



Influence of job satisfaction on the retention of university employees

Influencia de la satisfacción laboral en la retención de empleados universitarios

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ABSTRACT

Job satisfaction can be understood as the perception that an employee creates based on the conditions of their workplace and the experiences accumulated therein; it has been described as an influential factor in job retention. However, research is insufficient in the case of university students who work and study simultaneously, so the study was aimed at knowing the experiences of a sample of students from the Juárez Autonomous University of Tabasco about the conditions they face in the labor market and its relationship with job permanence based on perceived satisfaction. The results point to a notable lack of attention due to the limited information that exists in this regard and indicate the search for additional income and the acquisition of work experience as the main reasons. The results of the analysis show the need for corrective measures for an adequate environment aimed at the professional development of young people, which will contribute to job satisfaction and permanence.

Keywords: conditions of employment, job satisfaction, part time employment, student employment, student welfare.

JEL Classification: I0, I21, I31

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RESUMEN

La satisfacción laboral ha sido descrita como un factor influyente en la permanencia laboral y puede ser comprendida como la percepción que un empleado crea a partir de las condiciones de su lugar de trabajo y las experiencias acumuladas en este. Sin embargo, las investigaciones son insuficientes en el caso de los universitarios que trabajan y estudian simultáneamente, por lo que el estudio se encaminó a conocer las experiencias de una muestra de estudiantes de la Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco, acerca de las condiciones que enfrentan en el mercado laboral y su relación con la permanencia laboral a partir de la satisfacción percibida. Los resultados apuntan a una notoria carencia de atención debido a la escasa información que existe al respecto y señalan como principales razones la búsqueda de un ingreso adicional y la adquisición de experiencia laboral. Los resultados del análisis evidencian la necesidad de medidas correctivas para un entorno adecuado dirigido al desarrollo profesional de los jóvenes, lo que contribuirá a la satisfacción y permanencia laboral.

Palabras clave: bienestar del estudiante, condiciones de empleo, empleo a tiempo parcial, empleo del estudiante, satisfacción en el trabajo.

Clasificación JEL: I0, I21, I31

INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction can be defined as a stable affective disposition, a set of more or less integrated feelings that can be classified as favorable or unfavorable; it conditions how employees formulate an appreciation of their work (Bashir & Gani, 2020; Burić & Moè, 2020; Kuwaiti *et al.*, 2019). This attitude or system of attitudes can occur individually or collectively; its stable appearance is feasible in the representation that a group builds based on common, affective, and cognitive elements related to work (Katebi *et al.*, 2022; Tran, 2021). Therefore, it can be analyzed in relation to the general conditions corresponding to a single worker or applied in a specific work field where the organizational culture allows exploring the group approach to evaluation (Beuren *et al.*, 2022; Gu *et al.*, 2022; To and Huang, 2022). Due to its difficult conceptualization, job satisfaction can be approached as a relatively stable configuration over time or as a state marked



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by factors or variables that influence at a given moment. While the first approach has a longitudinal character and is closer to the culture of the organization (Park & Doo, 2020; Seo & Lee, 2021), the second is of a transectional nature and can be better observed in the set of emotions generated by experiences that involve individual and organizational situations, which, consequently, produce pleasant or negative satisfaction (Ortiz-Bonnin *et al.*, 2023; Pedraza Melo, 2020; Prayag *et al.*, 2020).

From this brief conceptualization, it is possible to affirm that job satisfaction constitutes a crucial element in the daily life of a company, as its impact is relevant to the quality of its productive activity and the services it provides (Belias *et al.*, 2022; Norbu & Wetprasit, 2021; Abate & Mekonnen, 2021). In this regard, in order to strengthen the positioning in the productive sector, if the objective of an organization is growth, it is necessary to know and understand the people who work in it, which means evaluating working conditions and job satisfaction as two cardinal variables in determining success and competitiveness (Newsham *et al.*, 2022; Peiró *et al.*, 2021; Roczniowska *et al.*, 2022).

A phenomenon that is not always sufficiently analyzed is the labor affiliation of university students to companies or other forms of organization as a way to cover expenses or as a combination between the generation of extra income and the necessary profit in work experience (Bernhard & Olsson, 2023; Haider *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, in the productive sector, there may be university students who have decided to work from the beginning, in the middle, or near the final stretch of their career. In addition, national and international studies offer data that allow us to understand that the linearity of studies can be affected by other factors, such as low acceptance rates in public universities, family problems that require support, increasingly accentuated demands for work experience and the temporality of the proposals based on future plans (McCann & Hewitt, 2023; Mordi *et al.*, 2023; Sánchez-Soto & Bautista León, 2020). Additionally, the decision to take on a part-time or even full-time job is influenced by other factors, such as gender, the type of higher education, and flexibility in time management, among others. Furthermore, the studies consulted suggest that the combination of university studies and work in an organization can generate feelings of joy, satisfaction, and personal fulfillment, especially if one has a solid social support network (Afshar & Polas, 2023; Barratt & Duran, 2021).

Although it is relatively evident that the system of causes related to the decision to start a part-time or full-time job can influence the perception of this, it is also necessary to understand how the job itself contributes to the satisfaction of the needs after such decision-making. Among other relevant issues, the consequences related to the health-disease process stand out, mainly the burnout syndrome, due to the high demands placed on the young university student to respond to two different systems of demands and the impact on the work-life balance (Dodanwala & Shrestha, 2021; Mullen *et al.*, 2021; Ninaus *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, in addition to being necessary to explore the causes, it is necessary to understand how the individual subject and his primary groups represent the working relationship in terms of need satisfaction and the loss/benefit relationship. Finally, it is necessary to explore the typology of employment relationships because although a stable job in the business sector would be desirable due to the legal and professional benefits they offer, this type of work is not only scarce but also involves low pay and working conditions that are not perceived as positive. This scenario has contributed to the increase in the number of students who choose to work independently or start small businesses, but this alternative is usually reserved for graduates with a degree.

However, these typologies and the sectors to which they refer are important since various studies indicate that there is a widespread and solid negative representation by previous generations regarding work ethic and the willingness to make efforts based on a linear logic of promotion and worldview disparities between intergenerational groups (Leslie *et al.*, 2021; Xueyun *et al.*, 2023). If we take into account that job satisfaction is also mediated by the real and perceived image that the employee has in the company, the confluence of personal, social, organizational, and school factors, as well as their contextualized study, would constitute an important resource to design better supports, training programs, and diagnostic mechanisms to facilitate the performance of these students.

In this way, job permanence would not only be understood as a positive attitude towards continuity in the job but as a broader process in which job satisfaction is assumed as a valuable indicator of the person's willingness to be involved in organizational processes (da Silva Henrique *et al.*, 2023; López-Ibort *et al.*, 2021; Orgambidez & Almeida, 2020). This represents a challenge in terms of human talent management, not only because of the responsibility placed on recruitment and selection processes but also because of the proper management of the organization's resources in order to build a positive work environment and an organizational culture oriented towards job satisfaction as an investment (Al Aina & Atan, 2020; Harsch & Festing, 2020; Lim, 2023; Rodríguez-Sánchez *et al.*, 2020). Based on the arguments presented, it can be stated that the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to remain in the organization is a topic of special relevance in terms of the population

addressed, precisely because of its economic, labor, social, educational, and personal implications. However, an exploratory review showed that the topic has been poorly studied because although there are studies that link both categories, they do not usually focus on young university students who study and work simultaneously. This lack of data and proposals for adequate management of job satisfaction among young people and future professionals is what defines the relevance of this study.

METHODOLOGY

Justification of the study and research questions

The two main aspects that motivated the development of the research were to examine the level of job satisfaction of university students who study and work simultaneously, as well as to explore its influence on the decision to remain in a job. In addition, based on the initial review of the literature and the discussion of the self-referential experiences of the research team, it was decided to maintain a broad approach that was sensitive to the study and description of other factors involved in the aforementioned relationship. Its usefulness and relevance, therefore, lies in its relevance for the university community and employers of this demographic group by taking into account its relationship with the importance of creating an appropriate work environment for youth, developing support mechanisms during incorporation into the professional field, and the development of instruments and programs to strengthen organizational and educational practices.

In order to fulfill these intentions, it was necessary to collect the experiences and opinions reported by students who have opted for this mixed study-work modality. The descriptive and experiential analysis that is built from their experiences will provide a better understanding of the ways to strengthen support for these students. In order to guide the research, the following panel of scientific questions was proposed:

Research questions

What are the factors that determine the job satisfaction of university students who study and work, in relation to the decision to remain in a job?

Based on this question, it is possible to identify the main unit of analysis as job satisfaction represented by students, while the complementary unit of analysis is the choice to continue working professionally within a company. Because both units act as *a priori* codes, it was vital to consider the mediating factors of the relationship as they are perceived, represented, and experienced by students. Therefore, the following auxiliary questions were developed:

Why do students decide to stay in a job despite unsuitable working conditions?

How can we contribute to improving the level of job satisfaction among young people?

How can we optimize the working conditions provided to students who are already part of the labor market?

Research design and general objective

Due to the limited bibliographic base in terms of direct antecedents, the low visibility of the problem, and the wide range of factors and units of analysis to be considered, it was considered that the scope of the study should be exploratory descriptive (Lau *et al.*, 2020; Rajeh *et al.*, 2024). Likewise, the restricted source of background information coupled with the descriptive and experience-focused purposes indicated the relevance of adopting a qualitative approach that would facilitate the in-depth examination of the units of analysis of the individual and shared perspectives of the students identified as the study population; something analogous to relevant proposals identified in the literature (Hu *et al.*, 2021; Vaterlaus *et al.*, 2021). Thus, a basic or generic qualitative design was chosen since this is ideal for first approximations when there is insufficient data or theoretical constructs (Kostere & Kostere, 2021). These designs allow the exploration of phenomena or behaviors without giving up the typical positions of qualitative methodology but without including specific procedures or scopes, according to different specialists (Kostere & Kostere, 2021; Monzón *et al.*, 2023; Waalkes *et al.*, 2023). Taking into account the multifactorial nature of job satisfaction and the general purposes set by the panel of questions, the general objective of the study was established, evaluate the impact of job satisfaction and its relationship with the decision to keep a job from the perspective of the university student.

Context and sample

The primary research context was the Academic Division of Economic-Administrative Sciences (DACEA) of the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco (UJAT). In this context, an accurate identification of students who study and work was pursued, for which gatekeepers were used as career coordinators, specialists from the academic secretariat, and identified students.

The sample size was defined with a combination of snowball and maximum extension strategies so that key participants with the capacity to provide relevant data could be included and that these represented a sufficiently broad selection to facilitate the best understanding of the phenomenon under study (Mthuli *et al.*, 2022). Finally, the sample was closed to 12 students who study and work, a figure for which the recommendation of sources suggested in the qualitative methodology was also taken into account.

Data collection and analysis instruments

Data collection was carried out in accordance with the generic procedures of qualitative research, using observation, semi-structured interviews with key participants, and triangulation of data, perspectives, and theories (Natow, 2020). This proposal sought to generate a comprehensive framework of the relationship between job satisfaction and its relationship with the decision to keep a job from the perspective of the university student who studies and works. This framework was built from the field notes, the verbalizations of the participants, and the debates carried out by the research team based on their assessments, perspectives, and the different auxiliary theoretical positions (Nyhagen *et al.*, 2023; Sridharan, 2020).

The data analysis was carried out from the transcription of the verbalizations collected in the interviews, the creation of a database with entries of notes from each researcher and their corresponding context, the coding of the texts, the identification of themes, and the interpretation of the results. Based on the themes found, the different backgrounds in the literature were examined; results and positions were contrasted, and the interpretation made by the team in light of the objective and purposes of the study. This analysis strategy also allowed the final results to be explored from the perspective of related studies and theoretical constructs that could facilitate their proper understanding.

RESULTS

The analysis of the data obtained allowed us to identify six major categories that made it possible to give meaning to the arguments and experiences of university students who study and work simultaneously. In general terms, it was found that the duality of positions and the multiplicity of roles, demands, and social duties that arise from this make the situation of students precarious, and the socio-psychological bases of job satisfaction appear disconnected and challenging. Below, the main aspects extracted from the data can be seen according to these categories.

Vital antecedents, social capital and system of causes

In this category, it was noted that the life history of university students has a tremendous influence on the way they approach their work. When judging their prior preparation, the 12 students interviewed stated that they were not prepared for the competitive scenario, that they lacked prior knowledge, and admitted that, although they knew of this type of modality, they did not consider it so challenging. The assessment of these findings was marked by the presence of a representation of university studies and work commitments that was far removed from their concrete realities, a limited cultural and personal preparation to assume the duality, and the influence of external factors on decision-making.

Motivation

Related to the previous category, the study of motivation showed a predominance of external factors, which suggests an extrinsic typology, which is characterized by the configuration of motives from the outside in. According to the interviewees, accepting a part-time or full-time job is determined –mainly– by economic needs, although they also attributed this search for employment to the importance of “learning to work” before graduating.

However, as the demands between “both worlds” begin to contradict each other, that is, to generate friction based on the time dedicated, extrinsic motivation decreases. According to the data collected, this does not happen because the system of causes has changed, but because the socio-psychological impact causes the internal factors that regulate the behavior of these students to move towards the protection of personal aspects and their well-being.

Human capital

In the analysis of this category, it was possible to see that the results of the double link would be directly influenced by the management of human talent in both organizations (work and HEI) and the benefits perceived by the students. As the interviewees frequently indicated, it is not only about organizational benefits in accordance with their needs but also about the work environment, the help provided, and the concessions made in complex situations. Some examples were the differentiated attention to the worker during exam times, the readjustments in tasks at the university with respect to their workload, attention to psychological well-being, and emotional support. However, these factors were presented with a “longing tone” rather than with concrete facts, which points to the importance of having policies and programs that facilitate the adjustment of this student/worker during critical periods.

Regarding satisfaction, in this category, there were mentions of the development of personal skills, the promotion of resilience, and the construction of other protective factors. Despite the positive aspects of this personal growth, the narratives were more attached to the negative polarity.

Employment

The nature of employment and its relationship to career and personal interests were also frequently discussed in the speeches. According to the analysis carried out, there is no single line of perception of employment concerning its suitability, although it is recognized that this influences satisfaction. It was possible to observe and interpret that this phenomenon is conditioned by how well the employment responds to the needs of the students.

Some of the examples have to do with the distinction between physical/intellectual work since several participants stated that they preferred a job that, although it represented a considerable physical load, allowed them to study by consuming audio books or recorded lecture notes. In addition, this type of work, depending on the schedule, is usually characterized by a high face-to-face workload, but once finished, it does not entail a greater expenditure of time.

The alternative appeared linked to jobs whose nature is essentially intellectual and requires a greater involvement of cognitive resources. In these cases, students who managed to integrate their studies and work or use jobs as platforms to improve their training showed greater satisfaction. On the contrary, those who did not appreciate or seek to build the study-work relationship declared less job and student satisfaction, which was interpreted as a result of an insufficient hierarchy of needs and motivations.

Performance

Although it was the least frequently mentioned category, it is important as a mediator in the representation of job satisfaction and its relationship with the intention to remain in the job. According to the data analyzed, this is because a higher/better performance alleviates the emotional burden of meeting both sets of demands by accentuating the sense of self-efficacy and validating the efforts invested in both scenarios. Contradictorily, a higher/better performance appeared associated in the narratives with a description of anxious-depressive symptoms that should not be overlooked. Additionally, this diminished mental health was compounded by the previously mentioned poor structuring of the hierarchy, causing the students who made the greatest effort to point out with more vivid phrases the difficulties of “trying to control everything at once”.

Expectations

This category appeared to be closely related to the previous category and to the category “*Vital antecedents, social capital and system of causes*”. Firstly, the relationship was conditioned by the individual’s life history and the set of ideas and preconceptions about the university and the need to get a job or not. Specifically, in the students who considered that taking on an extra job would not be particularly difficult, job satisfaction was conditioned by the performance they perceived once the link had begun. On the contrary, those students who achieved a performance perceived as favorable and whose initial motivation had been less conditioned by the factors described a more stable satisfaction and were more oriented towards their own goals as opposed to factors such as the difficulty of the studies or the working conditions. In this way, the data indicate that, although the organizational culture influences job satisfaction, the expectations of the students and their relationship with the decision to start the link could also influence it in a positive or negative way if the person does not achieve the necessary adjustments.

DISCUSSION

First, it is critical to recognize that college students who combine study with work often experience a considerable burden of responsibilities and demands, both academic and work-related. This delicate balance can significantly impact their psychological and emotional well-being, as well as their ability to maintain their jobs in the long term if their needs are not adequately addressed (Haider *et al.*, 2024; Hu *et al.*, 2021).

The findings and their contrast in the literature suggest that there is a deep and significant relationship between job satisfaction and job permanence among these college students (Chen & Lucock, 2022). Those who reported or described higher satisfaction levels tend to remain in their jobs for longer periods. This underscores the importance of understanding and addressing the factors that contribute to job satisfaction in this group, including aspects such as type of work, work-life balance, work environment, opportunities for growth and development, as well as remuneration (Abate & Mekonnen, 2021; Ortiz-Bonnin *et al.*, 2023; Song *et al.*, 2020).

It is also crucial to consider the impact that job satisfaction can have on the academic performance of these university students. The data suggest that greater job satisfaction can translate into better academic performance, as students feel more motivated and engaged both in the classroom and in the workplace. This finding highlights the interconnection between the work and academic spheres in the lives of these individuals, and the need to address them comprehensively through public, educational, and organizational management policies.

Regarding recommended interventions and policies, educational institutions and employers must recognize the unique needs of university students who work and study simultaneously. This may involve implementing student support programs, flexible work policies, professional development programs, and strategies to improve work-study balance.

Finally, it is important to highlight the need for continued research in this area to improve understanding of the work and academic dynamics of working college students. Additional research is required to explore how changes in work and academic conditions may affect job satisfaction and retention over time, as well as to identify effective strategies to improve the experience of this demographic.

The level of job satisfaction and its role in job retention among college students who study and work simultaneously is critical to inform policies and practices that promote well-being and success in both the work and academic realms. This analysis provides a solid foundation for addressing the unique challenges these individuals face and improving their experience in the workplace and on the college campus.

CONCLUSIONS

First, the study highlighted the importance of understanding the complexities of academic-work life balance, especially for a specific demographic group, such as college students, who face the dual responsibility of studying and working. The reality of these individuals is unique, as they must cope with academic demands while holding jobs that may have different levels of demand and satisfaction. Additionally, the research yielded a small bibliographic base on this population, which forced researchers to extrapolate categories and results, facts that, among other things, reinforce the importance of strengthening studies on the subject.

Second, the analysis identified a series of units of analysis that influence the job satisfaction of these college students. From working conditions to the conciliation between work and studies, through professional expectations and institutional support, crucial elements that shape the work experience of this group are revealed. This understanding is fundamental for the design of strategies and policies that promote a more satisfactory work environment and support the retention of these individuals in the labor market.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the impact that job satisfaction can have on the academic and work performance of working university students. Furthermore, the bidirectional influence between these two aspects highlights the need to address the psychological dimension in the work experience of this group. The implications of this relationship go beyond the individual sphere, and potentially affect productivity and general well-being, in both the academic and work spheres.

Finally, the analysis provided valuable information that can be used by educational institutions, employers, and policymakers to improve the working and academic conditions of working university students. The implementation of support programs, flexible working hours, and recognition of this group's contribution to the workforce are just some of the suggested measures derived from the findings of this study.

The work on the level of job satisfaction and its influence on job permanence among university students who study and work simultaneously not only broadens the understanding of this specific dynamic, but provides practical insights that can improve the work and educational experience of these individuals. Its impact transcends the academic realm by offering perspectives that could contribute to the development of more effective policies and the promotion of a more engaged and satisfied workforce as a whole.

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