

Teacher satisfaction in Abu Dhabi public schools: What the numbers did not say

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This study bridges a gap in qualitative research on teacher satisfaction in the United Arab Emirates. In line with the two-factor theory, we found that maintenance factors, such as perception of job insecurity, stagnant salaries and perceived heavy teaching loads, had more prominence in explaining teacher dissatisfaction. Motivational factors such as enjoyment of teaching, professional growth, and gratifying feelings derived from working with students were less likely to increase satisfaction if maintenance factors were not fulfilled. The study recommends that policymakers revisit salary structures, ensure transparency regarding termination procedures, and take measures to provide fair workloads for all teachers.

Introduction

Job satisfaction can be defined as one's psychological disposition toward work (Schultz & Schultz, 2010), or the "state of mind determined by the extent to which the individual perceives his/her job-related needs being met" (Evans, 1997, p. 833). Teacher satisfaction has been the focus of numerous studies worldwide, but the topic has not received due attention in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Only a handful of studies have been found such as Buckner (2017), Carson (2013), and Badri and his associates at the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), now named Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK). ADEC researchers found that teachers were less satisfied with their principals' "leadership of teaching and learning" and expressed concerns over their level of involvement in "curriculum issues" and "school decisions." In addition, teachers were not happy with their image in society, with their "sense of respect" scoring as low as 2.17 on a five-point Likert scale (Badri, Makki & Ferrandino, 2011, p. 2). The researchers warned, "the consequences of ignoring what makes teachers dissatisfied is detrimental not only to the quality of work life of the individual teachers but also to their schools and the children they serve" (p. 4).

Badri, Mohaidat, Ferrandino and El Mourad (2013) found positive relationships between teacher satisfaction, work conditions, and goal progress in the UAE. No relationship was obtained between job satisfaction, self-efficacy and goal support. They interpreted this result in light of the absence of a performance-based pay system. As they reported, in ADEC, "All teachers are treated the same. There is no difference between a teacher who is providing excellent student outcomes and those who never develop themselves and rely only on their experience" (p. 22). In a third study, Badri, El Mourad, Ferrandino, Makki, Al Sayari and Messaikeh (2011) considered demographic factors of teachers such as gender and nationality. They found that male teachers were more satisfied than female teachers in most areas, that non-Emirati teachers were more satisfied than Emirati teachers, and that the number of students taught (which they used to reflect teaching load) had no significant effect on teacher satisfaction.

The results of online satisfaction surveys conducted by ADEC in 2010, 2012 and 2014 support most of previous results. In 2010, the mean scores of teachers' satisfaction were as low as 2.55 out of 5.00 in the area of teachers' involvement in school decisions. In 2012, teachers' satisfaction with their influence in schools scored at 61.6%. In 2014, while satisfaction appeared high by some measures, such as teacher positive attitudes (80.93%), scores in other areas were surprisingly low. For example, overall satisfaction with teaching loads dipped low (53.2%) and teachers were not highly satisfied with the evaluation system, delivering a score of 72.47% in that area (p. 18).

Some results from the UAE seem to contradict international literature, such as the finding of no relationship between teachers' overload and their level of satisfaction. Similarly, Buckner (2017) found that male teachers in the UAE were more satisfied than females (p. 27) — a finding she described as surprising. Therefore, the current study serves two purposes. First, it bridges a gap in qualitative studies on teacher satisfaction in the UAE by presenting teachers' genuine voices and exploring the complex factors leading to teachers' satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Second, it clarifies UAE-based previous quantitative results that seem confusing, by exploring whether male teachers are more satisfied than females and whether satisfaction is not affected by factors such as teaching load. Thus, we seek explanations for "what the numbers did not say."

Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework that combines Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman's (1959) two-factor theory and Dinham and Scott's outer domain factors (1998) guides this study. While there is no universally accepted theory to explain job satisfaction, Herzberg's two-factor theory has been quite influential and frequently appears in the literature of business, economics, and education (Dinham & Scott, 1996; Smerek & Peterson, 2007). The two-factor theory posits that motivation does not exist along a single continuum, but rather is composed of two separate and independent sets of factors, one leading to satisfaction and the other to dissatisfaction. Motivational factors which lead directly to job satisfaction relate to the job itself, and include the sense of achievement, recognition, enjoyment of work, level of responsibility, opportunity for advancement, and other enhancers of personal and professional growth that derive from the work. Maintenance (or hygiene) factors connect with the conditions in which the work is conducted, such as working conditions, salary, benefits, interpersonal relationships, supervision, and impact of work policy on personal life. Maintenance factors must be present in sufficient amounts in order for motivational factors to come into play. When maintenance factors are not sufficiently favourable, they can block motivation and lead to job dissatisfaction. Traditionally, it was implicitly accepted that the opposite of job satisfaction was job dissatisfaction, and that by eliminating the sources of dissatisfaction from work, a job would be motivating and satisfying. However, Herzberg (1966) argued that the opposite of satisfaction is not dissatisfaction, but no satisfaction, and the opposite of dissatisfaction is not satisfaction but no dissatisfaction, thereby asserting that workers could not be motivated through maintenance factors only.

More recently, Dinham and Scott (1998) attempted to extend Herzberg's theory to include a third dimension, which they called the outer domain. Although it falls outside the control of schools, the outer domain factors impinge on and can negatively affect the business of schools. The outer domain factors include rising societal demands regarding the pace and scope of change in schools, demands to decrease school funds, and negative images of teachers displayed in media and society. Dinham and Scott (2000; 2003) found that, in Australia, USA, New Zealand and England, teachers and school executives recorded the greatest satisfaction with the core business of teaching, i.e., matters pertaining to working with students to help them achieve learning goals or better their behaviour, and increasing one's own professional skills and knowledge. In addition, they reported that the outer domain factors acted to erode the overall satisfaction of teachers and school executives, concluding that this domain can influence satisfaction perhaps more than inner factors pertaining to the core work of teaching.

Method

Research design

Previous research on teacher satisfaction in the UAE schools has been mainly quantitative, and consisted of large-scale surveys using pre-designed questionnaires. While this research presented quite meaningful and relevant results, we believe that utilising a qualitative research design would contribute to a deeper and much richer understanding of this important issue. Therefore, the phenomenological design was adopted wherein teachers can freely describe their human experience with job-related factors that lead to their satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This approach allows researchers to present the results from the perspective of teachers who have lived the experience.

Data collection

Phenomenological research is typically conducted through in-depth interviews with a small number of participants. Thus, this study used semi-structured interviews with a list of open-ended questions exploring motivational, maintenance and outer domain factors. Examples of questions are presented in Table 1.

We conducted seven individual interviews. Sometimes teachers preferred to sit for a group interview. Therefore, we did five focus-group interviews. The interviews were conducted during April and May of 2016, and we used Arabic language for native Arabic speakers, and English for native English speakers and for teachers who taught English. The total interviewing time was slightly more than 13 hours. Before each interview, participants were briefed about the purpose of the interview, assured of ethical considerations pertaining to confidentiality and anonymity, and given a chance to discontinue. The interviews were audio-recorded after consent was granted by the participants.

Table 1: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction factors and example interview questions

Satisfaction/ dissatisfaction factors	Example question
Motivational	Describe your relationship with students. How does this relationship affect your level of satisfaction?
Maintenance	Describe work conditions in this school. How do these conditions affect your level of satisfaction?
Outer domain	Do you feel secure in your job? Why? How is this affecting you? How do community- or society-related factors affect your satisfaction with teaching?

Participants

To select participants for this study, we purposely limited our interviews to schools in Al Ain, a large city in the Abu Dhabi Emirate, for proximity and convenience. Most government schools in Abu Dhabi are segregated by gender. In Abu Dhabi, cycle 1 schools serve grades 1-5, cycle 2 schools serve grades 6-9, and cycle 3 schools serve grades 10-12. In order to get a heterogeneous group of teachers, we visited schools that catered for the three cycles, for boys and girls, and interviewed Emirati, Arab, and Western teachers to represent the teachers' composition. At each school, the principal or the vice principal checked the approval letter from ADEC and assigned us to a staff member who arranged for teachers who were not in class to sit for the interview. Nineteen teachers participated in this study. In cycle 1, we interviewed five native English-speaking teachers from the UK, Ireland, Australia, and the USA, who taught English, maths and science. In cycle 2, we interviewed seven Emirati teachers, who taught Arabic, social studies and civics. Finally, in cycle 3, we interviewed two maths teachers from Egypt, two English teachers from Tunisia, one English teacher from Palestine, and two English teachers from Jordan. Participants consisted of ten male and nine female teachers.

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed into Microsoft *Word* files, and the audio files and transcripts were imported to *Nvivo Pro 11*. Each researcher separately used the program to code interview data into three main categories: maintenance, motivational, and outer domain factors. Upon reading the transcript, the researchers created sub-themes within each category and added selected quotations to the sub-themes. Table 2 provides the frequency of quotations for each of the three categories of factors.

Each researcher then extracted significant statements that described teachers' experiences using the data sheets. Then, the researchers discussed them and reached a consensus. These statements and examples became meaning units, which were integrated into the narrative description of the themes. As exact quotations were used to illustrate the viewpoints, the teachers were referred to in general terms to maintain anonymity.

Table 2: Frequency of quotes

		Number of quotations in each category of factors					
		Maintenance factors	169	Motivational factors	53	Outer domain	9
Sub-themes	Relationship with principal	15	Ability to influence students' success	12	Image of teachers in society	2	
	Salary and benefits	36	Helping students modify attitudes	8	The country and the lifestyle	7	
	Employment policy	42	Recognition and appreciation	13			
	Job security	33	Opportunity for advancement	11			
	Schoolwork conditions	43	Passion about teaching	8			
				Perception of achievement	1		

Limitations of the study

As with qualitative studies generally, perceptions of teachers could have been influenced by their immediate states of mind or the work conditions manifesting at the time of the interview. In addition, relatively small sample sizes limit the generalisability of findings. Mindful of these two limitations, the researchers took measures to ensure the credibility of the results. The first measure was for the two researchers to analyse the data independently before then agreeing on common themes. The second measure was to have one of the study participants and one non-participant school principal from ADEC read the findings, discussion, and recommendations sections to check for any misrepresentations or bias. At this stage, data transcripts were made available to these reviewers.

Findings

Data analysis revealed that teachers had emphasised maintenance factors over motivational and outer domain factors, with maintenance factors amounting to around three quarters of teachers' talk. Among these maintenance factors, three were remarkably repeated: salary and benefits, schoolwork conditions, and job security and employment policies. Among the motivational factors, four were notably recurrent: passion for teaching, work with students, appreciation or recognition, and opportunity for promotion. As for the outer domain, respondents stressed the quality of life in the UAE, and Emirati male teachers referred to teachers' social image. The findings will be presented in this order.

Maintenance factors

Salary and benefits

While salary scales in ADEC schools are not publicly available, information offered by participants in the study revealed that Western teachers earn around US\$52,000 to 70,000

annually, not including accommodation of around US\$22,000. Additionally, they are provided annual air tickets to their home country, medical insurance, and an educational allowance for their children. For Arab expatriates, the compensation in terms of salary appears to be lower and accommodation is at around US\$15,000 per year. For both Western and Arab teachers, the packages seemed reasonable, given that salaries are non-taxable and, as many teachers indicated, much higher than those in their home countries, particularly at the beginning of their service. One first-year English medium teacher (EMT henceforth — teachers who teach English, maths, and science, in the medium of English, in cycle 1 schools) from Ireland said, “I am paid quite well here... My salary is good and the country is very generous.”

However, there were a few less satisfying conditions as well. First, there was no annual salary increase; teachers who started their service at a certain salary stayed for years without any raise. As one cycle 3 teacher said, “It is the same salary for many years... and everybody [else] is taking much more.” Another said, “I am not satisfied with the salary for the fact that there are people who are less experienced but get paid more than me.” The second reason is that, in cases where there are salary discrepancies, it is the newest teacher recruits, like the Irish teacher mentioned above, who could be receiving a higher salary than veteran teachers. An Australian female EMT who earned around US\$52,000 per year explained, “I’ve got a friend upstairs who is getting 68, and she has less experience than me.” A third point concerns a sense of disparity regarding salary and workloads. EMTs in cycle 1, who were teaching 30 periods a week, complained that others were teaching less but receiving higher salaries. At the same time, teachers in cycles 2 and 3 complained that teachers in cycle 1 finish school earlier, but that their salaries were similar.

Emirati teachers’ salaries are calculated on a different scheme, and could amount to as much as double that of expatriate teachers. We heard figures of around US\$120,000 or more annually for a teacher, and around US\$180,000 or more for a principal. This is non-taxable income. Opinions of Emirati teachers regarding salaries were divided. On one hand, we found female Emirati teachers to be the most satisfied among all categories of teachers with regard to salary. Emirati male teachers, in contrast, were not satisfied with their salaries because they compared themselves with their peers, Emiratis in other government positions, who were earning higher salaries and could be working in less demanding jobs than teaching.

School work conditions

EMTs in cycle 1 schools teach six periods of 45 minutes a day totalling 30 periods per week, while other teachers, particularly Emirati teachers, who teach Arabic, Islamic, and social studies, are assigned a much lighter load. The four female Emirati teachers we interviewed were teaching between 10 and 16 periods per week and the two male teachers were teaching between 14 and 16 periods weekly. Arab teachers in cycles 2 and 3 were teaching a load of 18-20 periods a week. Accordingly, in our interviews we did not hear complaints from female Emirati teachers about their workload. EMTs, on the other hand, were unhappy teaching much more than their colleagues. Teaching six periods a day,

EMTs felt “the workload is too much.” As a result, some refused to work beyond school hours and developed a rather passive attitude toward their work. “Some teachers just really have a blasé attitude about it, you know, ‘I do what I can do, I’m not going to work outside the school,’” one EMT expressed about doing extra work at home.

While EMTs expressed dissatisfaction about their relatively heavy teaching loads, some shared with us the fact that compared to where they come from, their workload was manageable. One female EMT from the UK said,

I still have an afternoon and an evening. I mean, I never had an afternoon or evening back home... and I think most teachers, if they’re honest, have more free time because of the way the school works... if you organise your time, you can do it all within the time.

In addition to annoyances regarding teaching loads, teachers voiced displeasure toward administrative duties and paperwork. One Arab expatriate teacher explained, “The school principal always asks us to do duties and assignments, and the deadlines are so short.” Another teacher, explaining the aversion of many teachers toward administrative tasks, described how administrative duties took teachers away from their main job of teaching, stating, “When it comes to the administration no one wants to do it. I’m happy doing it. But when I’m doing that, I’m not doing something else... I am not focusing on my teaching.”

Job security and employment policies

Job security was not an issue for Emirati teachers since they are tenured and have guaranteed employment. The case is quite different for non-Emirati teachers, whose contracts contain limited terms and are subject to appraisals for renewal. Expatriate teachers are typically offered two-year contracts when they are first hired, after which they are considered for renewal annually. Some of these teachers had the belief that they were not guaranteed employment even if their performance was excellent and their record was otherwise unblemished. Referring to the renewal of her contract, one expatriate female teacher expressed, “We don’t know what will happen, even with an excellent evaluation... I’ve known people who have lost their jobs.” This anxiety, however, was not shared by everyone, particularly some EMTs, who believed that, as long as a teacher was doing an excellent job, there was no reason to be unnerved by the prospect of a termination. One female EMT from Australia expressed, “I feel secured in my job because I am doing my job correctly and I’ve had excellent evaluations and I haven’t had a problem.”

Some EMTs evidently believed they were here as “a temporary fix to a problem,” or just until the system has enough trained Emirati teachers. Along this line of pessimistic reasoning, Arab expatriate teachers expressed the sense that they were “spare to the Western teachers” and believed that when it came to contract renewal, Western teachers would have more job security than they would. Inevitably, where the sense of job security is low, rumors are circulated, and expatriate teachers reported that such chatter, however unreliable it may have been, exacerbated their fears. As one teacher expressed, “We get nervous because we hear stories about people who are instantly terminated... I always get

nervous that I may do something, then I will lose my job and I will be gone.” Others, unfortunately, became reluctant to “invest heavily in teaching” and started to look for jobs even when they were still working for ADEC. One male EMT confided, “I am always putting in job applications, and if it doesn’t work here, I’ll just go somewhere else.”

Among the teachers who clearly could not accept the demands of their position for any number of reasons, are those who chose to “run” and abruptly leave not just their job but the entire country. According to one male EMT, “They are here one day, and the next day you don’t see them... They can’t stand the change of conditions.” Many of those who suddenly abandoned their duties had loans on cars or credit card debts. As one EMT related,

I know that many teachers got into huge debts, car loans, credit cards... and we had a guy in school who actually, just went off to Dubai Airport in the middle of the night and got on a plane. I mean, I can’t really blame ADEC for being cynical.

Such events brought about consequences for the rest of the teachers, and particularly for EMTs. ADEC started implementing measures to forestall such conduct, one being to hold an amount of money from expatriate teachers as a deposit for their accommodation. Another measure was to delay expatriate teachers’ contract renewals. Each year in late June or early July, all ADEC expatriate teachers are on alert because this is the time during which they are notified of whether they will continue for the coming year. The tactic of delaying notification of renewal or termination has proven to be a controversial and stressful issue for expatriate teachers. Teachers related stories about colleagues who were about to fly off for vacation, thinking that their contracts would be renewed, only to get their letter of termination instead. The “surprise of termination,” as described by one Arab expatriate teacher, made teachers unfocused on teaching. One teacher speculated that ADEC might be worried that if teachers knew about their termination early on, they would not do a good job. Ironically, delaying notification was having the same effect, and not just on those being terminated, but on the other teachers as well.

Motivational factors

Passion for teaching

Some of the teachers we met were passionate about being teachers. These were mostly female Emirati teachers, some Arab expatriate teachers, and a few EMTs. One male EMT from the UK explained, “I love being in the classroom, and I love the interaction with the children.” One Emirati female teacher in cycle 3 expressed, “I enjoy being in the class with my students. I feel I am satisfied when I teach my children something new and they understand it.” Another teacher in cycle 2 stated, “I love teaching because it means helping my society and serving my country.” Emirati male teachers expressed mixed opinions, however. When they were first hired, they were energetic about being teachers out of “serving the country,” but over time their passion declined because they were not able to get promoted. One Emirati male teacher commented, “I don’t feel I have self-fulfilment in teaching, and with all the hardships I face, I feel I won’t.”

Our data indicated that some teachers were inspired and motivated to teach in the ADEC system while others saw frequent changes as a source of dissatisfaction. One female English teacher in cycle 3 explained, “The problem is that each year we don’t know what the changes are. So we start from scratch... that is really frustrating.” While some teachers valued the new learning outcomes system because it organised and unified the teaching and learning process, others, such as an Emirati female teacher in cycle 2, expressed concern about its suitability for students’ learning, a concern that made her unpassionate about what she does in class. She stated,

When students are promoted from cycle 1 to cycle 2, I have to repeat the basics because students did not learn them in previous years... We have to teach according to certain standards, we have to do them... but when we do them, students are not learning.

Work with students

Teachers in our study had mixed views regarding their relationships with students. While Emirati female teachers and a few expatriate teachers talked positively about students, others expressed negative views about their relationships with students, especially boys. In one secondary school we visited, Arab teachers appraised students quite highly: “We have the best students in the city... They are dedicated to learning and they usually achieve national ranking... We are proud of them.” We heard positive comments from female Emirati teachers, Arab female teachers, and EMT female teachers about their students: “I love the kids”, “I feel the kids need me”, and “I had a sick leave because of a broken leg, but I couldn’t leave the kids.” However, the relationship between male EMTs and students was not so positive. One EMT from the UK said, “It takes a lot of control to keep the boys focused... it is almost like a race track.” Another teacher from Ireland commented, “There’s no proper supervision of the boys.”

Some teachers believed that learning expectations were not being met by many students, and this caused them dissatisfaction. As an EMT in cycle 1 noted, “I think the biggest thing is that the outcomes are so far from what kids are actually learning.” Another female EMT in cycle 1 confirmed the same idea: “They expect to teach children here who have little or sometimes no English what my children in the UK in Grade 1 would achieve. It’s completely unrealistic... I think a teacher’s real frustration and disengagement comes more from that.”

The challenges presented by learning expectations and language are not felt just in early grades. English teachers in cycle 3 shared the same view about how the curriculum does not fit the learning needs of students, and this caused them dissatisfaction. One female teacher elaborated, “I don’t feel like the curriculum suits the needs of these girls... We are not teaching ESL. We’re teaching them as if it’s their first language, and it isn’t; they are ESL girls.”

Although students are not fully meeting the expected outcomes, teachers reported being regularly pressured by students and parents to assign higher and higher marks, and these demands were reported as another source of frustration. As one female cycle 3 teacher put

it, “The rubric is so lenient. It is very hard to fail... and for me a big concern is students’ lack of caring because they know that they will pass if they give me the very minimum.”

Recognition or appreciation

Many teachers, especially Emirati female and Arab teachers, felt that their school administration appreciated their work by presenting them with “certificates, flowers, or words of thanks during the assemblies.” Some of these teachers cited appointments to serve on important committees or to lead school teams as examples of recognition. Other teachers perceived that their work was not appreciated by the school administration. One Emirati male teacher said, “I do not receive any appreciation for what I do... I do my job to the best and I do not hear any compliment.” Lack of appreciation was also accentuated by EMTs. One female EMT explained, “No one really approached me and said, ‘Oh you did a great job,’” continuing, “I think a lot of dissatisfaction comes from the lack of appreciation... I don’t think it is intentional though.” Another female teacher in cycle 3 said, “Many teachers feel very frustrated with the fact that they do everything but there is no appreciation.” An expatriate Arab male teacher in cycle 3 expressed that sometimes instructors who appear to be close to the administration receive more appreciation even if their contributions are infrequent or less significant, explaining, “If someone from the close group did something tiny, they thank him... we do a lot and it goes unnoticed.” The teachers felt one way to appreciate their efforts was with a salary increase, especially to those teachers who serve for years in ADEC, “the people who are working with all heart and soul,” as one female EMT expressed.

Opportunity for promotion

Opportunity for promotion was another factor that was satisfying to some teachers and dissatisfying to others. For the most part, Emirati citizens occupy the high-level positions of principal, academic vice principal and administrative vice-principal in ADEC schools. While non-Emiratis can be found in those positions, it is becoming harder for them to apply for these posts. Typically, there are two leadership routes available for expatriate teachers: to internally apply for a head of faculty position who supervises teachers of English or Arabic at one school, or to externally apply for a vice principal or principal position. The second option requires that a teacher resign before applying.

Emirati male teachers, who are considered a “scarce commodity” since they make up the smallest percentage of teachers in Abu Dhabi and their numbers are on the decline, were concerned about their promotion. One Emirati male teacher lamented, “This is my tenth year and I got no promotion... I am in the same rank... the system they use is so difficult and the administration is not supportive.”

The outer domain

The outer domain was the domain in which teachers, except for male Emirati teachers, were the most highly satisfied. One strong reason why expatriate teachers stayed in ADEC was their satisfaction with the lifestyle in the UAE. Even some teachers who could get

higher salaries in their home countries preferred to stay in the UAE. Teachers explained their view that the country offers a culture of respect, tolerance, and security, and they enjoyed the many entertainment options. A female EMT from Australia expressed, "My salary is higher at home, but socially and culturally, I like the UAE a lot better." Another female teacher from the UK echoed the same sentiment, saying "We have a much better lifestyle here than most of us did in our home countries... You can't put a price on the lifestyle that I have here." Male teachers also shared similar opinions, "This is a lovely country and there are lovely people here" (EMT from Ireland) and "I like the country... and the lifestyle here is good" (EMT from the UK).

The only unsatisfying aspect in the outer domain was mentioned by the two Emirati male teachers, who explained that the social image of the Emirati teacher is not favourable because many Emiratis hold the view that Emirati nationals and especially Emirati men, should be hired in "more important" and prestigious positions than teaching. One such teacher explained, "When I say I am a teacher, they ridicule me. They say it is for women. They say it is a headache.... The image of a teacher as a role model does not exist anymore."

Discussion

In accordance with Herzberg's theory, we found that maintenance factors had more relevance in explaining teachers' status of "no satisfaction" in Al Ain schools. As maintenance factors were not fully met for most of the study participants, it was difficult for them to start feeling satisfied. Our data indicated also that motivating factors occupied a secondary position in their influence on the satisfaction level of teachers. In other words, teachers' passion about teaching and the enjoyment they had of working with students and seeing them achieve did not have more satisfying influence than their feelings of job insecurity, their perceptions of the heavy teaching loads, and the stagnant salaries. Similar to Herzberg, the conclusion would be that adequately fulfilling teachers' maintenance needs for a good salary, job security, and fair work conditions is a prerequisite for the actualisation of motivational factors. This is not to say that fulfillment of maintenance factors alone would create satisfied teachers. Ultimately, satisfaction could be anticipated only if both maintenance factors and motivating factors are fulfilled.

In contrast to Dinham and Scott (2000; 2003), we did not find that the outer domain exerted a significant impact on the level of teachers' satisfaction among either female Emirati teachers or expatriate teachers in ADEC's public school system. However, the outer domain did have an influence on the satisfaction level of Emirati male teachers. It is true that the lifestyle in the UAE was a compelling factor that appealed to expatriate teachers once they were in the country. However, this positive view of the UAE lifestyle should be interpreted in the light of other economic and political conditions. For example, Arab expatriate teachers may come from countries such as Syria or Yemen which are beset by political conflict and economic deterioration. These teachers would, therefore, be more likely to feel thankful to be living in safety in the UAE. For Western teachers, the compelling elements of UAE life are more economic than political. Their salaries in the

UAE might be higher, they do not pay taxes, and they are provided paid accommodation and other benefits which make the UAE an attractive destination (Pennington, 2016). If these privileges were removed, their decision to stay would no doubt be affected tremendously. Therefore, while the outer domain is a factor that can explain teachers' satisfaction, it should be considered in connection to relevant economic and political contexts.

A number of studies suggest that male teachers in general have lower rates of satisfaction compared to females. In Norway, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) reported that female teachers were more satisfied than male teachers and had lower motivation to leave their jobs. Similar results were reported in Greece (Koustelios, 2001) and USA (Klecker, 1997). Buckner (2017), in contrast, found that male Emirati teachers in Abu Dhabi were more satisfied than female teachers, and surprisingly, she found Emirati female teachers to be "the least satisfied females in public schools of any [Teaching and Learning International Survey] TALIS-participating country or region" (p. 12). Note should be taken that Buckner (2017) used the available data in TALIS about teachers' satisfaction with choosing teaching as a career, not their satisfaction with their current work dynamics. Contrary to Buckner, we found Emirati female teachers to be the most satisfied in the group we interviewed and Emirati male teachers to be comparatively dissatisfied. As our data indicated, Emirati males perceived teaching as a female domain, not rewarding, and of less value than positions in other government sectors. In the UK, the professional status of teachers has fallen sharply (Hargreaves et al., 2007) and in the UAE, Dickson and Le Roux (2012) found that male Emirati teachers perceived teaching to be a low status career. That Emirati male teachers perceived themselves to be in a low status position relative to their peers could help to explain the unbalanced teaching workforce in which Emirati males are the most under-represented population in the ADEC system and among teachers in the UAE more generally (Buckner, 2017).

Our findings indicated that teachers who seemed dissatisfied had a low level of passion for teaching, many of them were not sure about their ability to positively influence their students, and many felt unappreciated for the hard work they do. Appreciation was a major issue in teachers' talk and is an important topic in research about teacher satisfaction. Aldridge and Fraser (2015) found that the principal plays a significant role in enhancing teachers' satisfaction through appreciation, and Rhodes, Nevill and Allan (2004) argued that when the principal is accessible, supportive, sympathetic, and helpful, teachers' job satisfaction and self-efficacy increase. Our data indicated that Emirati female teachers and some Arab teachers felt their principals supported and appreciated their work, while Western expatriate teachers expressed feelings that principals were not supportive or appreciative and Emirati male teachers believed that their principals did not trust their work and did not support them for promotion. Failing to appreciate the work of teachers could have impacted Emirati males' views of principals and their overall level of satisfaction.

Our findings indicated that a particular school's working conditions were important factors for explaining teacher satisfaction, and these conditions could work to either encourage or discourage teachers. Previous research found that the dynamics of a

particular school affected its teachers' satisfaction. Shen, Leslie, Spybrook and Ma (2012) found that 17% of the total variance in teacher job satisfaction could be attributed to the differences among schools. In the same fashion, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) and Grayson and Alvarez (2007) found that as teacher satisfaction levels increased, negative emotional reactions and feelings of alienation were less likely to occur as a product of school climate factors. Some of the teachers we met became dissatisfied when they perceived that their hard work went unrecognised. Another relevant dynamic is whether teachers sense that they can positively impact students within prevailing assessment rubrics. If students believe that everyone will pass their courses at the end of the year regardless of their actual achievements, teachers may perceive that there is little they can do to motivate students to achieve. This perception apparently led some teachers to adopt a passive attitude toward student achievement, thinking there was nothing they could do to change this dynamic. When teachers perceive that they are losing autonomy over what can be done in classrooms or with students, their satisfaction level starts to erode (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005).

Previous research pointed to the negative effect of overload on teachers' satisfaction and their ability to work with and positively impact students' learning (Ghavifekr & Pillai, 2016; Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2006). In the UAE, Badri et al. (2011), taking the number of students taught as a proxy for teaching load instead of the number of periods taught, found that teaching load had no significant effect on teacher satisfaction. Our study indicated that a heavy teaching load, in the case of EMTs, was a discouraging factor, especially as they perceived their colleagues as taking a much lighter load. When teachers are overloaded, either with excessive class times or additional administrative duties, their time for interaction with colleagues and students becomes limited, and they feel restricted, hurried and unable to achieve what they can really achieve with their students.

Employment policies are important determinants of teacher satisfaction, and according to our data, some of ADEC's policies triggered dissatisfaction among teachers. In what Ridge (2014) referred to as a "two-tiered workforce" (p. 90), expatriate teachers perceived the payment system, wherein Emirati teachers have both lighter workloads and higher salaries, as unfair. Emirati male teachers themselves perceived their work as tougher and their salaries as lower than what other government employees in Abu Dhabi experienced. Even female Emirati teachers in cycles 2 and 3 complained that their counterparts in cycle 1 taught fewer hours but got the same salary. In the UAE, Buckner (2017) found that salary mediates teachers' perceptions of whether teaching is a good job. Similarly, our results indicated that one major factor for the low satisfaction of teachers was their perception of salary and in the case of Emirati male teachers, their perception of the status of teaching as a career is affected by their perception of the salary.

Our findings indicated that not having a means to reward dedicated teachers could be a factor that leads to teacher dissatisfaction. The persistent lack of salary increases throughout the ADEC system resulted in expatriate teachers staying on the same salary for years. More problematic is the fact that new teacher recruits might get higher salaries than veterans. Finally, the system does not have any means through which it can reward hardworking and high-performing teachers. When teachers perceive that non-

hardworking teachers get the same recompense as hardworking teachers, a sense of indifference creeps in. Badri et al. (2013) criticised the absence of a performance-based pay system in Abu Dhabi schools, wherein length of experience was the only determiner of a teacher's salary. Therefore, the payment system should be reformed to reward hardworking teachers.

Conclusions and recommendations

Payment and benefits are important factors for teacher satisfaction and the fact that teachers in ADEC are not given any salary increase for years is causing a significant degree of distress, especially as the cost of living rises every year. A pay scale that is clear and transparent and that includes an annual salary increase could relieve much dissatisfaction among teachers. Expatriate teachers compare what they get in the UAE with what they can get at home and therefore ADEC should not wait for the negative factors to outweigh the positive ones. It is neither practical nor cost effective to have teachers leave and bring in new teachers every year.

Teachers who feel secure in their positions are more satisfied. In the case of expatriate teachers, this means that employment policies should be clear regarding the grounds for termination and renewal of contracts. Tolerating a lack of clarity about what conditions could lead to a teacher's dismissal places teachers in a precarious, stressful and, it could be argued, unfair position. Teachers who are preoccupied with avoiding termination are not in an optimal position to contribute fully to the development of students. That expatriate teachers' contracts are reviewed every year for renewal presents a recurring psychological stressor for these teachers. As teachers have suggested, offering a longer contract would provide security without nullifying ADEC's right to dismiss a teacher for acceptable reasons.

Exceptional service should always be recognised as well. If the system appears injudicious about who is recognised for their good work and who is not, teachers start to sense that it may not matter whether they strive for excellence or not. As the study showed, they become indifferent. One way to counter this feeling is to create a motivating force by rewarding outstanding teachers through retaining them, awarding monetary incentives, or acknowledging their service in some other way.

Teachers voiced their cynicism toward the many administrative duties they are required to do, some of which, they felt, took away from precious time needed for planning for lessons, working with colleagues, and teaching students. The system should provide a fair workload for all teachers and consider administrative assignments carefully, perhaps delegating certain tasks to staff or hiring more employees if needed. With so many changes happening on a daily basis, teachers all too often seem taken away from their main job of teaching. Therefore, changes should be carefully planned and sustained for a long time, and frequent changes should be minimised.

Finally, the authors acknowledge that the study does not dwell on the complex, multidimensional, and interconnected nature of the factors that contribute to teacher

satisfaction and dissatisfaction, such as organisational climate, teachers' sense of efficacy in the classroom, teachers' professional commitment, and internal qualities of teachers (i.e., age, experience, level of certification, and other background characteristics). These factors provide important opportunities for future research about teacher satisfaction in the UAE.

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