

## The job satisfaction of principals of previously disadvantaged schools: new light on an old issue

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*The aim of this study was to identify influences on the job satisfaction of previously disadvantaged school principals in North-West Province. Evans's theory of job satisfaction, morale and motivation was useful as a conceptual framework. A mixed-methods explanatory research design was important in discovering issues with which these principals struggled. Thirty principals of secondary schools located in the rural villages and townships in the province were purposefully selected. A structured questionnaire was used during the quantitative phase. The items in the questionnaire determined the principals' views on intrinsic and contextual factors related to their working environment. These items were followed by open-ended questions. Additional qualitative data were obtained through interviews with eight principals selected from the same group. Although the principals enjoyed intrinsic aspects of their work and positive interpersonal relations at their schools, the results were significant in determining how the principals struggled with other issues (e.g. policies and practices of the Department of Basic Education). Underpinning factors were unrealistic expectations and negative perceptions that influenced their professionalism. A key factor that emerged was power versus powerlessness.*

**Keywords:** Evans's theory; job satisfaction; mixed-methods; previously disadvantaged schools; principals

### Introduction

The role of school principals is pivotal. Principals are considered the leaders in schools and primary work performance managers. However, principals face great challenges in their professions. These challenges include external factors (e.g. legislation, departmental policies), school structures (e.g. for maintaining standards and budgets), interpersonal processes (i.e. relationships with teachers, students and parents), and personal factors (i.e. professional activities and lifestyle) that affect their job satisfaction and motivation (Chaplain, 2001:200).

The South African education system is facing unique challenges. These include continual changes to the curriculum and government policies as well as the effect of HIV/Aids the principals have to deal with. Another challenge is violence in South African schools (Lindle, 2004:379; Makwabe, 2009:7; Newman, 2008:3). This violence includes skirmishes among learners as well as learner-to-teacher and teacher-to-learner aggression. Another major issue is unsatisfactory Grade 12 pass rates. In 2004 the national pass rate was 70.7% but it changed to 66.6% in 2006 (Govender, 2006:4). Analysts have described the poor pass rates as appalling, and criticised the education system and principals in particular. Some provinces reacted to the problem by demoting or by warning the principals (Govender, 2006:4).

Principals are instrumental to functional schools and need to experience job satisfaction

to be motivated to do their work well and address challenges effectively. This is a fact recognised worldwide and numerous studies have been published on principals' job satisfaction in different contexts. Some recent examples include a study among principals in Macau that identified the significance of financial issues and student numbers and the role of emotional support from supervisors to improve job satisfaction (Wong & Cheuk, 2005); an American study that identified the importance of relationships with staff (Clemens, Milsom & Cashwell, 2009), and a Flemish study that determined the influence of self-efficacy and achievement orientation as well as the key role of school boards (Devos, Bouckennooghe, Engels, Hotton & Aelterman, 2007).

In the South African context, very little research has focused on the job satisfaction of school principals, with the exception of related studies such as a dated publication by Steyn and Van Wyk (1999). This gap in the current body of knowledge was brought to the fore by an electronic search. Studies that referred to teachers found significant correlations between poor job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation that prevented education professionals from functioning effectively (George, Louw & Badenhorst, 2008). Another South African study found that poor job satisfaction and job stress were significantly related to illnesses such as hypertension, heart disease, stomach ulcers, asthma, mental distress, and tobacco and alcohol misuse (Peltzer, Shisana, Zuma, Van Wyk & Zungu-Dirwayi, 2008:247).

In view of the above, this study sought to add new information to an old topic in the ongoing discourse around job satisfaction. The main research question was therefore: *What are the influences on the job satisfaction of principals of previously disadvantaged schools in North-West Province?*

North-West Province was selected for reasons of accessibility and convenience, a useful and valid approach pointed out by McMillan and Schumacher (2010:137). The research focused on previously disadvantaged schools since they experienced greater management problems due to insufficient resources (Govender, 2010). Another challenge the principals of previously disadvantaged schools faced was the fact that they competed in the open market, as parents could send their children to any well-resourced school of their choice (Nir, 2000:335; Dempster, Freakley & Parry, 2001:1)

The study used Evans's theory as a conceptual framework. This model is explained here.

### Conceptual Framework: Evans's theory

According to Evans (1998:12), job satisfaction is defined as "a state of mind encompassing all those feelings determined by the extent to which the individual perceives her/his job-related needs to being met". Different job satisfaction theories include (i) discrepancy theories, which examine the discrepancy between what an employee needs or wants and what the employee finds in a job, (ii) equity theories, which suggest that the way people evaluate their jobs is largely influenced by their perceived treatment compared to others in a similar situation, and (iii) expectancy theories that focus on the expectations of people to be rewarded in accordance with their input (Adams & Bond, 2000:537).

Evans's (2001) discrepancy theory proved most useful for the purposes of this study, for two reasons. First, she worked with *educational* professionals in particular. Second, she identified *context* as a key influence on the job satisfaction of individuals. She (Evans, 2001:300) defined context as

"the situation and circumstances, arising out of a combination and interrelationship of institutionally- and externally-imposed conditions, that constitute the environment and

culture within which an individual carries out his/her job”.

An important aspect of job satisfaction is not the context itself, but the extent to which the values and ideologies that operate in the context matches those of the individual (e.g. the principals). According to Evans (2001), the perceived proximity to their conception of a job-related ideal would determine the principals' morale, motivation and job satisfaction. This conception of an ideal job is fluid and reflects the principal's current needs, perceptions and expectations. Evans (2001) also emphasises the role of individual differences and warns against crude and simplistic generalisations.

Another factor in experiencing context is the principals' expectations — which may be unrealistic. Relative perspective is another aspect. This perspective refers to their views of their working environments compared to previous environments, or to the contexts of other principals (e.g. in well-resourced urban schools). A third aspect is their professional orientation which may be restricted (based on experience and intuition), or extended (based on pedagogical theory) (Evans, 2001:293).

In her research, Evans (2001:300) identified six key influences on the job satisfaction of teachers and academics. These influences are not hierarchically arranged because of individual differences. A good match would be when teachers and principals do not have to compromise their beliefs in terms of the six aspects below.

- Equity and justice (fairness) relate to circumstances that discriminate against the school or individuals. Individual principals may differ in their views on what is fair or not fair, depending on their professional orientation, their expectations, and their relative experience.
- Pedagogy and androgogy concern principals' perceptions of the quality of the education in their schools (e.g. methods, curricula, teacher/learner relations, departmental policies, and the teaching/learning culture in their schools).
- Organisational efficiency relates to the principals' views on how compromising or uncompromising their school contexts are. This aspect may include departmental practices that affect the day-to-day running of the school, and the efficiency of the teachers.
- Interpersonal relations are important in schools because of the communal nature of school teachers' working conditions. This issue includes principals' relations with the Department of Basic Education (DBE), their supervisors, the School Governing Body (SGB), the learners and their parents.
- Collegiality overlaps with interpersonal relations, and deserves a separate category. Collegiality focuses on relations with the teachers at the school, and involves principals' views of the quality of the teamwork and the support among the teachers at the school.
- Self-concept and self-image essentially reflect the integration of the above five issues, but also moves beyond this integration. Self-concept or self-image is dependent on how the contexts in which the educational professionals work shape their perceptions of themselves, both personally and professionally. If the contexts in which the principals function require of them to act contrary to their nature or their values, the situation would create dissatisfaction and consequently affect their self-concept and self-image.

With reference to the above, this study sought to determine what influenced the job satisfaction of principals of previously disadvantaged secondary schools in North-West Province. To this end, the next section addresses the research design and data collection.

### **Research method and data collection**

This study followed a mixed-methods approach. Bazeley (2009:203) writes that some authors recommend that the elements of quantitative and qualitative research be combined at all stages of a research project, whereas others suggest that the phases be kept separately prior to combining them for the conclusions. The authors of this paper elected to start with a quantitative phase, followed by a separate qualitative phase, but to integrate the results. This approach enhances understanding of what the results mean, and helps to identify conflicting results. A sequential explanatory research design was therefore implemented (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:401). This design permitted the authors to discover general trends during the quantitative phase, and to explore these trends further in a qualitative phase (Cresswell, 2003:216; Clark, Cresswell, Gutmann & Hanson, 2003:210).

The study population was all the principals of previously disadvantaged schools in North-West Province of South Africa. This province was purposely selected because of its convenient location and accessibility (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:137). Thirty principals of 30 secondary schools located in the rural villages and the townships in the district participated in the study. Of these, 20 were male and 10 were female; 18 were between 31 and 40 years old; 3 had education diplomas, 11 had B degrees, 3 had BE degrees, 9 had Honours degrees, and 4 had Masters' degrees.

In the quantitative phase, a structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire consisted of different sections and was pilot-tested. The first section collected demographic data (gender, age, years of experience as a principal, and highest academic qualification). The remainder of the questionnaire covered various intrinsic and contextual factors that could influence the job satisfaction of the principals. These factors included aspects such as the nature of the work, the roles of the principal, physical working conditions, self-actualisation, salary and interpersonal relations. The principals were requested to respond by means of a four-point Likert scale, ranging from very dissatisfied to very satisfied. (For the purposes of this article, the percentages of the two positive responses, and the percentages of the two negative scores were grouped together.)

The data were interpreted by means of descriptive statistics that included correlation, the percentage of respondents who answered an item in a specific way, and the means of each item (which could be anything from 1 to 4. The higher the mean, the more satisfied the respondents were about an issue). In the final section of the questionnaire the principals were asked to briefly describe the factors in their daily work that gave them the most or the least satisfaction, and to make recommendations on how to improve their job satisfaction.

Several measures were taken to ensure the validity of the questionnaire. Regarding content validity, the authors ensured that the factors captured in the literature review were well represented by the items in the different sections of the questionnaire. Expert opinion was sought to check for face validity. To determine the instrument's reliabilities, the Cronbach alphas were calculated for the various constructs of the questionnaire. The reliabilities were generally above 0.7 and even 0.8 which is excellent for this instrument (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:184).

In the qualitative phase, eight participants were purposely selected for maximum variation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:327). To this end, the authors ensured inclusion of both genders (two females and six males, as there were double the number of male than female principals in the area). The selection also ensured that the participants had varying years of experience and education, and that some worked in townships and others in rural schools.

The principals were interviewed to gain an in-depth understanding of the results obtained

in the quantitative phase. Semistructured interviews were conducted. All the questions were related to factors that could influence the job satisfaction of principals in some way. For example, since job satisfaction could be influenced by unrealistic expectations (as indicated by Evans's theory), the principals were questioned on their aspiration to become principals, their expectations when they were first appointed, and what had happened as time went by. They were also asked about their views on recognition as principals, how they experienced their interpersonal relations, how they experienced their physical working environment at the schools, and what they perceived as satisfactory and non-satisfactory aspects of their everyday working conditions.

The authors ensured the reliability of the qualitative data by selecting a lengthy data collection period, conducting interviews in the natural settings of the principals to reflect the reality of their working situations, by using a tape-recorder during the interviews and transcribing these verbatim, and presenting direct quotes from interviews in the results. The results also indicate whether the statements were made by a male (M) or female (F) interviewee.

For the qualitative data analysis, the authors used the steps recommended by McMillan and Schumacher (2010:371-377). This implied getting a sense of the whole by reading the interview transcripts; identifying initial codes that were written in the margins; comparing codes for duplication, trying out the provisional coding and refining the coding system. This was done for each category. The categories were pre-determined by the questions in the interview guide (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:369).

To ensure ethical research, the authors obtained the informed consent of the DBE and of the participants. They were not deceived in any way, anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed, and their permission was asked to record the interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:339).

## **Results**

Just more than 50% of the principals indicated that they did not feel comfortable in their working environments, and 60% specified that their poor working environments had a negative impact on their commitment. In spite of that, 93.94% noted that they loved their work.

During the qualitative phase, a picture emerged that highlighted individual differences. The results are presented in the light of the conceptual framework. The six elements that influence job satisfaction (identified by Evans, 2001:300) have been used as key elements for presentation. This is followed by a "discussion of results" section in which the results are interpreted in the light of the conceptual framework and compared with other literature.

### **Equity and Justice**

The highest positive correlation (0.25) between various factors and job satisfaction was found with salary: the more positive principals were about their salaries, the more satisfied they were with their work in general. (The low correlation is influenced by the small sample size.) Between 66.7% and 90.0% of the principals were dissatisfied (as indicated by means of 1.47 to 1.93) with their salaries and fringe benefits as well as salaries compared to age, experience, workload, and those of other professions. In addition, 76.7% believed their salary was not equal to the effort they put into their jobs, and a significant 100% indicated that their salaries did not cover all their needs. In line with this result, 90% said that it was not the salary that kept them in their jobs. It is noteworthy, however, that 86.3% stated that their perceived poor salaries would not make them leave the profession.

Qualitative data confirmed general dissatisfaction with salaries. As for the recommendations to improve their job satisfaction, the principals suggested that the DBE could show its appreciation of their work by means of merit awards (M), incentives (F) (M), salary adjustments (F), and subsidies for cars (F).

General dissatisfaction was expressed with regard to their physical working conditions. A high mean of 3.07 and 70% agreement illustrated satisfaction with the availability of classrooms. Dissatisfaction (means of between 1.47 and 1.93) related to the poor financial support from parents, unsafe premises, and the lack of adequate sports grounds (indicated by between 76.8% and 90.0% of the principals).

Qualitative data obtained by means of open-ended questions, confirmed that previously disadvantaged schools experienced problems with infrastructure that hampered the delivery of quality public education. The principals referred to poor facilities and the absence of maintenance, a serious water shortage, and poor roads leading to the school. It was mentioned that the roads were particularly bad when it rained. They also referred to electricity problems and an unkempt school environment. The surroundings included dilapidated buildings, tall grass and overgrown shrubs that made the school look "uninviting". During the interviews, two principals summarised the views of many principals:

*My school does not have the following which I think would help: an administration block, a laboratory and a library, a hall for assembly and for other uses, and toilets for both learners and teachers. The 25 female teachers, including the principal, have to share toilets with the girls, and the 10 male teachers have to share with the boys (F).*

*We have to pay for electricity, buy printing paper, ink, pay for the telephone, water, the list is endless ... we have to employ a security guard as required by the Department, and we use a lot of money to pay him ... you cannot even think of employing extra teachers; you are not allowed to anyway ... we do not have a general worker to clean the school because we do not have enough money (M).*

The parents could not afford to pay extra money for school projects, and the department frequently paid out funds very late. In expressing their financial needs, a number of the principals compared their infrastructure and sports facilities to those of previously advantaged schools, and indicated that they expected to rise to that level (F) (F) (M).

### Pedagogy or Androgogy

The quantitative results showed that 56.7% agreed that their jobs were too demanding, and 83.3% commented that their work was interesting. Further investigation revealed the influence of autonomy/power (causing satisfaction) versus powerlessness. The principals had some autonomy over administrative work at their schools (e.g. handling finances, managing projects, and developing school policies). However, the principals were dissatisfied (low means) with the absence of opportunities for personal growth related to limited control. This issue was strongly corroborated by the qualitative data (see below).

The main cause of dissatisfaction in the category of "pedagogy or androgogy" was the practices and policies of the DBE that left principals feeling powerless and frustrated. At the core of the frustration were the uncoordinated demands and "time-consuming" instructions that came from the DBE. Added to those were the "interference" and the "interruptions" in their daily working lives that "wasted" their time and took them away from schools during office hours. They expressed dissatisfaction with bureaucracy and having "to wait forever to get anything done".

The principals perceived the DBE as indecisive when dealing with teachers' disciplinary cases. Labour legislation made it very difficult to discipline uncommitted teachers who were well aware of the lack of principal authority. One male principal referred to himself as a "toothless dog".

The pressure to improve learners' performance was another significant cause of dissatisfaction. The system to measure performance quite often resulted in bitterness and anger. If there was improvement, it did not last because the methods were not sustainable. The principals and teachers were frequently compelled to work long hours and give extra classes after school, over weekends, and during the holidays, leaving them without time "to rest and recuperate". In addition, their schools were often compared to previously advantaged schools that achieved 100% pass rates.

The principals were also dissatisfied with some departmental policies which they wanted reviewed. One such a policy is the pregnancy policy, and another the Section 21 education policy. The Section 21 rule meant that most poor schools were classified as no-fee schools. The principals stated that this policy prevented them from improving the infrastructure because Section 21 money could not be used for this purpose (F), that resources and Section 21 money were "always late" (M) and inadequate for meeting their needs (M).

The other policy several principals mentioned was the "unfavourable" Post Provisioning Model the DBE used to allocate teachers to schools. The principals had limited power in these appointments. They believed that the policy caused "an insufficient number of teachers in schools" (F), in "political influence on post occupation" (M), and teachers getting "imposed" on schools (M). In many cases the quality of the appointments was questionable and often delayed (M).

One principal stated that the DBE did not treat them as "educated professionals". He wished the department would accept recommendations from principals as the people "on the spot".

### Organisational efficiency

Factors that affected the day-to-day running of each school also influenced job satisfaction. These factors included problems with a number of learners who were ill-disciplined (demonstrated by their repeated absence from school or class), noisiness, loitering, and late arrival at classes, unruly behaviour, and drug and substance abuse. However, these were not major issues since 93.3% of the principals indicated that they were satisfied with their professional relationships with the learners.

Although the supervisors were experienced as unsupportive, 70% of the principals indicated that they were satisfied with the commitment of colleagues. Most teachers seemed to give their cooperation to enhancing the school's efficiency. However, during interviews and in open-ended questionnaire responses, five of eight principals mentioned the lack of commitment of staff members (e.g. teacher absenteeism) as a source of annoyance. One principal stated: "Teachers want to be reminded to attend classes all the time". Some principals also referred to the fact that teachers wanted to be instructed what to do (M) (F), and some teachers had negative attitudes "especially the lazy ones" (F).

Parent involvement also affects the efficiency of a school. Of the group, 86.6% were dissatisfied with the extent of parents' commitment (e.g. poor attendance of parent meetings). Many parents failed to collect their children's progress reports. Other principals indicated that they had to deal with difficult parents who defended their children when they misbehaved (M).

Some parents in North-West Province were physically absent most of the time since they worked far away, only went home at the end of each month, and were therefore unable to support the school. For example:

*I work with communities that are detached from the school. The majority of students are from farming communities, children of farm labourers from around here. The SGB tries its best to involve parents. We don't always win but we try (F).*

Added to the above were child-headed homes where the parents were absent (sometimes because of death), poor parents so that children went to school without having eaten, and a low literacy level of the parents (e.g. expecting teachers to be substitute parents).

### Interpersonal relations

The mean calculations showed a general dissatisfaction with the diversity of roles expected from principals, and the consequent role conflict. The roles that caused most dissatisfaction (means between 1.87 and 2.27) were social demands, parent expectations, general workload, and the little time principals had to spend with their families (indicated by most of the principals [50% to 76.6% in all instances]).

The principals were generally satisfied (most means exceeding 3) with the interpersonal relationships at their schools. This was particularly true of the professional relationships the principals had with their students (93.3% satisfied), the parents (83.3% were satisfied), and their colleagues (76.7% were satisfied). The principals also indicated that focusing on interpersonal relations was worth the effort (73.3% in agreement).

Although some students were ill-disciplined, the qualitative data showed that the relationship between the principals and the learners was one of the most important sources of job satisfaction. The principals derived satisfaction from “*dealing with young minds, guiding them and advising them*” (M), and from “*developing the precious minds of African students*” (F).

Acceptable Grade 12 results played a significant role in the recognition principals received. One said: “*The good results helped a great deal ... I am still riding the cloud ... I hope it lasts. Everyone recognises me at the moment*”. The principals’ views on the recognition they experienced, indicated that they were least satisfied with the feedback they received from the DBE. For example:

*As an individual I have not received any recognition for the work and the leadership I am offering my school to remain up there. I have not received a certificate, a trophy, a cheque or a gift voucher. I feel bad because it is like the department does not recognise what I do as principal (M).*

Other respondents based recognition on their salaries. One observed that they were treated as doormats. “*Principals get blamed for every situation, but when you perform you still do not get recognised*”. If schools underperformed, principals blamed staff that “*dragged their feet*”.

### Collegiality

Some principals highlighted their satisfaction with staff cooperation, for example, referring to “*a sense of ownership of functions of the school by the staff. ... LRC [Learner Representative Council] and SGB*”. Some male principals mentioned the punctuality of teachers, the work done as assigned by all stakeholders, support from the teachers and good human relations with staff. There was less satisfaction with the support the principals received from their supervisors.

### Self-concept and Self-image

In their responses on the structured questionnaire, the principals indicated general satisfaction with their own competence and worth as principals, indicating self-efficacy as school managers. They believed that their work was important and that the work was stimulating (indicated by 90% and 83.3%, respectively); 90% believed they had the necessary experience to perform the job well; 83.3% of the group indicated that they were satisfied with the work they did as principals, and 73.3% believed they achieved a high standard of excellence. The principals were also significantly satisfied (means of at least 3.0) with their understanding of the different tasks they performed (96.6% were satisfied), and their training for the job (76.7% were satisfied).

However, when they could respond freely, the qualitative data indicated individual differences, and a somewhat different picture emerged. The data illustrated that a number of principals were struggling to cope and would welcome training on how to address the challenges they faced. For example, a female principal suggested the creation of a platform for interactive sessions to share best practices with previously advantaged schools as a way of uplifting the previously disadvantaged schools. Some male respondents added that they needed training to deal with issues such as disciplinary problems (e.g. related to teacher absence and inadequate teacher commitment), classroom management, conflict management, financial management and policy development. This reaction corresponds with the fact that some of the participants became principals without having applied for the work. One principal who was appointed in this way stated that he was "*not yet ready to be a principal*".

The principals had certain expectations when they were first appointed. They thought they would be supported by the DBE, would be able to address challenges, would be authoritative leaders that "*called the shots*", would receive decent salaries, would receive cooperation from important stakeholders, and would be mentored by role models. Only one principal said that he had received the support he needed from the DBE. For many others, adjusting to the position and overcoming the initial challenges were problematic. Challenges included winning the confidence of staff members, not being given time by the SGB to settle in, having to organise people, being exposed to different situations and different opinions, and an "*obsession*" with Grade 12 results. When one principal was appointed, the school was called "*tozo-yizo*", meaning everyone did as they pleased. In trying to address the various challenges that came their way, some had grown "*tired*" and conceded defeat.

### Discussion of results

This study confirmed the importance of the six elements identified by Evans (2001:300) influencing the job satisfaction of principals of previously disadvantaged schools in North-West Province. The study also proved the value of a mixed-methods approach to painting a holistic picture of issues that influenced the job satisfaction of selected principals in this province. What initially emerged as positive aspects when the principals ticked off responses on scaled items, were revealed as negative influences by some when they were allowed to voice their views and concerns freely in open-ended items. These views were confirmed by one-on-one interviews with an interviewer of their own culture who facilitated trust. One such factor was self-efficacy.

A sense of efficacy has been found to impact significantly on overall job satisfaction (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni & Steca, 2003:821). The quantitative data found apparent positive self-concepts and self-efficacy beliefs. However, the qualitative data revealed the

uncertainty of many principals about dealing with the challenges they faced, and how powerless they often felt (like “toothless dogs”). The qualitative data also illuminated their training needs on various issues (e.g. how to discipline teachers).

In other instances the qualitative data confirmed the quantitative results. For example: The principals found the intrinsic aspects of their work meaningful. Hackman and Oldham (in Pinder, 2008:209) pointed out the importance of jobs as meaningful experiences. “Meaningfulness” means that the school principals believed their efforts or inputs to count for something, or somehow important to others (Pinder, 2008:209). Jobs are meaningful when they offer variety, task identity and task significance as was generally the case in this study.

Catano and Stronger (2007:379) explain the role conflict school principals experience. They have to deal with education department officials, parents, teachers and learners, each group having its own expectations. They constantly try to balance the conflicting needs and expectations of each group. Although the quantitative data indicated that the principals experienced such role conflict, it was not even mentioned when the principals could express themselves freely and explain the factors that most affected their daily working situations.

The principals seemed satisfied with the respect they received from parents and learners, and with their interpersonal relations with the teachers at the same school. This was an important finding since Maforah (2004:79), in a study on factors that promoted job satisfaction among school teachers, found that interpersonal relationships correlated significantly with job satisfaction. What separates effective leaders from ineffective ones, is not only the quality of their vision and courage, but their interpersonal relationships as well (Day, 2005:284). This aspect is related to how much such leaders care about the people they lead.

A major source of job dissatisfaction for this group of principals was the policies and practices of the DBE. The principals spoke at length about their frustrations during the interviews, and wrote extensively on this issue in the open-ended questions. Their frustrations were related to interference by the DBE, interruptions of their daily working lives, and their lack of autonomy. All of these had a negative impact on the school culture because the principals were prevented from sharing decision-making with their staff. This finding confirms that South African teachers are largely ignored when policies are formulated, and are merely treated as implementers of such policies. However, they are exceptionally eager to be involved, as Swanepoel (2009) found. Blasé and Blasé (2000:9) report on the importance of shared governance as a way of creating a climate and culture in schools where individuals are willing to explore without fear of undue reproach.

Recognition and positive feedback by superiors have been identified as important to educational professionals (Pinder, 2008:174; Whitaker, 2003:170). Recognition brings about a sense of fulfilment and self-actualisation, and is the driving force that propels individuals to greater performance. This is a crucial factor for school principals because it improves the standards of their schools. However, this study found that insufficient support and recognition from the DBE was a significant source of dissatisfaction and contrary to what principals expected when they were appointed.

The above negative views of the principals concerning the policies and practices of the DBE seem to have caused disengagement of some principals, with a consequent lack of focus on professional activities, and being negative and critical about the DBE, teachers and learners. This is cause for concern because disengagement necessarily erodes the quality of teaching and learning at schools (Pretorius & De Villiers, 2009).

Another source of principals’ dissatisfaction was their salaries. Pinder (2008:219) writes

that an increase in remuneration is expected by employees who perceive increases in responsibility and input in their jobs. The responsibilities of principals have increased and become more complex as they are inundated with new policies and practices, but their salaries have not been commensurate with their duties. The finding that South African educational professionals are often dissatisfied with their salaries confirms previous research (Marais, Monteith & Smith, 2001:90; Pretorius, 2002:1). Among other aspects, poor salaries have discouraged some teachers from applying for the post of principal (Whitaker, 2003:162).

Another source of dissatisfaction included inadequate physical resources and infrastructure, in stark contrast to the resources available to previously advantaged (predominantly white) schools. North-West Province in South Africa is primarily rural and poor. According to Legotlo et al., (2002:113), very few secondary schools are equipped with well-stocked libraries or functional laboratories. Water and working toilets are sometimes non-existent. Some of the schools have no chairs, chalkboards, doors, or windows. Insufficient textbooks sometimes mean that up to 10 learners have to share one book. School principals have to struggle with these problems daily.

Demotivation and dissatisfaction were also caused by the fact that the principals did not know how to deal with ill-disciplined teachers and students. Poor student discipline and lack of student motivation were main stressors for teachers (Schulze & Steyn, 2007). Govender (2010) confirmed that some black parents in South Africa were abandoning dysfunctional state schools in favour of top private schools, among other reasons for better discipline.

The work ethic of South African black adolescents is determined *inter alia* by their parents' involvement in school matters (Myburgh, Niehaus & Poggenpoel, 2002:531). Uninvolved parents therefore remain a problem. In the context of this study, the parents were not involved, in many cases because they were poor, illiterate or employed in urban areas far from home. Several principals commented that they felt powerless to improve parent involvement. When the above results are compared with those of Evans (2001) in very dissimilar contexts, it seems clear that institutional policies and practices as well as collegial relations were key factors in job satisfaction. However, in the Evans study the education professionals were allowed to participate in decision-making and received recognition for work well done. These professionals also indicated positive professional self-efficacy beliefs. In both studies, the general sources of negative job-related attitudes were institutional policy and management decisions.

## Conclusions

This study investigated the job satisfaction of principals connected to previously disadvantaged schools in North-West Province. The mixed-methods approach that was used and Evans's theory on job satisfaction were particularly helpful in discovering which factors were *most* influential in the work situations of the principals. The questionnaire covered all factors equally. However, the principals' answers to the open-ended questions and their comments during the interviews revealed the most significant factors. Rich qualitative data facilitated understanding of individual differences and the role of context (e.g. the particular parent community and inadequate resources at the schools).

Specific factors that had a positive impact on the principals' job satisfaction were intrinsic aspects of their work and interpersonal relationships at their schools. Specific factors that had a negative impact on their job satisfaction were in particular the DBE's policies and practices (e.g. no autonomy and no recognition). Added to these were the absence of relevant training

for principals, ill-disciplined students, uncommitted staff members, uninvolved parents, insufficient physical resources and poor salaries. Although the study was limited to North-West Province, the principals of other previously disadvantaged schools in the country no doubt struggle with similar issues. The situation requires further investigation.

Underpinning the above dissatisfaction of the principals were three additional factors that were also observed by Evans (2001:293). These factors were unrealistic expectations, relative perspective, and professional orientation.

The principals in this study had unrealistic expectations of what their work would entail. These expectations were related to the support and cooperation they would receive to empower them for their task, the autonomy/authority/power they would have, and their remuneration. Their perception of their own situation as pitiable and inferior compared to those of “*privileged*”, predominantly white, schools had a negative effect on their general attitude. They also had to spend their time differently from how they *wanted* to spend it. Both their unrealistic expectations and their negative relative perspective had an impact on their professionalism. They felt professionally restricted by the day-to-day practicalities of struggling to manage their schools effectively. In this regard professionalism is seen as the attitudinal, intellectual and epistemological stance of the principals in relation to the practice of being a principal (Evans, 2001:293). This study found that a number of principals even became disengaged from their professional life.

An important factor that emerged from the above was power versus powerlessness. There was, for example, no consultation with the principals when decisions were made that influenced their daily lives, and this absence of autonomy facilitated feelings of powerlessness. This issue needs to be explored further. More research is also needed on factors that influence the work situation of principals of previously advantaged (or Model C) schools. Such a comparative study would be particularly useful. Conflicting quantitative and qualitative results also require further investigation, as do the self-efficacy beliefs of principals of previously disadvantaged schools. These topics have not been sufficiently researched in different South African contexts. As was pointed out, principals are instrumental to functional schools and need to experience job satisfaction to be motivated to do their work well.

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