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Relationship between situational determinants of teachers' perceptions of organisational politics and job satisfaction

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With the study reported on here we aimed to explore the relationship between situational determinants of teachers' perceptions of organisational politics in some public high schools in the KwaZulu-Natal province. We adopted a cross-regional survey design and convenience sampling to study teachers ($n = 301$) at public high schools in all 10 districts in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. We found that perceived organisational politics had a positive relationship to job satisfaction. Analyses of correlational and stepwise regression showed numerous significant relations between the perceptions of organisational politics and job satisfaction variables. The results of the study can be used by the Department of Basic Education to improve South African provincial school management practices for the development and retention of experienced and valuable educators.

Keywords: job satisfaction; organisational politics; state-run schools; teachers' perceptions

Introduction

Worldwide, professional teacher attrition has been acknowledged as a substantial problem that requires supreme consideration (Räsänen, Pietarinen, Pyhältö, Soini & Väisänen, 2020). Professional teachers in some African countries are quitting their jobs and “to make matters worse, young adults are uninterested in choosing teaching as a career” (Toropova, Myrberg & Johansson, 2021:74). Many teachers are faced with poor working conditions, insufficient infrastructure on teaching and learning resources (Amusa & Toriola, 2013). Tshiredo (2013:10) asserts that the work of teachers in South Africa is affected by various factors, that include, inter alia, “inequalities, constant changing curriculum” and Saunderson-Meyer (2019) argues a suppression of teacher authority in the classroom as one of the factors. Consequently, teachers “are losing interest in working in public schools because political cliques appear in the school environment, ‘sell teaching jobs’”, and teachers instigate strikes to eliminate their colleagues (Volmink, Gardiner, Msimang, Nel, Moleta, Scholtz & Prins, 2016:118). According to some studies these factors influence some teachers to the extent that they have no option but to exit their jobs to explore other informal/formal tactics to strive for limited resources to satisfy their expectations and other needs (Saunderson-Meyer, 2019; Volmink et al., 2016). Moreover, the Ministry of Basic Education is reactively dealing with the manifestation of the ruinous organisational politics culture in public schools (Saunderson-Meyer, 2019; Volmink et al., 2016). Daskin and Tezer (2012, in Elkhailil, 2017:3) maintain that “perceived organisational politics have a lethal effect that can influence employees' behaviour, conduct, enact the work context harmony and efficacy.” We sought to examine the relationship between situational determinants of teachers' perceptions of organisational politics (POPS) and job satisfaction (JSS) in public high schools in KwaZulu-Natal. Teachers play a fundamental role in nurturing and shaping the future of humans to remain competitive in a dynamic economic mainstream (Global Partnership for Education [GPE], 2020; Lamar University, 2016). We formulated a broad research question: Is there any significant relationship between POPS and the JSS of teachers in state-run schools in the districts of the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa?

The objectives of this article were to (1) establish the relationship between POPS and JSS and (2) establish whether the POPS variables positively and significantly predict the teachers' JSS. We formulated the following hypotheses:

- H_1 Perceived organisational politics relates significantly and positively to job satisfaction of teachers.
 - H_2 Perceived organisational politics significantly and positively predicts teachers' job satisfaction.
- In the ensuing sections, we briefly discuss the concepts “perceived organisational politics” and “job satisfaction” as well the research methodology, analysis of the findings, limitations, recommendations and conclusion.

Perceived Organisational Politics

Perceived organisational politics conceptually entails employee motivation, which is an essential tenet for the development of the organisation (Abbas & Raja, 2014; Conner, 2006; Elkhailil, 2017; Hooper, 1983). Mintzberg's (1983) defines POPS as behaviours aimed at promoting self-interest at the expense of others or organisational goals. Poon (2003) categorises antecedents of POPS as personal factors (e.g., personality characteristics, demographic factors, attitudes, needs and values); situational factors (e.g., at the job level, factors like job autonomy and job variation); and organisational level, (factors like centralisation and

formalisation). Perceptions of organisational politics are influenced by four variables, namely the hierarchical level, job autonomy, formalisation and the climate of the organisation (O'Connor & Morrison, 2001:3; cf. Ferris & Kacmar 1992).

Perceived organisational politics may cause stress and conflict in the workplace (Chinomona & Mofokeng, 2016; Conner, 2006; Ferris, Fedor, Chachere & Pandy, 1989:92; Richardsen, Traavik & Burke, 2016; Swartz & Potgieter, 2017). This in turn can result in the disturbance of the usual patterns of activity or behaviour at both an individual and organisational level in terms of JSS (Ferris, Treadway, Perrewé, Brouer, Douglas & Lux, 2007; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). Hence, Swartz and Potgieter (2017) suggest control and understanding as remedies that can regulate the connections between POPS and its effects (cf. Bodla, Danish & Nawaz, 2012; Elkhailil, 2017; Hochwarter & Treadway, 2003:558; Tlaiss, 2013). Factors such as commitment (Ferris et al., 2007; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007), political behaviour (Al-Zu'bi, 2010; Dhar, 2011), and self-efficacy (Ashforth & Lee, 1990; Jawahar, Meurs, Ferris & Hochwarter, 2008) can balance the connections between politics and work outcomes.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction (JSS) exemplifies “an individual’s total feeling about their job, organisation climate and the attitudes they have towards various aspects or facets of their job, as well as an attitude and perception that could consequently influence the degree of fit between the individual and the organisation” (Spector, 2008, in Lumley, Coetzee, Tladinyane & Ferreira, 2011:102). Generally, employees who are highly satisfied with their job appear to “have positive attitudes while those who are dissatisfied appear to have negative attitudes toward their job and organisation” (Mokgolo, 2008:54). These attitudes are influenced by interrelated facets of JSS such as “pay, promotion, supervision, benefits, contingent rewards, operating procedures, co-workers, the nature of the work and communication” (Spector, 1997:8). Therefore, organisations need to find ways through which they will encourage positive political behaviour, enhance employees’ job satisfaction and their service spirit (Yusof, Zulkiffli, Padlee & Yusof, 2018). Different scholars (e.g. Chen, Wang, Chang & Weng, 2017; Chinomona & Mofokeng, 2016; Swartz & Potgieter, 2017) opine that POPS are associated with increased levels of turnover and decreased levels of commitment, job satisfaction, performance, and job stress.

Method

Participants

Data were collected from 350 full-time and temporarily employed teachers at state-run high schools across all 10 districts in KwaZulu-Natal

through anonymous, self-administered questionnaires. A total of 301 surveys were circulated and returned, signifying a response rate of 86% – 78% from female and 22% from male participants. Most participants were full-time teachers (59%) while 41% were temporary teachers. The focus of this study was on teachers tasked to teach on a daily basis, hence school principals were excluded because they form part of the school management. Cluster probability sampling (i.e. two-stage cluster) was used to draw the sample. This selection method allowed us to create a representative sample of the high school teaching workforce while mitigating the probability for bias and addressing context-specific challenges (Morris & Nguyen, 2008; Turner, Magnani & Shuaib, 1996).

Measuring Instruments

The questionnaire survey used to gather data for this study consisted of three sections: demographic and background variables, and two other sections for the POPS and JSS scales.

Job satisfaction scale

The Job Satisfaction Scale (Spector, 1997) measures nine aspects namely: pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operating conditions, co-workers, nature of the work, communication, and the overall job satisfaction. We used a 5-point response scale to measure all the variables. The scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire included 12 items which the respondents answered by indicating how true the statement was. We ensured that the instrument was reliable and valid by piloting the questionnaire, linking it with the research questions, comparing it with the literature, and giving clear instructions. The Cronbach’s alpha (α) for the JSS was 90.

Perceived organisational politics scale

O’Connor and Morrison (2001) assessed four facets of POPS, namely hierarchical level, job autonomy, formalisation and the climate of the organisation, and general organisational politics. The questionnaire included a set of 12 items that were of the same value and the respondents answered by indicating how true the statement was. The Cronbach’s alpha (α) for the POPS was 87.

Research Procedure

We sought and obtained an approval letter from the KwaZulu-Natal provincial Department of Basic Education to conduct this study. The study adhered to all ethical guidelines for research involving humans. The Public Service Commission (PSC) upholds the Constitutional Values and Principles (CVPs) of Chapter 10, Section 195, which govern public administration. The respondents were visited at their respective schools after school hours to

collect data, the sessions lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes. All the respondents received the questionnaires and covering letters in an envelope explaining the purpose of the study guaranteeing their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. The return of the questionnaire was an indication of informed consent to participate in this study.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse data. Pearson product-moment correlations and stepwise multiple regression analyses were performed to test the study hypotheses and a cut-off point of $p \leq 0.05$ and $R^2 \geq 0.30$ were also performed to measure a practical effect size of correlations (Cohen, 1992). In terms of the multiple regression analyses, we used the value of the adjusted R^2 to define the strength of association and the overall difference of the dependent variable (JSS) that the independent variable (POPS)

explained. The F -test was implemented to test the multiple coefficient correlations of (JSS) and (POPS) variable variances.

Results

The information contained in Table 1 indicates that with the POPS, the highest mean scores were obtained on the climate of the organisation ($M = 4.07$; $SD = 1.04$), job autonomy ($M = 4.05$; $SD = 1.01$) and hierarchical level ($M = 4.03$; $SD = 0.97$) and the lowest mean score on the formalisation ($M = 3.51$; $SD = 0.90$). The standard deviations of the sub-scales were fairly similar, all ranging from 0.90 to 1.04. The mean scores of all the JSS scales ranged from 4.69 to 3.62. The sample of participants displayed the highest mean scores on promotion ($M = 4.69$; $SD = 1.12$) and the lowest scores on pay ($M = 3.62$; $SD = 0.90$). The standard deviations were fairly similar, all ranging from 0.90 to 1.73.

Table 1 Means, standard deviations and instrument reliability: POPS & JSS ($N = 301$) (variables adapted from O'Connor & Morrison's (2001) POPS scale and Spector's (1997) JSS scale)

Measuring instrument	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α)
POPS			
Hierarchical level	4.03	0.97	0.78
Job autonomy	4.05	1.01	0.58
Formalisation	3.51	0.90	0.78
Climate of the organisation	4.07	1.04	0.89
JSS			
Pay	3.62	0.90	0.79
Promotion	4.69	1.12	0.80
Supervision	4.35	1.20	0.82
Fringe benefits	3.65	0.97	0.85
Contingent rewards	4.48	1.73	0.76
Operating conditions	4.06	1.12	0.77
Co-workers	4.12	0.97	0.68
Nature of the work	4.64	1.12	0.79
Communication	4.12	1.01	0.70

As illustrated in Table 2, significant positive relationships ($p \leq 0.001$; medium to large practical effect sizes, except for hierarchical level and co-workers, $p \leq 0.01$) were observed between all the

POPS variables and JSS of teachers in the KwaZulu-Natal district schools, with the exception of the formalisation (POPS) variable.

Table 2 Significant Pearson product-moment correlations: POPS and JSS ($N = 301$) (variables adapted from O'Connor & Morrison's (2001) POPS scale and Spector's (1997) JSS scale)

	Pay	Promotion	Supervision	Contingent rewards	Operating conditions	Co-workers	Fringe benefits	Nature of the work	Communication
Hierarchical level	0.49** +	0.32** +	0.37** +	0.31** +	0.38** +	0.30* +	0.40** +	0.43** ++	0.41** +
Job autonomy	0.62** ++	0.38** +	0.46** +	0.37** +	0.42** +	0.54** ++	0.32** +	0.28* +	0.30** +
The climate of the organisation	0.54** ++	0.41** +	0.43** +	0.32** +	0.40** ++	0.38** +	0.46** +	0.59** +	0.32** +

Note. * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$. + $R^2 \geq 0.29$ (small practical effect size), ++ $R^2 \geq 0.30 \leq 0.49$ (medium practical effect size).

Table 3 displays that the POPS hierarchical level variable contributed significantly to the variance in the JSS (50%) (large practical effect size). Hierarchical level received the largest beta weight ($\beta = 0.44$; $p \leq 0.001$). The POPS job autonomy variable ($\beta = 0.32$; $p \leq 0.001$) positively predicted the JSS by achieving 21% (medium practical effect size) of the variance. The POPS

climate of the organisation variable ($\beta = 0.36$; $p = 0.001$) positively predicted the JSS by gaining 29% (large practical effect size) of the variance. The variables of hierarchical level, job autonomy and the climate of the organisation are POPS drivers found in the regression analysis of JSS. In accordance with the findings mentioned above, the hypothesis was accepted.

Table 3 Multiple regression analyses: JSS and POPS ($N = 301$) (adapted from O'Connor & Morrison's (2001) POPS scale and Spector's (1997) JSS scale)

Variable	Unstandardised		Standardised coefficient	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i>
	B	SE b						
JSS (constant)	-0.33	0.59	β	-0.57	0.57	29.78	0.50** ++	0.72
Hierarchical level (POPS)	0.12	0.02	0.44	5.17	0.00			
JSS (constant)	0.97	0.70	β	1.38	0.17	12.29	0.21* +	0.48
Job autonomy (POPS)	0.11	0.04	0.32	3.08	0.00			
JSS (constant)	2.06	0.41	β	5.03	0.00	17.92	0.29* ++	0.55
The climate of the organisation (POPS)	0.06	0.02	0.36	3.72	0.000			

Note. * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.001$. ⁺ $R^2 \geq 0.13 \leq 0.25$ (medium practical effect size); ⁺⁺ $R^2 \geq 0.26$ (large practical effect size); *F* (test the variances of multiple coefficients).

Discussion

In this study we explored the association of POPS and JSS and whether POPS variables positively and significantly predicted JSS of teachers in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. Overall, the results suggest significant and positive relationships between POPS variables and JSS (cf. Table 2). The positive associations suggest that the respondents who were satisfied with the POPS felt more emotionally attached to their schools (organisations). These respondents were prone to stay with their own schools owing to social norms. These findings support findings of numerous scholars (see, for instance, Chinomona & Mofokeng, 2016; Chipunza & Malo, 2017; Gull & Zaidi, 2012; Hochwarter & Treadway, 2003; Khalid & Ishaq, 2015; Meisler & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007; Yusof et al., 2018). It was found that POPS related strongly to JSS and also resonated with theories on POPS (Ferris et al., 1989). The results shore up the recognition that both POPS and JSS relate to individuals' attitudes towards their job. These areas of POPS may be explained as the obligations that exist between the employer and employee.

An integrated analysis of past and recent literature support the argument that POPS have the ability to indicate lower levels of job commitment, satisfaction and performance and increased levels of job tension and intention to resign. In addition,

studies revealed that POPS have the potential to jeopardise an employee's work affection or enthusiasm and as such, should be minimised (Chinomona & Mofokeng, 2016; Gull & Zaidi, 2012; Hochwarter & Treadway, 2003; Khalid & Ishaq, 2015; Meisler & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007; Yusof et al., 2018). No significant relationships were observed between formalisation and JSS. This suggests that POPS do not link with the respondents' JSS with the rules and procedures at their schools.

The results further explain that the respondents' POPS with regard to the hierarchical level, job autonomy and the climate of the organisation played a vital role in predicting and explaining their general satisfaction with the schools. Hierarchical level, job autonomy and the climate of the organisation are concomitant with the motivations that govern an individual's decision to remain with a school. Globally, employees attach great importance to certain working conditions and if these conditions are greatly fulfilled and harmonious with the employees' expectations, such employees are unlikely to resign from the organisation (Dhar, 2011; Martin & Roodt 2008; Shen & Xia, 2012; Swartz & Potgieter, 2017). Thus, it is incumbent to imply that teachers who were pleased with and positive about their schools' political atmosphere, often contributed toward helping their learners realise their full

potential and consequently contribute to the country's economic growth (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2010; International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis [IIASA], 2008). On the contrary, Akanbi and Ofoegbu's (2013) found that POPS had detrimental effects on employees' JSS and regarding learners, such learners' cognitive skills were negatively impacted, particularly in countries whose economies were still growing. This affirms the notion that economic growth in both developed and developing countries relies, to a large extent, on the workforce whose cognitive skills have been shaped by teachers (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2010). Thus, neglecting the economic dimension of education and the teachers' JSS negatively affects the development of future generations (Chipunza & Malo, 2017) and subsequently inhibits fair competition in the global economy (Lamar University, 2016).

The main finding of this study is that JSS is a key issue. Toropova et al. (2021) assert that management cannot change an employee's affect disposition but schools (i.e. principals and teachers) can influence what they perceive in their immediate work environment. The findings reveal that teachers need a conducive work environment in order for them to stay longer at their respective schools. If teachers work in conducive school environments, they will be able to provide their learners with the necessary skills to compete in the global economy. Principals and the Ministry of Basic Education should ensure that political infighting and killings for promotions within state-run high schools are prevented and that POPS are handled with fairness and equity.

It was established that POPS positively predicts teachers' JSS, with the exception of formalisation. The findings reveal the need for state-run schools to be considered as a breeding turf for the manifestation of perilous POPS, which have adverse consequences on teachers' JSS. Generally, in the public school context, little is done to foster positive POPS. In the KwaZulu-Natal province, state-run high schools and the provincial Department of Basic Education should work together to create a conducive teaching and learning environment and combat counterproductive organisational politics influenced by self-interest. This may yield teachers' JSS, self-efficacy and retention of teachers. If negative POPS persist, a decrease in the employees' job satisfaction, involvement and working relations will be exacerbated (Chinomona & Mofokeng, 2016; Elkhail, 2017; Tshiredo, 2013) resulting in lower levels of employee performance and higher levels of job frustration (Aneja, 2015).

Implications of the Study

The results of this study may assist state-run school management and the KwaZulu-Natal provincial Department of Basic Education to develop or implement effective and robust strategies to minimise severe POPS, improve JSS and teachers' self-efficacy in their respective schools. According to Shibiti (2019), employees who are satisfied in their on-and-off-the job environments or fair career advancement have a tendency to display higher degrees of JSS, involvement and organisational citizenship. The school and provincial management should motivate teachers to stay in their jobs by "promoting the values and principles prescribed in section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, without fear, favour or prejudice" (PSC, 2020:1).

A limitation of our study was that it was restricted to teachers employed in public high schools in KwaZulu-Natal. Thus, the findings cannot be generalised to other districts and provinces. We recommend a further study on two levels: firstly, to cover combined schools in the entire province of KwaZulu-Natal to establish the impact and contributing variables of POPS on JSS of teachers; and secondly, to conduct a comparative study between the entire province and schools in other provinces of South Africa. Furthermore, it is important, for instance, for researchers to focus on personalities and affiliation, and how personalities and affiliation reflect the reactions and behaviour of the teachers. Another limitation was that some teachers evaded sharing views pertaining to differential matters because of the political instability in their province, which is considered as a very sensitive aspect, although fertile for research. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study should be considered as a positive contribution to the development of a politics-free and conducive working environment in state-run high schools in South Africa.

Conclusion

The overall results of this study shed new light on how perceived organisational politics in state-run high schools in South Africa relates to teachers' levels of job satisfaction. The new knowledge emerged from this study may help the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education and others in the retention and enhancement of devoted teachers' well-being. This view agrees with Shibiti's (2019:8) finding that "satisfaction with retention factors plays an important role in explaining employees' level of links, fit and sacrifice (i.e. job embeddedness) and individuals tend to demonstrate high levels of sacrifice in both on-the-job and off-the-job environments." The result of this study are

consistent with the literature that teachers in government schools are highly satisfied to stay at their schools on condition that their employer enhances and maintains a healthy organisational climate (Ampofo, Coetzer & Poisat, 2017), independence at work, fair opportunities for career growth (Chipunza & Malo, 2017; Shibiti, 2019), and champion their health and safety needs (Coetzee, Oosthuizen & Stoltz, 2016).

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Authors' Contributions

Dr M.M. was responsible for the project design, conducted the statistical analyses, and wrote the manuscript. Prof. M.A. was responsible for the conceptual contributions and assisted with interpretation, formatting and technical presentation.

Notes

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