

Social / relatedness needs

The results show a positive relationship between job satisfaction and interpersonal relationships. This implies that the better the interpersonal relationships with colleagues, the greater the job satisfaction. 70% of the educators in this research have shown satisfaction with the interpersonal relationships that they have among their colleagues. 58% of the educators do however feel dissatisfied with the professional relationship that they have with the owners of the schools they work in.

Growth needs

This encompasses the self-esteem, as well as self-actualisation as portrayed by Maslow. Self-esteem is brought about by factors like the status educators have in the community they serve, involvement in decision making and the level of recognition that educators get. The results show that only 37% of the educators feel satisfied with the status that educators have in the community. 28% of the educators are satisfied with their involvement in decision making, while only 24% feel that they receive recognition for the work that they do.

All this translates to only 40% of the educators feeling motivated to do their job and 38% feeling satisfied with their jobs. A huge 84% of the inner-city school’s educators feel that they are highly disadvantaged.

Discussion of results

This study focused on the factors that promote job satisfaction among educators of inner-city Independent Schools by using the needs theories as expressed by Maslow and Alderfer. There are indications from the results that there is a general dissatisfaction among educators in inner-city Independent Schools. The results show a high level of dissatisfaction with lower order needs (salary, fringe benefits,

security). 76% of the inner-city Independent Schools educators want to leave their schools to join public schools. Public schools are regarded as better paying, provision of some fringe benefits and secure jobs. They are regarded as a safe and better alternative to working in inner-city Independent Schools. The main focus of the educators in the study seems to be to satisfy the basic physiological and security needs (extrinsic factors). This behaviour is in line with the needs theories premise that individuals act to fulfil the needs that are important to them at a particular time. Pinder (2008:316) indicates that the beliefs of people regarding how they are treated, is always in comparison to the treatment that others receive who are in similar circumstances. Bennett (2002:13) talks of 'loyalty' becoming a rare commodity in places of employment. 'Loyalty' may mean employees having few options and willing to leave as soon as they can. High unemployment and poor security tend to keep people who would otherwise leave their jobs. Bennett (2002:13) continues to talk about separated and divorced employees. Separated employees think poorly of their companies but do not intend to leave due to absence of alternatives. Divorced employees are actively seeking to leave. 72% of inner-city Independent School's educators are seeking to leave their schools to join public schools or other better options.

Maslow refers to the linear movement from lower to higher order satisfaction as the 'satisfaction-progress' model. According to this phenomenon, the main focus of the inner-city Independent Schools educators is going to be on the satisfaction of the lower order needs until they feel that they are paid better and feel more secure in their jobs. This is a difficult situation to address, as the amount of subsidy inner-city Independent Schools get depend on factors like:

- The number of enrolment of the students
- Performance of the school (based on grade 12 results)
- School fees that students have to pay

This means that what educators receive as salaries will always be determined by these factors and these factors differ from school to school. This explains why 84% of the inner-city school educators feel disadvantaged. Their livelihood depends on the stability of their schools. The stability of the schools depends on the overall performance of the schools. If only 40% of the educators feel motivated to do their job, it creates a dilemma for the schools, as it means that educators will not be performing at their best, resulting in poor performance by learners. It is a vicious cycle, as this will have an impact on enrolment and subsidy payments. This then translates into educators either going without salaries, or taking pay cuts or even being laid off. One teacher said:

"There was a time in my school that we were not paid for three months. We called the period 'May, June, July'. Some teachers were of the opinion that we should boycott classes. We realised that it would mean that the school closes. We decided to drag our feet to class so that 'May, June, July' should not happen again."

The results also show that 72% of the educators are dissatisfied with the lack of involvement in decision making. One educator said:

"You feel so stupid when decisions that will affect you are never communicated with you. Sometimes students seem to even know more than us the educators."

"I have decided long ago never to get involved in anything in this school"

because I am never consulted on anything. The management can go ahead and do what they want, I am not going to get involved."

Educators regard what they receive as remuneration, as a form of recognition for the work that they do. 76% of the educators felt that they do not receive recognition for the work that they do. Most educators regard their low salaries and lack of benefits as unfair treatment, and lack of recognition and appreciation on the part of the employer. It then becomes difficult to be self-actualised when the perception is that the basic needs have not been met. Self-esteem is also affected by perceived lack of recognition, autonomy and appreciation.

Alderfer in the meantime suggests a frustration-regression model, in that failure to satisfy a need renders it less important and the focus goes to other needs in any direction. Most inner-city schools educators will indicate that they are grateful to be employed as some people are still not employed and looking for jobs. However, they feel that their salaries should be reflective of their qualifications, experience and expertise. Also, once they are employed they would like to have some sense of stability and feel secure in their jobs. This does not usually happen as employment contracts are usually renewed on a yearly basis. According to the regression- frustration model, educators will tend to ignore the existence needs (lower order need) and focus on the next level, which is relatedness needs or growth needs. If those are not satisfied, they then tend to focus again on lower end needs or what seems important at a particular time. 60% of the educators are satisfied with the level of responsibility that their jobs carry, yet only 52% get a sense of achievement from doing their job and a low 38% feel satisfied with their jobs. This could then be ascribed to the frustration-regression phenomenon that higher end needs that have potential to motivate and increase performance when not satisfied, get

ignored for other needs. The focus then keeps on regressing to lower end needs, as they are a source of high levels of dissatisfaction.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study investigated the job satisfaction of educators in the inner-city independent schools of Johannesburg. The quantitative approach, as well as the unstructured comments that the educators had to make, coupled with the needs theories by Maslow and Alderfer, gave a helpful discovery of the factors that promote satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the educators. The results show that inner-city independent schools educators in Johannesburg are highly dissatisfied with their working conditions, as they feel that their basic needs are not being met by their employers. This results in very low motivation and commitment to do the job and results in very high turnover in such schools. Bennett (2002:13) raises a question about what makes an employee become committed: "The key component is the employee's assessment of leadership, development opportunities, their judgement on whether they are sufficiently empowered to carry out their work effectively as well as their ratings of their immediate supervisors people's management skills."

Research results also show that when the environment provides adequately for the satisfaction of all kinds of needs, the motivators become more powerful sources of satisfaction than lower end needs. However, if the environment deprives people of both lower-end and higher-end needs, then the lower-end needs become more powerful sources of dissatisfaction, as is the case in this study.

As a result, this study recommends that principals, directors and owners should be aware of the factors that increase job satisfaction and those that just decrease job dissatisfaction. For the inner-city schools to improve and grow, educator job satisfaction cannot be ignored. What is of

significance is that in spite of all the challenges that inner-city independent educators go through, only 40% were considering leaving teaching as a profession. The 76% who are thinking of joining public schools can be retained if attention is paid to motivators. Principals, managers and owners of inner-city Independent Schools would do well to look into factors like:

Investing in human resource management

People are what make an organisation. According to Bennett (2002:13), the more committed the employees, the better the bottom line. The bottom line is important especially in Independent Schools, as they are privately operated. Fair payment of the employees is important.

Providing stability

High turn-over of employees cannot be good for any organisation. There needs to be development of policies and practices that promote stability.

Involvement in decision making

Decisions that are always made from the top-bottom are not sustainable. Involving staff in decision making is empowering to them. It promotes levels of responsibility and ownership of projects.

Rewarding excellence

This is crucial for employees because it means you recognise their effort. If excellence is not rewarded, employees tend to withdraw into a shell and stop performing at their outmost.

Recognising effort and attempt

Among employees, there will be those who are up-coming. There should

therefore be recognition of effort and an attempt to nurture such.

Evans (2001:303) says: "Many teachers face poor prospects, low morale and even lower pay levels, but treat them right and they will move mountains for you." This research focused on inner-city Independent School educators, more research should be done on educators in public schools, tertiary institutions and private schools.

About the Author

TSHOLOFELO PAULINAH MAFORAH is a faculty mentor at Tshwane University of Technology, Art campus in Pretoria, South Africa. Tsholofelo also works as an Independent Education Consultant. She has worked for the Department of Education as a teacher and principal for more than twenty years. Her research focuses on job satisfaction of employees as well as on student performance. She received her Ph.D. from the University of South Africa.

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