

Determinants of academic job satisfaction: findings from Russia

Olga Y. Rotar, PhD, National Research University Higher School of Economics. Centre for Institutional Studies. Postdoctoral Research Fellow

Bernardo Eugenio Pincheira Sarmiento, PhD, National Research University Higher School of Economics. Centre for Institutional Studies. Postdoctoral Research Fellow

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Abstract

Job satisfaction among academic staff is an important area of research since academic performance affects student learning and determines the success of the higher education system. Moreover, the role of academics in shaping the university culture and contributing to the quality of the educational provision is well recognised. Nevertheless, despite international research on academic job satisfaction, little is known about factors affecting academic job satisfaction in the context of higher education in Russia. To address this gap, our study aims to identify factors of job satisfaction among academics working in Russian universities based on the analysis of the “Monitoring of Education Markets and Organisations” data and employing Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory to the analysis.

The preliminary findings indicate that the most influential factor in maintaining a job among academics is the existence of social programmes aimed to co-finance healthy lifestyle and sports activities, followed by wage and seniority of a position. Our study is unique because it focuses on “hygiene” factors contributing to job dissatisfaction among Russian academic staff based on the nationwide data. The study results highlight the importance of addressing the lower-order needs of Russian higher education academics to maintain their job satisfaction and ensure retention in academia.

Research problem and context

Job satisfaction as a theorised, two-dimensional concept was proposed by Herzberg (1959) and has been continuously challenged and re-examined since then (Lacy & Sheehan, 1997). Another widely used characteristic of job satisfaction is the one proposed by Locke (1976), who defined it as “...a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences” (p. 1304). However, researchers are still struggling to agree on a single set of factors that determine job satisfaction.

Despite recognising job satisfaction as an important research area, much focus has been placed within the private sector organisations, whereas the academic labour market remains under-researched (Castellacci & Viñas-Bardolet, 2021). The review of the literature allowed us to formulate the following conclusions:

1. Academics are more likely to be satisfied with their job than their income.
2. Yet, the wage is one of the most important determinants of job satisfaction.
3. Job satisfaction is strongly related to the rank or seniority of an academic position.
4. There are mixed results on the effect of contract conditions and individual characteristics on job satisfaction.
5. Social benefits showed to be significant predictors of job satisfaction in two national contexts, but such benefits are not widespread in Russia.

Thus, this study focuses on the factors of wage, fringe benefits, position (senior, senior administrative, full-time), HEI's characteristics and length of service in academia, and individual characteristics of academics to examine the determinant of academic job satisfaction.

Theoretical framework

We employ the Herzberg (1959) two-factor theory to look at “hygienic” factors of job satisfaction, e.g., factors that are suggested to contribute to the level of dissatisfaction with a job if absent, since no research has been done on examination of hygienic factors in the context of Russia. As Mikhalkina et al. (2020) explain, examination of job satisfaction characteristics with the aim to search for factors that are significant for academic staff, is an important research agenda.

Methodology and methods

The data was derived from the “Monitoring of Education Markets and Organisations” (MEMO) 2020 database- a project initiated by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation.

To examine the effect of hygienic factors of job satisfaction among academics, we used a recursive feature selection (RFE) method based on cross-validation technique. To apply the RFE method, we split the dataset into two subsets (20% and 80%). The larger subset was used to train on all terms, evaluate their significance, remove the least significant, and so on, until the optimal number of the most relevant variables was computed. Five most influential variables selected based on the results of computation were used to build the model. The model was examined for multicollinearity and tested for the overall significance using the Wald test.

Results

All selected variables were included into the RFE process and the top 5 variables (out of 8), namely wage, health insurance, sport, senior administrative and full-time employment were proposed as the most influential terms.

The results of logistic regression with the inclusion of the top 5 variables showed that among social programmes, having an advanced health insurance is a significant determinant of academic job satisfaction. However, the analysis of the provision of advanced health insurance co-financed by a HEI conducted by Rudakov (2021) found that the majority (86%) of universities either do not have such a programme or academic staff is not aware of it. On the positive side, 30% of academics indicated an existence of programmes that support a healthy lifestyle at their HEI (e.g. co-financing fitness and sport activities). In our study, this factor is the most influential on academic job satisfaction, with the strong positive impact.

Academics who hold a senior administrative position are 1,61 times more likely to be satisfied with their job, which confirms the results of the past research on the impact of academic rank on job satisfaction..

Wage of an individual has a strong positive effect on job satisfaction. Our findings support past research on the academic labour market in Russia. Previous studies showed that the presence of an administrative position is a major predictor of high wages (Prakhov, Rudakov, 2021; Prakhov, 2019).

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