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**JOB SATISFACTION AND SELF-ESTEEM FOR PRIMARY  
SCHOOL AND KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS**

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***Abstract***

Nowadays, the social status and the social perceptions of the teaching profession are suffering a decline. Despite wage increases and small investments in the educational system, teachers do not seem to be happy at work. In the present study, we aimed to investigate different aspects of teachers' job satisfaction. We wanted to see whether primary school teachers were more satisfied with their jobs than kindergarten teachers and whether the working conditions (working in a city or working in a rural area) influenced job satisfaction. Finally, we wanted to see whether there is a significant correlation between job satisfaction and self-esteem. We included in our study 250 primary school and kindergarten teachers (N=250), aged between 25 and 54, out of which 104 worked in primary schools and 145 worked as kindergarten teachers. 121 worked in rural areas and 129 worked in urban areas. According to our findings, kindergarten teachers are less satisfied with their jobs than primary school teachers ( $t = -6.550$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.830$ ) and they have lower levels of self-esteem ( $t = -2.350$ ,  $p = 0.020$ ). Teachers that work in the cities are more satisfied with their jobs than those working in rural areas ( $t = -38.359$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -4.855$ ) and have higher levels of self-esteem ( $t = -4.725$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.598$ ). Finally, we found a positive correlation between the two variables of interest for our participants.

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**Keywords:** Job satisfaction, self-esteem, primary school teachers, kindergarten teachers.



## 1. Introduction

For many years now, I have been working with future primary and preschool teachers and I am always pleased to see our students' enthusiasm. They are hardly waiting to work, to become fully active teachers, to make a change, to create a better leaning environment for primary and preschool children. But, as years go by, I have seen their enthusiasm decrease in this line of activity, the primary and preschool teachers are less enchanted with their work, their status and their job, in general.

How does a teacher feel at work? How happy and satisfied is he or she with this job? In the past few years, there have been a multitude of changes in the educational system in Romania, and unfortunately, they have been rather chaotic, and not based on some credible feasibility studies. In addition to a mediocre professional status, teachers face multiple changes that take place without warning, working conditions are unsatisfactory in most cases and pay is not that attractive despite the latest efforts made by the Government in this regard. In this study we wanted to investigate teachers' perception regarding job satisfaction and self-esteem. We felt that it was high time to bring to light new date in this concern especially now, with all the changes in the educational system.

### 1.1 Job satisfaction

Why do we talk some much about job satisfaction and why is this variable so studied? It seems job satisfaction is one of the most well-known and explored constructs in the organizational psychology. The simplest definition of job satisfaction refers to „the extent to which people like (satisfaction) or dislike (dissatisfaction) their jobs” (Spector, 1997, p.2). But one of the most referenced definitions of job satisfaction postulates that job satisfaction is “the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one’s job values” (Locke, 1967, p. 1342).

Job satisfaction is an important product of any organization or institution, reflecting the social function of the enterprise, namely its obligation to be a both a working place and a living space, and to provide the optimal possibilities so that every employee can express his and her own personality.

The modern approaches of management state that job satisfaction is an important human resource component and it represents one of the fundamental factors of the overall work efficiency. In other words, every intelligent manager will strive to create such a working environment that will facilitate job satisfaction that will naturally create better working employees (Furnham, Eracleous, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2009).

From a psycho-sociological point of view, job satisfaction is the difference between what the individual obtains as a reward for his work and what he estimates that he should be obtaining. There are a lot of theories on job satisfaction and a lot of facets of this construct that reveal its factors. Zamfir (1980) presents some of the most important sources of job satisfaction:

a) Job facilities – refers to the technological, social and human conditions in which the activity is carried out (for example, the possibility of promotion, medical insurance, means of transportation, living arrangements, car etc.);

b) The basic working conditions – refers to a number of work characteristics that physically, chemically, physiologically affect the human body;

c) Work content – refers to the work itself, to the type of work that every employee should carry out (the consistency between work and the employee's abilities, the monotony of work etc.);

d) Human working relationships – refers to the relations with the co-workers and with the direct superiors.

## **1.2 Self-esteem**

Self-esteem generally refers to our own confidence in ourselves, it refers to the way we assess ourselves. Smith and Mackie (2007) defined it by saying that the self-concept is what we think about the self and that the self-esteem, is the positive or negative evaluations of the self, as in how we feel about it. The way in which we assess ourselves, the way in which we think about ourselves is highly connected to our job satisfaction.

One of the theories that make the link between self-esteem and job satisfaction (among other variables) is the dispositional approach on job satisfaction. This approach suggests that job satisfaction is intricately linked to our personality. In other words, for example a generally optimistic, communicative person will be happier in a specific job or working environment comparatively to a withdrawn individual. The dispositional approach postulates that an individual has a strong predisposition towards a certain level of satisfaction, and that these remain fairly constant and stable across time (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997).

Self-esteem is one of the personality traits frequently studied in relation with job satisfaction, among others. A meta-analytical study of 169 correlations between work satisfaction and four other affective constructs including self-esteem (self-esteem, self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control) shows a strong correlation between these two variables. In other words, a person with a higher self-esteem, will show greater satisfaction at work, and vice versa (Judge & Bono, 2001).

Another study on the relationship between self-esteem and job satisfaction for employees in governmental organizations has shown a strong correlation between the two variables (Alavi & Askaripur, 2003). Dey, Rahman, and Akther (2013) found as well a positive correlation between teachers' self-esteem and job satisfaction ( $r = 0.17$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and their findings also showed that Government teachers were having significantly higher self-esteem ( $F = 5.71$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $P < 0.02$ ) than non-government teachers. However, college teachers were scored higher on job satisfaction ( $F = 9.00$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $P < 0.00$ ) than school teachers.

## **1.3. Related studies**

There are many interesting and relevant studies on this particular matter, but we choose to present here some of the researches that inspired us. In a study conducted by Taber and Alliger (1995) they discovered that the accumulating enjoyment of work tasks added up to overall job satisfaction. The participants were employees of an American educational institute. So, according to their findings, it is very important to enjoy our working tasks in order to feel job satisfaction. However, the authors did not test other factors besides task enjoyment.

A study similar to ours investigated the job satisfaction of primary school teachers in Turkey (Demirtas, 2010). The author measured the teachers' job satisfaction levels and he found a significant age differences between participants. The teachers aged between 36 to 40 years of age were the most satisfied

with their jobs as opposed to the teachers aged above 41 years, which seemed to be the most dissatisfied with their jobs.

Ma and MacMillan (1999) investigated the influence of some psycho-social variables (gender, years spent on the job etc.) and workplace conditions on teachers' job satisfaction on an extensive group of participants (N = 2,202). They found that female teachers were more satisfied with their job than their male colleagues and that the more time they spend on the job, the less satisfied they are. Of course, the workplace conditions influenced job satisfaction, such as administration control, teaching competence and organizational culture.

Last but not least, a study conducted by Liu and Ramsey (2008) analysed teachers' job satisfaction from a multitude of aspects based on the national surveys in the U.S. According to their findings, teachers were the least satisfied with their working conditions and compensations and that the minority teachers were generally less happy with their jobs than the non-minority teachers. As other studies did, these authors found that gender, years of teaching and career status influenced job satisfaction.

## **2. Problem Statement**

There have been many changes in the educational system in Romania, some of the experts in educational policies consider them effective and some of them are dismissing them. There is no current information about the impact of these changes on the teachers' lives and working conditions, there are no recent studies investigating teachers' job satisfaction or teachers' self-esteem related to work. These are some of the reasons why we considered important to conduct our research, to bring to light some fresh data concerning teachers' job satisfaction and self-esteem from kindergarten and primary school.

## **3. Research Questions**

How satisfying is really be a teacher? Is it more satisfying to work in kindergarten or in a primary school? Is working in a city better or worse than working at the country side? These are some of the research questions that we are trying to answer throughout our study.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The main goal of the study was to investigate aspects of teachers' job satisfaction. We wanted to see whether primary school teachers were more satisfied with their jobs than kindergarten teachers and whether the working conditions (working in a city or working in a rural area) influenced job satisfaction. Finally, we wanted to see whether there is a significant correlation between job satisfaction and self-esteem.

## **5. Research Methods**

### **5.1 Participants**

We included in our study 250 primary school and kindergarten teachers (N=250), aged between 25 and 54 (with an average of 37,2) out of which 104 worked in primary schools and 145 worked as kindergarten teachers. 121 worked in rural areas and 129 worked in urban areas.

## 5.2 Measurements

In order to assess the levels of job satisfaction we used *The Job Satisfaction Survey* (Spector, 1985) which is a 36-item questionnaire divided into 9 subscales that assesses employee attitudes about the job and aspects of the job.

Each subscale is assessed with four items, and a total score is computed from all items. A summated rating scale format is used, with six choices per item ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The nine subscales are: *Pay*, *Promotion*, *Supervision*, *Fringe Benefits*, *Contingent Rewards* (performance-based rewards), *Operating Procedures* (required rules and procedures), *Co-workers*, *Nature of Work*, and *Communication*. Although the JSS was originally developed for use in human service organizations, it is applicable to all organizations (Spector, 1994).

Self-esteem was assessed with the well-known *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (Rosenberg, 1965), which is a 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. All items are answered using a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The higher the total score, the more positive the self-esteem is.

## 6. Findings

Our first direction of research was to see whether working as a teacher in the primary school is different from working in the kindergarten regarding job satisfaction and self-esteem (Table 01).

**Table 01.** Means and standard deviations for job satisfaction and self-esteem variables for kindergarten and primary school teachers

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD
Job satisfaction	kindergarten	145	128.448	19.098
	primary school	105	145.010	20.574
Self-esteem	kindergarten	145	28.290	5.989
	primary school	105	30.038	5.542

Analysing the data above, we can see that the primary school teachers scored higher both on the job satisfaction and on the self-esteem scales, the mean for job satisfaction for primary school teachers was 145.010 and for the kindergarten teachers was 128.448. As for the self-esteem variable, the mean for the primary school teachers was 30,038 and for the kindergarten teachers was 28.290. In order to see if there is a statistically significant difference for these variables, we used the one-sample t-test. The results are shown in the following Table 02.

**Table 02.** Independent samples t-test for job satisfaction and self-esteem – differences between kindergarten and primary school teachers

Variable	T	df	p	Cohen's d
Job satisfaction	-6.550	248.0	< .001	-0.839
Self-esteem	-2.350	248.0	0.020	-0.301

The one-sample t-test indicated that there is a strong significant difference between kindergarten and primary school teachers in terms of job satisfaction ( $t = -6.550, p < .001, d = 0.830$ ). Thus, we can state that primary school teachers experience more job satisfaction in this line of work as opposed to their colleagues which work in kindergartens. At this point, we can only assume the reasons for such different perspectives.

When we analysed the data from the 9 subscales of the JSS, we encountered significant differences between primary school teachers and kindergarten teachers just for nature of work ( $t = -6.158, p < .001, d = 0.789$ ), co-workers ( $t = -5.982, p < .001, d = 0.767$ ) and communication ( $t = -4.586, p < .001, d = 0.588$ ). So, primary school teachers consider that they are more satisfied with their working conditions, they enjoy better working in schools and they assess positively their working environment opposed to their kindergarten colleagues. In the same way, primary school teachers consider that they can communicate better with their co-workers compared to kindergarten educators. Last but not the least, primary school teachers are more satisfied with their co-workers, they can talk better to each other and they can rely better on each other compared to kindergarten teachers.

As for self-esteem, according to our data we discovered a significant difference between these two types of teachers ( $t = -2.350, p = 0.020$ ), but the effect size ( $d=0.301$ ) highlights just a moderate effect of the independent variable. So, we can only state that there is a just a tendency for kindergarten teachers to evaluate their self-worth lower that the primary school teachers.

Our second direction of research was to investigate the differences between rural and urban teachers (primary school and kindergarten) regarding job satisfaction and self-esteem. Below you can see the descriptives for the mentioned variables (Table 03).

**Table 03.** Means and standard deviations for job satisfaction and self-esteem variables for rural and urban teachers

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD
Job satisfaction	Rural	121	115.074	5.756
	Urban	129	154.473	9.826
Self-esteem	Rural	121	27.289	6.205
	Urban	129	30.651	5.015

When inspecting the means for job satisfaction and self-esteem comparing rural and urban teachers, we found very strong differences between these two categories. The means for the job satisfaction variable was 115.074 for urban teachers and 154.473 for rural teachers and the means for the self-esteem variable was 27.289 for rural teachers and 30.651 for urban teachers. Again, we used the one-sample t-test in order to test these differences. The results are shown in the following Table 04.

**Table 04.** Independent samples t-test for job satisfaction and self-esteem – differences between rural and urban teachers

Variable	T	df	p	Cohen's d
Job satisfaction	-38.359	248.0	< .001	-4.855
Self-esteem	-4.725	248.0	< .001	-0.598

The one-sample t-test indicated a very highly significant difference between rural and urban teachers in terms of job satisfaction, highlighted by a very strong effect size ( $t = -38.359$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -4.855$ ). Therefore, we can state that the teachers that work in rural schools and kindergartens are significantly happier with their jobs than their rural colleagues. These differences can be explained by various factors like the poor working conditions from the rural areas, the parents' lack of involvement in their children's educations in the rural areas, the lower social status of the rural teachers etc. When analysing the JSS's subscales, we found strong significant differences for supervision ( $t = -49.007$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -6.202$ ), contingent rewards ( $t = -6.658$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.843$ ), working conditions ( $t = -28.757$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -3.639$ ), co-workers ( $t = -18.243$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -2.308$ ), and communication ( $t = -15.857$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -2.007$ ). Thus, rural teachers feel that they have no real help from their supervisors (the principal of the school or kindergarten), that they have no one to ask work related questions, they do not enjoy their working conditions – which is not surprising at all, considering the real conditions from rural schools and kindergartens - and that they have no benefits from working in this particular job.

As for self-esteem, we found a moderately significant difference between rural and urban teachers ( $t = -4.725$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.598$ ), so we can assume that urban teachers have higher self-esteem than their kindergarten colleagues.

Finally, in the end of our study we wanted to see whether there is a significant correlation between job satisfaction and self-esteem. A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed and we found a positive correlation between the two variables ( $r = 0.290$ ,  $n = 250$ ,  $p < .001$ ) for our participants. Overall, we can say that a high job satisfaction is linked with a high self-esteem for primary and kindergarten teachers and vice versa.

## 7. Conclusion

Nowadays, everybody talks about education. We all know that education is important, we take pride in our degrees of education and, as parents, we all want the best schools and teachers for our children. In Romania, there have been many changes in the educational system and in the educational policies, including some recent increases regarding incomes. But were these changes efficient? Are teachers more satisfied with their jobs or themselves?

In our study, we wanted to investigate the primary school teachers' and kindergarten teachers' perceptions about their jobs and their self-esteem. We wanted to see if there are differences between primary school and kindergarten teachers in these matters, we wanted to investigate whether working in rural areas is perceived differently from working in urban areas and finally, we wanted to test the relationship between job satisfaction and self-esteem. Why is this important? Because in order to have creative, kind and inspired teachers they must feel good about their jobs and about themselves. If these requirements are not met, then the political factors have to take action and have to implement new strategies in order to change the state of facts.

Our study was conducted upon 250 participants and we are aware that it is not a significant number, but it highlights the experience of many primary school and kindergarten teachers. According to our results, primary school teachers are more satisfied with their jobs and have higher self-esteem than their colleagues which work in kindergartens. Why does this happen? Maybe primary school teachers have a better social

perception, maybe the kindergarten teachers are frustrated as their incomes are lower than their colleagues, but from our data we found significant differences caused only by the nature of work, by the relationship with the co-workers and communication. Thus, we can conclude that kindergarten teachers are less satisfied by what they have to do at work compared to primary school teachers. We all know that it is not easy to work with large number of pre-schoolers and in Romania a kindergarten teacher has to take care of as many as 35 children in one class. That is a lot considering that the children are very small (as young as 2 years old), very energetic and demanding. We can only imagine the amount of stress experienced by these professionals. Another aspect that can cause dissatisfaction is the relationship with the co-workers. In Romania, the kindergarten teachers work in pair in one class. If they are lucky enough, the two colleagues get along well and form a solid team, but it is not always the case. Thus, we can imagine why *the relationship with co-workers* variable presented a significant difference between primary school and kindergarten teachers regarding job satisfaction.

In the second part of the study, we wanted to investigate the differences between teachers that work in rural versus urban area regarding the same two variables: job satisfaction and self-esteem. As expected, teachers that work in the country side feel less satisfied with their jobs and with themselves. We can assume as main causes for this the working conditions that are much poorer in rural areas, but our data also showed differences in supervision, contingent rewards, co-workers and communication. What does this mean? Teachers that work in rural areas feel that they are not fairly appreciated for their work, they feel like they are not properly rewarded and correctly perceived by the other members of society. They are not particularly happy with their co-workers or their superiors and they consider that communication doesn't function properly in their working place. Finally, they scored lower on self-esteem compared to teachers that work in urban areas.

Needless to say, in the final part of our study we discovered a strong positive correlation between job satisfaction and self-esteem for primary school and kindergarten teachers. This means that happy teachers work better and feel better about their jobs and themselves and thus, children would gain more from having such teachers to educate them. We conclude that the decisional and political factors should pay more attentions to kindergarten teachers and their needs and to teachers that work in rural areas. They should consider giving them some different types of benefits or rewards and they should consider improving the working conditions in rural schools and kindergartens.

Of course, there are many limits to our study starting with the relatively small number of participants (N=250), and the few variables included in the research. In the future, we intend to conduct a larger study in which we will analyse the job satisfaction and the self-esteem of primary school and kindergarten teachers from a multifactorial point of view. But at this point, we can only hope that we highlighted some important issues concerning primary school and kindergarten teachers' life.

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