Job satisfaction amongst teachers at special needs schools

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The aim of this study was to establish the level of job satisfaction amongst teachers at special schools. Teachers in special schools need to cope with curriculum changes, the administrative duties that come with these changes, and the learners with their diverse needs. Learners with special needs require a specific educational programme and also schools that cater for the needs of learners with emotional, social, neurological or physical problems. The research group consisted of 101 teachers working at six different special schools situated in various parts of the Bloemfontein area, two in the Mangaung area, and four were situated in suburban areas. The group consisted of English- and Afrikaans-speaking teachers of both genders and from different race groups. The data for this study were compiled by means of a short biographical questionnaire and the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire. The results indicated that the teachers experienced an average level of job satisfaction. In addition to this finding, differences were also found in the levels of job satisfaction between different races, but not between genders.

Introduction

The educational system in South Africa is constantly under scrutiny (Dada, Dipholo, Hoadley, Khembo, Muller & Volmink 2009:44), with each year's matric results eliciting country-wide debate because of the perceived low standards. Yet South Africa spends approximately R140 billion per annum on education, making it one of the most expensive in the world (Gericke, 2009).

South Africa's inclusive education model depends strongly on resource centres to offer support to full service schools, but it is clear that special schools cannot be supportive unless the resource centres themselves function well (Department of Education, 2007:1). Education White Paper 6 (2001) refers to the importance of improving the quality of special schools and their phased conversion to special school resource centres that will provide professional support to neighbouring schools. The support that the special school resource centres offer to mainstream and full service schools is an important lever to establish an inclusive education system. However, special schools themselves must be improved so that they offer quality education in good conditions to their own learners, before they can offer support to other schools (Department of Education, 2007:1). Indeed, for these special schools to be successful, well-trained and satisfied staff are important.

Due to problems currently experienced by teachers at main stream schools, such as work pressure and minimal support and restructuring of the education system, their job satisfaction has reached an all-time low according to De Beer, Mentz & Van der Walt (2007) and Peltzer,

Shisana, Zuma, Van Wyk & Zungu-Dirway (2009). International trends suggest that first-year special education teachers are more likely to leave the service than main stream teachers (Gehrke & McCoy, 2007). Studies indicate that low job satisfaction in teacher can be attributed to an excessive workload because of curriculum changes, unreasonable demands and lack of support systems (Castro et al., 2010; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Kirk & Wall, 2010). Because there is a lack of sufficient and specific data or literature regarding special schools, one can argue that the relatively low satisfaction of teachers in mainstream education could be generalised to teachers in special education (Castro et al., 2010). However, one needs to bear in mind that there are different variables which could contribute either positively or negatively on the teachers' job satisfaction. Although low salaries are often cited as a factor contributing to job satisfaction, the contrary could also be true; in other words that the act of helping those less fortunate might be a source of profound job satisfaction (Kirk & Wall, 2009) and opportunities for personal and professional growth (Gehrke & McCoy, 2007) This article will attempt to address the aforementioned. Special education requires an educational programme, class or school that accommodates the needs of special learners — i.e. learners with emotional, social, neurological or physical problems (Plug, Louw, Gouws & Meyer, 1997). However, Dada et al. (2009) argue that it seems that the category of special education has become a catch phrase for a range of learner 'issues' — from 'special needs', learning and behavioural challenges, to diagnosed and undiagnosed syndromes such as ADD and autism. They explain that the term needs to be more clearly defined if it is to be targeted more meaningfully. However, for the purpose of this study special education will be treated as an all-encompassing term. Therefore, special education requires educational programmes that give both particular and extensive support to the learners who need them (Department of Education, Education White Paper 6, 2001). According to a statement issued by UNESCO (1994:14),

> "Many children experience learning difficulties and thus have special educational needs at some time during their schooling. Schools have to find ways of successfully educating all children, including those who have serious disadvantages and disabilities".

Special education in South Africa

After the 1994 elections in South Africa, a new culture of learning and education had to be designed and established because, before this time, racial segregation was also manifest in the education system. Moreover, according to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), everybody has the right to basic education (Fiske & Ladd, 2004; Motala & Pampillis, 2002). Funds had to be redistributed and the relationship between learners and teachers rectified (Waghid, 2002; Motala & Pampillis, 2002).

According to Chrisholm (2004), and Motala and Pampillas (2002), the South African educational system has been subject to continuous changes of curriculum, study material and the demands made on teachers since 1994. Curriculum 2005 is one of the best-known complications in the transformation of the South African educational system and comprises the following: a learner-centred education policy, an integrated and non-disciplinary section of knowledge and an outcomes-based educational policy (Arnold, 2005). OBE is described by Spady (2008:25) as:

> "Define, design, build and organise everything within an educational system focusing on aspects with lasting significance, which eventually culminate in every learner being able to demonstrate it successfully, as a result of their learning experience obtained through that system".

In other words, the OBE approach requires the constant assessment of learners, and group work with the teacher as facilitator. In addition, learners should assume the responsibility for their own studies (Arnold, 2005; Botha, 2002) and be motivated by positive feedback, and also be allowed to work at their own pace (Spady, 2008).

However, in a study by Dada et al. (2009), the authors find that learners with special needs attending mainstream schools are often neglected by teachers who do not have the special skills to allow these learners to benefit fully from OBE — namely, that individuals should learn at their own pace. According to the authors (2009), a criticism of OBE is that there are few curriculum guidelines for teachers of learners with special needs. To provide the best possible education for special needs learners, it is necessary to have teachers of exceptional quality, as well as a learning environment that will sustain teaching and learning (Billingsley, 2004). However, as George, Louw and Badenhorst (2008) indicate, many teachers have recently resigned from the profession due to changes in the educational policy, the children's rights movement and Government policy. As a result of these factors and targeted criticism from the general public, teachers' job satisfaction has declined. Billingsley (2004), and Stempien and Loeb (2002) support the afore-mentioned views and indicate that a considerable number of special needs teachers — especially in subjects such as mathematics and sciences — have left their profession.

Job satisfaction and education

It may be argued that low job satisfaction of teachers of special education could be a reason why many teachers at special schools resign — this assumption will be tested. Job satisfaction can be evaluated according to a worker's expectations, value and reward (Evans, 1998); and can be established by differentiating between the person's expectations and the personal fulfilment that he or she gets out of a job (De Beer et al., 2007; Evans, 1997). However, Kalleberg (1977) identifies the reward of a job and its concomitant value as the most important predictors of job satisfaction, when job satisfaction is seen as the employee's general orientation towards the different job roles he or she represents. This contradiction of ideas surrounding job satisfaction might come to play an important role when one ascertains the level of job satisfaction amongst special needs teachers.

De Beer et al. (2007) and George et al. (2008) argue that job satisfaction within education is influenced by factors such as the person's own experience, his or her demographic circumstances and personality, as well as physical, psycho-social, emotional and economic factors. Santos (2002) subdivides these factors into psychological variables (like motivation, self-worth, sense of autonomy and satisfaction with own life) and personal and professional variables. Santos (2002) goes further and describes the influence that age, gender and experience within education have on job satisfaction. Billingsley (2004) and George et al. (2008) maintain that job satisfaction can be determined by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors: where intrinsic factors are mainly determined by a person's motivation and can include non-material recognition for work done; and where extrinsic factors include the work-environment, supervision and working conditions. Therefore, if a teacher is satisfied that his or her work contributes to the school's aims, an intrinsic reward is received for the work done; and if he or she feels that his or her particular professional status is recognised, a high level of job satisfaction will be experienced according to De Beer et al. (2007) and Vroom (1967). Taking the afore-mentioned into consideration, job satisfaction can be described when teachers are motivated to do their jobs as well as possible together with having a high level of morale (De Beer et al., 2007).

When the above-mentioned is taken into account, change is seen as one of the most important factors that might influence teachers' job satisfaction. Therefore, if change is a negative experience, a teacher's satisfaction will be affected negatively. According to research on mainstream teachers conducted by Chrisholm (2004) and Motala and Pampillis (2002), the implementation of OBE has caused teachers to experience their situation as negative; and this has led to a decline in the general level of job satisfaction amongst teachers.

Several factors have been identified by Billingsley (2004), and Stempien and Loeb (2002) as indicators of the lack of job satisfaction amongst special school teachers with special reference to their working conditions (overcrowded classrooms, the lack of electricity and inadequate sanitation — or the lack thereof). These factors are age, reward, physical resources and the level of stress experienced. Research also shows that neither race nor gender has any significant influence on the resignation figures (Kaff, 2004). Billingsley (2004) argues that teachers' salaries play an important role in their job satisfaction and that teachers earning a higher salary would rather commit to their jobs than those earning lower salaries. Poor remuneration and unreasonable demands made on teachers by the Department of Basic Education are the main reasons for teachers' leaving special school education (Bateman, 2007; Bolowane, 2005; Johns, 2007; Kassiem, 2008; Keating, 2005; Masemola, 2007; Mbanjwa, 2007; Mohlongo, 2006; Nthite, 2006; Nzimande, 2008; Seale, 2006; Smith, 2005).

Stempien and Loeb (2002) point out the strong correlation between job stress and a lack of job satisfaction. This correlation consequently contributes to a situation in which special school teachers, with high levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and burn-out, leave the profession. Increasingly, the lack of special school teachers creates problems which can result in inadequate educational experiences for the learners, lower levels of achievement by learners, and insufficient competence of graduates in the workplace, if the issue is not addressed — according to Billingsley (2004).

Based on the above literature investigation, the question is what is the level of job satisfaction amongst teachers at special schools? Insight into these levels may contribute positively or negatively towards the availability and sustainability of these schools with the introduction of the new Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS).

Method

Non-experimental research was done, using the criteria of group design with the main objective being to determine the level of job satisfaction amongst teachers at special schools, as well as to ascertain whether there are any differences in the average job satisfaction scores (intrinsic, extrinsic, and general) for the different genders, races, and years of service.

Participants and procedure

Research was conducted in six schools in the Bloemfontein area. Four schools were situated in suburban areas and two schools were situated in the Mangaung area. Of these schools, the schools situated in the in the Mangaung area were more badly maintained than the schools in the suburban areas. However all the schools indicated a need for more funding and resources. Teachers working at six special schools participated in the study; and the consent of the Free State Department of Education was obtained before its commencement. Principals of the particular schools were also contacted in order to obtain permission and to convey the necessary information to ensure clarity. In addition, the permission of the teachers to conduct the research at the school was also obtained.

Because some schools were writing exams, the teachers had to be consulted in groups. At no stage during the research process was any teacher forced to participate in the study and, to ensure anonymity, no names or personal information was requested of the teachers. Furthermore, all participants also had the opportunity to withdraw from this study at any time with no negative implication if they decided to withdraw.

Various biographical data such as race, gender and years of service in special education were obtained from the teachers. Table 1 gives an indication of the frequency distribution of the different averages of the three variables (gender, race, and years of service).

Table 1 Frequency distribution of the sample group according to gender, race and years of service

Biographical variables	*n*	%
Gender:		
Male	28	27.7
Female	73	72.3
Race:		
Black	26	25.7
White	75	74.3
Years of service:		
0 – 10 years	60	59.4
More than 10 years	41	40.6

The majority of the teachers participating in the research were women (72.3%), while male teachers comprised only 23.7% of the sample. In line with this, Billingsley (2004) indicates a general tendency for more females than males to work at special education schools. The majority of the teachers (74.3%) in the test sample were white, while black teachers (25.7%) made up only about one quarter. Years of service were divided into two categories: less than 10 years' service; and more than 10 years' service. The majority of this sample had 10 years' service or less. The importance of the differentiation regarding years of service was to ascertain whether less experienced teachers were less satisfied with their jobs than more experienced teachers.

Measuring instrument
Data were obtained through the completion of a biographical questionnaire and the *Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire* (Weiss, Davis, England & Lofquist, 1967) as well as a single free response question to gain each teacher's personal opinion about his or her job satisfaction.

The *Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire* (MSQ) (Weiss, Davis, England & Lofquist, 1967) was used to obtain teachers' job satisfaction level. The MSQ Short Form, consisting of 20 items, tests three aspects of satisfaction, namely: intrinsic satisfaction which is the recognition for work done and the possibility of advancement in a certain position, extrinsic satisfaction is the work environment shared with colleagues and the condition of the work place, e.g. books, learning materials and physical resources.as well as remuneration for work done, and lastly general satisfaction which is an overall view of the above-mentioned factors (Weiss et al., 1967; Billingsly, 2004; George et al., 2008). The instrument is rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (highly dissatisfied) to 5 (extremely satisfied). The authors of the

questionnaire (1967) explain that a high score on the scales (the Intrinsic and Extrinsic and the General scales) indicates high levels of satisfaction, whereas a lower score indicates less satisfaction. The MSQ has an internal consistency of 0.86 for the Intrinsic scale; 0.80 for the Extrinsic scale and 0.90 for the General scale and produces alpha coefficients of 0.70 (Holcomb-McCoy & Addison-Bradley, 2005; Weiss et al., 1967).

Table 2 Alpha coefficients for the scales of the total group, as well
as the two language groups completing the questionnaire

Scale	α coefficient		
	Total	English	Afrikaans
Job Satisfaction			
General	0.936	0.945	0.912
Intrinsic	0.920	0.937	0.885
Extrinsic	0.805	0.810	0.785

Results

Significant differences appear in the average job satisfaction scores (Intrinsic, Extrinsic and General) for the different genders, races, and years of service.

With reference to the independent variables (gender, race, years of service), Table 1 clearly indicates that they all have only two categories and can, for statistical purposes, be presented for gender as follows:

$$H_0 : \mu_1 = \mu_2$$
$$H_1 : \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$$

where:

μ_1= average score (Intrinsic, Extrinsic and General) for the population of male teachers at special schools

μ_2 = average score (Intrinsic, Extrinsic and General) for the population of female teachers at special schools

Similar statistical hypotheses for race and years of service can also be formulated.

The *t* test for independent groups was used to test the set research hypothesis. One of the underlying assumptions for the *t* test for two independent groups deals with the homogeneity of variances. The size differences of the sub-groups may be a contributing cause to the variances of the two groups not being homogenous. When this was found to be the case, the Welch-Satterthwaite approach (Howell, 2007) was used.

To assess the relevance of statistical significant results of this investigation, it is also necessary to investigate the practical significance of these results. To gauge practical significance, effect sizes (Steyn, 1999) should be calculated. The effect size to determine the difference in the averages of the independent groups is calculated by Cohen's *d* procedure. This procedure expresses the differences between the two averages in terms of the size of the total group's standard deviation. In this instance the following directive values applies: 0.20 = a small effect; 0.50 = a medium effect; and 0.80 = a large effect. The 0.01 level of significance is used in this study, as well as the SPSS programme (SPSS Incorporated, 2009).

Before any formulated research hypothesis can be investigated, it is imperative to indicate the level of satisfaction experienced by teachers. To do this, it is important to compare their

particulars with those of a comparable group. No comparable information could be obtained for the MSQ of a South African group. Therefore, the averages on the various MSQ scales of this study have been compared with the averages of the total group in the USA, on which the test was standardised, as reported by Weiss et al. (1967) and Holcomb-McCoy and Addison-Bradley (2005), in their manual. These particulars are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Averages and standard deviations on the job satisfaction scales for the standardised group (USA) and the present study group

MSQ scale	Standardised group		Study group		t
	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	
Job Satisfaction					
Intrinsic	47.14	7.42	44.09	9.61	3.135**
Extrinsic	19.98	4.78	18.79	4.74	2.452*
General	74.85	11.92	69.55	14.63	3.572**

** $p \leq 0.01$;   * $p \leq 0.05$

The t test for independent groups was used to compare the averages on the three scales for both the sample group and the standardised (USA) group. For the Intrinsic and Extrinsic scales, significant differences between the two groups were found on the 0.01 level. It became evident that the local sample group scored a significantly lower average than the USA group. This deviation in averages could be attributed to the different professional groups that constituted the standardised group, while the present test sample group comprised teachers from special schools. Another factor, that could be a reason for the deviation, is the difference in the sizes between the standardised group and the test sample group used in this study. Subsequently, the possible variations in average regarding job satisfaction scores for all three independent variables will be investigated.

Gender
The test group consisted of more female teachers than male teachers and could be because there are more females are in the education sector than males (Billingsley, 2004; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). The job satisfaction scales of both genders were compared by means of the t test for independent groups. When significant results were found, the corresponding effect size (d) was shown.

Table 4 Averages, standard deviations, t and p values, and effect sizes (d) for both genders

MSQ scale	Males ($n = 28$)		Females ($n = 73$)		t	p	d
	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD			
Intrinsic	43.68	9.80	44.25	9.59	−0.265	0.792	-
Extrinsic	18.82	4.69	18.78	4.79	0.038	0.970	-
General	69.43	14.29	69.60	14.85	−0.053	0.958	-

Table 4 clearly indicates that no significant difference between the two genders could be determined on any of the three scales of job satisfaction.

Race

In the test group there were more white teachers than black teachers. This could be because most of the schools were all situated in the suburban areas and only two of the schools were situated in a rural area. The two racial groups (black and white) were also compared in respect of job satisfaction scales, by using the *t* test for independent groups. Where significant results were found, the corresponding effect size (*d*) is also indicated.

Table 5   Averages, standard deviations, *t*, *p* values, and effect sizes (*d*) for both racial groups

MSQ scale	Black (*n* = 26)		White (*n* = 75)		*t*	*p*	*d*
	x̄	*SD*	x̄	*SD*			
Intrinsic	37.96	10.77	46.21	8.23	4.056*	0.000	0.86
Extrinsic	17.19	5.20	19.35	4.48	−2.027	0.045	-
General	61.04	16.29	72.51	12.85	3.651*	0.002	0.76

    * *p* ≤ 0.01

It is clear that there are significant differences in the averages of the two racial groups on the 0.01 level, for both Intrinsic and General scales. A nul hypothesis can thus be rejected in these instances. The corresponding effect sizes indicate the major practical importance of the results. In respect of both variables (Intrinsic and General), white teachers obtained a significantly higher score than black teachers. It can be deduced, therefore, that when comparing white teachers with black teachers at special schools, the whites experience considerably higher levels of satisfaction in respect of intrinsic satisfaction and general satisfaction. Since most of the black teachers of the sample worked at schools situated in the rural Mangaung area, this could influence a lack of support and recognition experienced by the teachers, both of which play a fundamental role in intrinsic satisfaction (De Beer et al., 2007; Evans, 1997) as well as lower personal fulfilment. Thus, the combination of a learning environment that does not sustain teaching and low intrinsic satisfaction, could be a reason for low general satisfaction.

Years of service

The years of service of the two groups was also compared and, as with the previous two variables, the *t* test for independent groups was used. Where significant results were found, the corresponding effect size (*d*) is also indicated.

Table 6   Averages, standard deviations, *t*, *p* values, and effect sizes (*d*) for both years-of-service groups

Variable	0–10 years (*n* = 60)		>10 years (*n* = 41)		*t*	*p*	*d*
	x̄	*SD*	x̄	*SD*			
Intrinsic	42.77	9.80	46.02	9.08	−1.689	0.094	-
Extrinsic	19.10	5.00	18.34	4.36	0.788	0.433	-
General	68.55	15.22	71.02	13.77	−0.834	0.407	-

This survey shows that (in the three scales of job satisfaction) there are no significant differences between the two groups' job satisfaction when using their years of service as the criterion.

In conjunction with the MSQ questions and the biographical questions, an open question was also put to the test sample group. The main purpose of this question was to gauge the personal opinions of the teachers themselves as to what influenced their job satisfaction. Only 60 of the 101 participants responded to this question. Several widely divergent replies were received and these, as well as the most common responses, are indicated in Table 7, together with their frequency and percentages.

Table 7 Frequency distribution for the free response question

Personal opinions of teachers	*n*	%
Lack of discipline amongst learners and conflict experienced with learners and parents	15	25
Lack of support from the Department of Education	12	20
Availability of training resources, such as desks, chairs and educational material.	11	16.67
Large or overcrowded classes	10	16.6
Administrative duties taking up too much of the teacher's time	6	10
Lack of motivation on the side of learners to cooperate or learn properly	6	10
Total	60	98.27

Of the teachers, 25% believed that their job satisfaction was affected mainly by the discipline (or the lack thereof) of learners and by conflict with learners and their parents. This conflict could have a significant influence on the intrinsic criteria of the MSQ like reaching personal fulfilment and eventually hamper personal accomplishments in the workplace, bringing intrinsic satisfaction down. The Department of Education also contributed to 20% of the population's dissatisfaction. This deals mainly with the confusion regarding the implementation of the curriculum, as well as the increase in administrative work. The availability or lack of educational material and the learner to teacher ratio also had a significant influence on the job satisfaction of about 33% of the teachers. These results correspond with the findings of Bateman (2007) and Bolowane (2005) and international studies of Gu and Day (2007) as well as Castro et al. (2010). These however, contribute to the pool of exclusively South African data.

Furthermore, the results of this study are unique because the majority of research studies focus on mainstream education. Although literature indicates that younger, inexperienced teachers experienced lower job satisfaction than teachers more settled in their professions (Stempien & Loeb 2002), this study indicated no such difference in a South African population.

According to De Beer et al. (2007), job satisfaction is influenced by factors such as own experience and personality. The difference between the results of this study and what is indicated in the literature could be attributed to the teachers themselves, in terms of their different personal experiences, different school environments, colleagues and their expected work load.

Discussion

The research question posed by this study focuses on job satisfaction of teachers at special schools. Literature indicates that a lack of resources, support systems (Howard & Johnson, 2004; De Beer et al., 2007; Peltzer et al., 2008; Castro et al., 2010) influences job satisfaction negatively. The results of this study state that the test group for this study has average job satisfaction (the average job satisfaction score is between 50–69) and that there is no difference between males and females in this regard. However, there is a difference in the job satisfaction of the different racial groups; white teachers present greater job satisfaction than black teachers, especially with regard to intrinsic job satisfaction and general job satisfaction. Furthermore, the length of service does not affect job satisfaction. The differences between the races' job satisfaction could be contributed to the fact that black teachers work predominantly in poorer communities where resources are scarce and where there is less involvement from parents because both parents need to work. This corresponds with the findings of Castro et al. (2010) and Peltzer et al. (2009). However, this assumption needs to be addressed in the form of more studies focusing on black special needs teachers and the role/involvement of parents, as well as suggest coping mechanisms for the teachers.

When the results are considered, it is recommended that special school teachers should have more control over the disciplinary process without infringing on the learners' rights. Teachers should also continually undergo training so that they acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the learners' disabilities. In this way, discipline could become more effective. Furthermore, more auxiliary help should be provided to the teachers since learners in special schools require more individual attention and overcrowded classes influence the quality of their education. This can be done by the Department of Education co-opting students doing their internships in professions such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, psychology and social work to assist the special needs teachers in assessing learners with problems and also to focus on interventions for these learners. Parent-teacher programmes could also be encouraged where skills-transfers occur and the parents take an active role in the education of their children. As the need grows for teachers to work with diverse needs in the classrooms, keeping teachers motivated should be one of the main focuses in schools. An investment in a mentor programme for teachers can offer support and information from the more experienced teachers, develop a broad network of resources and enforce better professional relationships between teachers and professional (Gehrke & McCoy, 2007)

International trends indicate that learners with special needs should be integrated into mainstream settings (UNESCO, 1994). However, studies (Keen & Ward, 2004) have shown that the capacity of many schools to cater effectively for learners with special needs has not been achieved. Furthermore, teachers in mainstream schools do not have specialised skills to assist learners with special needs effectively (Robertson, Chamberlain & Kasari, 2003). Therefore it is clear that one cannot negate the importance for special schools. In order to sustain special education and to acknowledge the human rights of learners with special needs, it is important that attention be given to the level of job satisfaction of teachers. The recommendations could, in the opinion of the researchers, contribute positively to this end.

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