



Research Proposal

Teacher Salary and How It Relates to Job Satisfaction

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Abstract

With over 75 million children enrolled in school within the United States, teachers have been in high demand. Teachers are constantly encouraging, educating, and caring for the children who walk into their classrooms in order to help them achieve growth along their educational journey. As teachers are required to hold up a standard of education and evaluate the readiness of students to move forward in their education, they are often called to do so while working in dated buildings with minimal supplies. There are many teachers who do not believe they have been shown support for the work they do every day. For example, their workload has increased each year with changes in state and federal education standards, while teachers' salaries have not increased to even compliment the current cost of living in many states. Teachers have also begun receding from their positions to go into different career fields. This trend is what inspired our group to research whether teacher's salaries and working conditions impact their overall job satisfaction and play a major role in an increasing exodus from careers in the field of education.

Key words: *Teachers, salary, job satisfaction, justice.*

Problem

For many decades, teachers have been the main source of academic education for children throughout the world yet their pay for their dedication and service has been a questionable topic. Yet, researchers have mentioned that American teachers did not always earn less in comparison to other workers, for example in 1960 female teachers were being paid a weekly compensation that was 14.7% more than that of other women with similar levels of education (Morgan, 2019). Today we have witnessed times when educators were taking home income that was half of what they make in a month because of taxes, insurance, and union fees. We have also witnessed teachers spending more time with children than their own parents do. Teachers are with their students for 6-8 hours a day, 5 days a week, for 10 months out of the year,

and they are often not being recognized for their hard work and dedication as they are at times called “glorified babysitters”.

Even now, teachers are leaving their tenure positions to pursue jobs outside of education because they are unable to live on the salary they are paid. Researchers have estimated and results suggest that 12% of all teachers leave teaching every year, from that percentage only 25% of departure cases are due to teacher retirement (Moore, 2012). We have also observed many teachers who have been asked by administrators and school boards to do additional work with no compensation for the extra time. Along with these requests, American teachers generally earn less than other college-educated professionals (Morgan, 2019). Understanding how to effectively attract and retain good teachers has been referred to as one of the most important policies within education today (Hanueshek & Rivkin, 2007). Due to the prominence of this discussion in education, we chose to research the following question: does teacher salary and job satisfaction affect job retention?

Literature Review

With the many researchers and educators alike pleading for better pay for educators, these findings and petitions have also been disputed by researchers such as Hess, who made a point to mention that teachers in general were not underpaid. Within his research he states that most everyday working Americans work about 25% more than the average teacher (Hess, 2004). He took into consideration the Bureau of Labor Statistics report that stated in 2001 the average hourly rate of pay for all workers in a “professional specialty” within the United States was \$27.49, while secondary and elementary teachers were making a little over \$30 an hour (Hess, 2004). We also found reports of teacher earnings in a yearly report from the National Center for Education Statistics, prepared in August 2021. Within the report we found that teachers made a national average of about \$65,000 in the school year of 2020-2021 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Although, while revealing his research, Hess counter-stated that “good teachers”, on the other hand, are often underpaid (Hess, 2004). He described good teachers as those who have to work in tough circumstances and maintain critical skills needed within education (Hess, 2004).

Although our prospective research would be focused on educators within the United States, evaluating and gaining information on teacher job satisfaction has evidently not only an issue within this country. As the question of job satisfaction was the focus of a research study by Fuming and Jiliang in 2008 in regard to elementary and high school teachers in China, it sheds light and prognosticates the issues that have been evident in the United States. Their research states that exploring this issue helps us to gain a deeper understanding of teachers’ mental state, such as their occupational attitudes, zeal for teaching, and work enthusiasm, which affects the quality of teaching and education (Fuming & Jiliang, 2008). Yet, their findings rendered recommendations for strategies in raising teacher job satisfaction and one of which was to increase salary and remuneration (Fuming & Jiliang, 2008), which is similar to the suggestions of other researchers in the United States. Based on their study they realized that people consider income first when choosing their profession (Fuming & Jiliang, 2008). These findings from across the Pacific are actually very similar to the response of today’s educators in America and has also sparked the curiosity of education reform researchers such as Hani Morgan. Although her research focused on the disparity in education within the United States, she articulated that the lack of needed funding has now evolved into a cycle of “unfavorable outcomes”, while emphasizing that an increase to the funds given to schools, especially those in socioeconomically

disadvantaged areas where needs of students are often greater, would make paying teachers a higher salary a possibility (Morgan, 2019).

The endeavors to explore the issue of teacher job satisfaction also reveal that the majority of teachers are actually not very satisfied with the current working conditions they are required to work in (Fuming & Jiliang, 2008) leaving a greater feeling of dissatisfaction in their job. Several features of school environments have been directly tied to teacher dissatisfaction even in the United States. For example, negative school climate, poor administrative leadership, and the quality of the school building have each been associated with increased rates of teacher dissatisfaction (Buckley, Schneider, & Shang, 2005; Lee, Dedrick & Smith, 1991; Tye & O'Brien, 2002). In addition, the racial and economic composition of the student body has also been shown to play a role in the satisfaction of teachers (Litt & Turk, 1985; Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2006).

Taking a closer look at the conceptualization of teacher job satisfaction, as well as its predictors described in previous research, such as educational working conditions and teacher characteristics we find that even though the focus of our study would be on teacher job satisfaction, the literature on closely associated factors, such as teacher turnover and retention, was also reviewed. In their review of the educational working environment, Bascia and Rottmann (2011) reinstate the importance of working conditions in schools not only for teacher motivation, effectiveness, and job satisfaction, but also for student opportunities to learn. Previous research has recognized some of the most crucial factors, which ensure quality of teachers' work: adequate resources, feasible workload, collegial cooperation, opportunities for professional development, leadership support and decision-making opportunities, to name just a few.

A considerable amount of research on the role of working conditions for teachers' career trajectories was conducted in the US. For example, Ingersoll (2002), on the basis of a nationally representative dataset of over 6,000 U.S. elementary and secondary school teachers, has found that schools with higher levels of leadership support, better student discipline, and higher degrees of autonomy and decision-making opportunities had lower rates of teacher turnover. In their meta-analysis of 63 factors that moderate teacher attrition in the U.S., Borman and Dowling (2008) found that schools where teachers were offered administrative support, mentoring programs at early career stages, and opportunities for networking and cooperation, had lower attrition rates when compared to schools without these features. According to researcher Moore, the factors that ultimately contribute to teacher discontent are important factors that need to be understood because of their connection to student and overall staff morale, teacher burnout, teacher stress as they try to improve students' standardized test scores, and the current costs of replacing teachers if they choose to leave the profession (Moore, 2012).

In light of the many different findings on this multi-tiered issue we see the need to further study the effects of current teacher salaries while facing the challenges that refute their ability to be satisfied with their jobs. Future research would allow us the opportunity to validate or even refute the credence that even though most teachers are satisfied with the nature, significance, and challenges of teaching, improving these conditions is still a major need and would inevitably increase teacher job satisfaction (Fuming & Jiliang, 2008). Increasing job satisfaction of teachers can in turn lead to an end in what Ingersoll (2002) has called the "revolving door" in reference to new teachers leaving in their first three years, while ameliorating school performance, and minimizing turnover costs for districts and schools that are already operating on inadequate budgets (Moore, 2012).

Methodology

The methods employed to respond to our research question would be that of quantitative and qualitative research. By not limiting research to one form, we are given the opportunity to evaluate not only the response from the subjects within our research in a quantitative way, but also permitted a greater understanding of their background, lifestyle, and the different dynamics of their daily lives that most likely affect their response to the research question in a quantitative manner. According to researchers, there is little evidence that teachers who are highly paid are systematically more effective, while mentioning that problems with the methods used to gain these findings have limited the value of many studies (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007). This is the reason we found it necessary to encompass both qualitative and quantitative research within our study. A previous research study by Meagher, showed statistical analysis in the form of a quantitative questionnaire to be successful in gathering research from 300 secondary math teachers in Lake County, Illinois in regard to a possible relationship between teachers' professional development, job satisfaction, and work environment (Meagher, 2011).

Statistical analysis can be a useful tool to evaluate quantitative data which is seen in the results from the United States Department of Education survey of Teachers and Principals in regard to their salaries and job satisfaction. The survey asked public-school teachers if they were satisfied with their jobs and salaries and received very telling outcomes. The statistics reveal that teachers in 2015-2016 school year were, in majority, not satisfied with their salary as 45% said yes, they were satisfied, while 55% said no they were not (National Center for Education Statistics & United States Department of Education, 2016). The following percentages are showing the results from all of the participating public-school teachers who were in agreement with the quantitative statistical analysis statements within the survey performed by the United States Department of Education in 2015-2016:

- 45% - "If I could get a higher paying job, I'd leave teaching as soon as possible."
- 52% - "I don't seem to have as much enthusiasm as I did when I began."
- 31% - "I think about staying home from school because I am just too tired to go."
- 30% - "The stress and disappointments involved in teaching at the school aren't really worth it."

Our group has decided to conduct a mixed method research study on teacher job satisfaction in relationship to their salary in the form of interviews and Likert scale surveys composed of questions that would allow for quantitative analysis and qualitative research for triangulation purposes on a well-known digital survey platform called Jotform. Within Jotform, we will be able to formulate the interview and Likert scale surveys with the ease of sending a link to all participants via email that will take them to each component of the research process. The site format will allow us to reach a large number of teachers within a short amount of time, while giving teachers the ability to complete the information at their convenience. We plan to focus our sampling pool on teachers within San Joaquin County. In order to first obtain a diverse demographic of teachers for our final result, our sample population will be selected through an initial interview sent to 300 K-8 teachers within San Joaquin County. The list of potential teachers will be procured by sending an email to their district email address that has been approved by San Joaquin County Office of Education for disbursement amongst their 14 school districts in support of this study. This county's office of education was chosen due to our connection to current staff, our employment within the county, and because of its diversity and location in one of the most diverse cities in the United States, Stockton, California.

Data Collection

From the initial survey only 200 teachers will be chosen. This will be based on the qualitative research in the first survey to determine that we have at least 100 men and 100 women, with as close to even representation of candidates amongst the following age groups: 21-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65. The initial survey would determine the tenure status of all teachers to maintain an even representation of different stages in career experience represented by these tenure ranges: 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, and 20 years or more. Also, questions inquiring about the current grade level the teacher is instructing between kindergarten-8th grade. Along with this Likert form of research we would include questions to identify ethnicity, religion, educational background, specialty credentials/degrees, the district in which they are currently employed, and any future goals whether based in education or not. All participants will remain anonymous, eliminating the collection of names, addresses, or contact information. We believe that these aspects of a teacher's character and lifestyle will have an impact on how they answer the questions that will be in the next step of the research. This will also give us an understanding of how to categorize our findings so that they reflect diversity within the sample with low duplicative rates to shed light on the variations and even disparities in teacher response to the initial research question of teacher's salary in relation to job satisfaction.

Once the final 200 subjects are selected, we will send out, via email, a second Likert survey of at least 15 questions that will deal with the issue of teacher satisfaction. Each question will have 5 varying answer options that are tailored to the question. Some of the questions that will be included in this survey are as follows:

- Do you believe your current job requirements meet the salary you are currently receiving?
- How do you feel about teaching now versus when you started?
- Is your work environment conducive to your career enjoyment?
(Environment being defined as physical location, staff/administration team, students, classroom structure)
- What is your level of satisfaction in your salary versus your education level?
- How often do you think about other job opportunities outside of the field of education?
- What salary range do you best identify with?
- Would a pay increase raise your level of job satisfaction?

Our goal is to allow our research to open the door to different ways of looking at why teachers are not satisfied with their jobs and to identify whether the majority of teachers are not happy with their income when it comes to dealing with the challenges of their job. Teacher job satisfaction is something that can cause a negative ripple effect resulting in school performance not being up to par and children losing interest in education as teachers' negative morale disseminates throughout their schools. The data we collect can help to shed light on this widespread issue and bring awareness to the need for reform when it comes to maintaining job satisfaction, whether it is found to be directly related to teacher salary or not.

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