

## Factors connected with professional satisfaction and dissatisfaction among nutrition teacher

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**Abstract** *Teacher satisfaction can be reflected in the success of higher education institutions to provide meaningful learning to their students. This study analyzed the professional satisfaction of nutrition teachers at a federal institution of higher education by identifying the factors that generated satisfaction and dissatisfaction for them and also the feelings that they envisioned for themselves at the end of their careers. This is a descriptive and exploratory study with a qualitative approach. A questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were performed. The results showed that 72.7% of the teachers were satisfied with their profession. In relation to satisfaction were considered: the fulfillment of a vocation; research and extension activities; the development and recognition of students and society; learning; autonomy; flexibility; and relationships with students. In relation to dissatisfaction were considered: overloading due to work, administration, bureaucratic duties and assistance; lack of interest and respect from students; relationships with colleagues and managers; devaluation in the role of teaching; large classes and poor physical infrastructure. The respondents expressed a positive attitude and had no desire to leave their profession. Further studies are required regarding factors leading to satisfaction and dissatisfaction for teachers, in order to contribute to their productivity and well-being.*

**Key words** *Teaching in higher education, Satisfaction, Nutrition*

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## Introduction

Studies of teaching as a career evolved during the 1970s and they have contributed to a better understanding of the professional trajectory of teachers. However, the personal dimension of teachers within the university context has received less attention.

Zabalza<sup>1</sup> considers that personal and professional satisfaction and a teaching career are essential aspects of the personal dimension of university teachers. For the aforementioned author, the way that teachers feel, the way they live their lives, and the expectations that shape their work, are generally not considered to be factors that might affect the quality of their teaching.

Studies about the professional satisfaction of teachers are still scarce in Brazil and especially studies about teachers working in the area of health. Satisfied teachers are less likely to change their job, and satisfaction has been linked with those who remain in the profession<sup>2</sup>.

There are changes in attitudes and emotions within the teaching experience that can interfere with work performance, given that factors associated with satisfaction and dissatisfaction reflect the investment that individuals make in their career<sup>1</sup>. Satisfied employees are more committed to their profession and they tend to put more effort into their work<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, dissatisfied employees tend not to produce as well as expected and also tend to look for a way to change their job or workplace.

The job satisfaction of teachers has been referred to as “a feeling and a way of teachers being positive within their profession, which is caused by contextual factors and/or externalized by dedication, defense and even happiness”<sup>4</sup>. Evidence to the contrary characterizes dissatisfaction.

Satisfaction refers to a generally positive emotional state. Among the theories that explain the degree of satisfaction of teachers and the work that they do, Herzberg<sup>5</sup> argues that personal satisfaction is caused by both internal factors, such as personal fulfilment and professional recognition, and by external factors related to hygiene or context such as working conditions, pay, security, stability and interpersonal relationships established in the workplace. Satisfaction develops in response to social stimuli and real working conditions; it can be understood as fulfilling a need, as meeting expectations<sup>3,6,7</sup>. Job satisfaction is reflected in the effectiveness of the work that is performed; it promotes psychological well-being and results in a better performance of teaching activities<sup>2</sup>.

Satisfaction with a teaching career can be related to intrinsic factors (feelings, emotions, experiences) and extrinsic factors (working conditions, recognition, opportunities)<sup>4</sup>. Promoting personal satisfaction for teachers by decreasing factors that can generate dissatisfaction may result in a greater dedication by teachers to teaching duties as well as a lower rate of staff turnover, ensuring that teaching institutions have better visibility in society<sup>8,9</sup>.

Understanding the determinants of teachers' satisfaction is essential for universities to achieve excellence in all their activities. Institutions that understand and value this issue provide better conditions to provide a pleasant working environment, thereby attracting and retaining higher quality professionals<sup>10</sup>.

This study analyzed the level of satisfaction of teachers on a nutrition course at a federal university in the city of Goiânia in the state of Goiás, Brazil by identifying the factors that generated satisfaction and dissatisfaction for the teachers, as well as the feelings that they envisioned for themselves at the end of their careers.

## Method

This study was an exploratory piece of social research which used a qualitative approach<sup>11</sup> to understand the processes and relevant aspects connected with the levels of satisfaction of nutrition teachers. Social research is a scientific method used to acquire new knowledge in the field of social reality<sup>12</sup>. Different sub-classifications can be presented according to the purpose of each research subject and they are divided into exploratory, descriptive and explanatory types of research. This particular study used an exploratory approach, which is a type of research that is intended to enlighten, to develop concepts and/or provide a dialectical approach to ideas related to the subject of study<sup>12</sup>.

The following were considered as criteria for inclusion in the study: to be a full-time teacher in the institution; to not be licensed; and to not be on postgraduate leave. Those professionals who refused to participate in the study, and those who were away from work due to reasons such as vacation, sick leave, awards etc, were excluded from the study. All the teachers who met the inclusion criteria were invited to participate in the study by email<sup>13</sup>.

Two data collection instruments were used: a questionnaire with open and closed questions; and a semi-structured interview, which was per-

formed without prior knowledge of the script by the respondents. The interview is one of the techniques that are most used in research. It is considered to be a form of social interaction because it permits information to be obtained about what individuals know, believe, feel, want, do, and also to explain how those individuals respond to situations that they encounter<sup>11,12</sup>.

The data collected from the questionnaire made it possible to identify the teachers in terms of details regarding their personal data, teacher training, academic qualifications, scientific production etc.

The interviews were intended to provide answers to the following issues: the level of satisfaction with the teaching career; the choice of profession if it were possible to choose again; the factors that kept individuals in the teaching profession; how individuals coped with experiences of stress and/or discouragement related to teaching; and feelings that individuals envisioned for themselves at the end of their career.

The preparation of the script for the semi-structured interviews was intended to meet the objectives of the study in a flexible context; it was intended to allow new issues to be included to allow the individuals to subjectively make sense of their experiences<sup>11</sup>.

By giving voice to these teachers, it was also intended to complement the understanding and interpretation of the data obtained from the questionnaires. When it is decided to opt for a qualitative approach to research, "only interviews consisting of open questions, i.e. those marked by a relationship that only proposes topics, without specifying pre-established responses, are compatible with the definition of qualitative research"<sup>14</sup>.

A large amount of data was obtained through the interviews with the teachers. Minayo<sup>15</sup> stresses that material obtained in this fashion "tends to be greater and with a far greater degree of depth in relation to material obtained in questionnaires because the qualitative approach makes it possible to reach areas that are inaccessible to simple questions and answers".

The data obtained in the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed fully and literally. The material was then subjected to thematic content analysis<sup>16</sup>, which made it possible to understand meanings, relevant structures and behavior patterns that were found in the discourses<sup>11</sup>.

This research project was approved by the Ethics in Human and Animal Research Committee of the clinical hospital at the university in which the survey was conducted. The data was

collected only after the teachers signed an informed consent form.

The data were collected at a meeting with each teacher that lasted an average of 40 minutes. The questionnaire was delivered and completed at this meeting and then the semi-structured interview was conducted. As the interviews were being held, a data saturation table was constructed and criteria were used to establish or close the size of the study, interrupting the acquisition of new components<sup>16</sup>.

Because this was a qualitative study, with a non-randomized and non-representative sample, the results could not be generalized, which was a limitation of this study.

## Results

Eleven teachers participated in the study, the majority of whom (ten) were female and they were aged between 29 and 59. Their length of time as teachers ranged between one and 40 years; 27.3% (3/11) had between one and ten years of teaching and 72.7% (8/11) had over ten years' experience, all in full-time teaching. Of those included in the survey, 81.8% (9/11) had doctorates and 18.2% (2/11) had an MA.

### Professional satisfaction

When asked about their satisfaction with teaching, the majority (72.7%) of respondents said that they were satisfied, while 18.2% were dissatisfied and one teacher said that they were indifferent, as can be seen in these extracts:

*I'm 100% satisfied, I really like what I do and I love to teach. (P5)*

*At the moment, my level of satisfaction is very low, I consider myself unhappy. (P10)*

*I do not know if I'm satisfied or dissatisfied, I think neither one thing nor the other. (P7)*

One of the reasons for the satisfaction of the teachers that stood out, and which was reported by 72.7% of respondents, was the fact that they liked the profession and that they saw teaching as personally satisfying and the fulfilment of a vocation:

*It's that self-satisfaction as a professional who follows their vocation, it gives personal satisfaction. (P9)*

The possibility to perform research within the university, together with outreach work in the community, was reported as a reason for satisfaction by 45.4% of teachers:

*The university experience is very interesting. I've been involved with projects that were funded, projects that weren't funded, agreements and training, all of them involving students. (P6)*

*Being involved with research and extension activities is a reason for satisfaction. (P3)*

Another reason for satisfaction also reported by 45.4% of the teachers was recognition by students and society:

*It's the social role that we have. If you say that you are a teacher then doors open. You can say things in spaces that no one else can. (P5)*

*My greatest satisfaction is when I see my students paying attention in the classroom or praising me to another teacher. (P1)*

Another factor that was cited was the feeling of gratification in being able to contribute to the training of other professionals. The development of students who would possibly go on to qualify as dieticians was indicated by the teachers as a factor that generated satisfaction:

*It is very rewarding to see research being accomplished, bearing fruit, students graduating, doing MAs, PhD's and to be able to say that I contributed to this training (P1)*

Autonomy and flexibility were also identified as reasons for satisfaction:

*I recognize that the great merit here is autonomy. Here I can do here what I like and when there is something that I don't like I just say no. (P10)*

Another reported reason for satisfaction was the possibility of learning, of studying and learning more:

*It's a form of satisfaction that's very exciting; you are always learning and there is always something more to learn. (P9)*

### **Factors linked with dissatisfaction**

In the analysis of the factors causing dissatisfaction, one factor that was highlighted was overwork, coupled with extra activities (administrative, bureaucratic, assistance etc.), which was reported by the majority (81.8%) of the participating teachers:

*Teachers have to do everything. There is not much support from within the university. (P5)*

*There are days when I leave here crying because so much work has been dumped on me. (P1)*

Difficulties involving relationships with fellow workers and managers were reported by 54.5% of teachers as being a cause for dissatisfaction:

*Inside the university there are ghettos of teachers and isolated groups; everyone does their own thing in their own space. I think that's bad. (P2)*

*When you don't have support from the administration, or any direction or coordination to your disciplines, that's also very discouraging. (P3)*

A lack of interest, associated with a lack of respect, from students was identified as a cause of dissatisfaction because the teachers were obliged to devote time and study to prepare classes and often they did not receive the response they expected from students:

*Stress in the classroom, the students are increasingly less prepared, always wanting to study less and always just wanting to just ask questions and to have everything given to them on a plate. (P10)*

*For example, I have suffered from rude students and I have had to put them in their place. (P11)*

Another motive that generated dissatisfaction was the depreciation of the role of teaching, which was mentioned by 45.4% of respondents. This lack of recognition stemmed from the directors and the coordinators of the university, and even the government, as can be seen in these extracts:

*Here in Brazil, given the working conditions, salary and recognition, things are very difficult. (P7)*

*We do a lot of extra activities without getting the recognition we deserve. We do it because we like it, to give opportunities to the students. (P4)*

Pedagogical factors, which were evidenced by poor working conditions and the lack of infrastructure in the university in general, were the major obstacles to teaching performance and they were referred to as the main causes of dissatisfaction:

*Once I had to sit with the students in the entrance of the clinical hospital to teach a class because there was nowhere else to go. (P10)*

Overcrowded classrooms were also revealed as a reason for dissatisfaction for 36.4% (4/11) of teachers:

*The class was very large, people were everywhere. (P2)*

### **Choice of profession**

When they were asked about the possibility of choosing teaching as a profession again, 72.7% of the teachers said that would, while only 18.2% said they would not.

One teacher analyzed the difficulties that she had faced in her career and concluded that she

would still do it all again if she could go back to the beginning of her career: *Yes, I would choose to do it again.* (P8)

### Feelings visualized at the end of the career

The teachers were asked about the feelings that they thought they would have when they reached the end of their career. The idea that that they would continue teaching and/or researching, independent of receiving their pension was reported by 45.4% of the teachers:

*I still see myself in the classroom, but involved more with research, which is something I want to strengthen my performance in.* (P3)

Tiredness was also cited by the teachers:

*I'll be very tired because it is a profession that takes a lot out of people.* (P8)

Feelings of accomplishment, satisfaction and happiness were mentioned by 36.4% of teachers when they imagined themselves reaching the end of their career:

*I see myself as being satisfied, with a feeling of accomplishment, which I think is very important.* (P1)

*I think that I will be very happy.* (P5)

## Discussion

This study shows that the satisfaction of nutrition teachers was related to the act of teaching itself and that dissatisfaction was related to the working conditions in higher education. These findings are similar to those found in a study of teachers who acted as preceptors for students in the health area<sup>17</sup>.

Alves<sup>4</sup> classifies the determinants of satisfaction/dissatisfaction into economic, institutional, pedagogical, relational and social factors. The aforementioned author considers that as far as teachers are concerned the sources of satisfaction/dissatisfaction are as follows: in the economic sphere, wages; at the institutional level, the pressure exerted by centralizing-conservative forces on teaching institutions; in the pedagogical context, working conditions and the successes and failures of students; in the relational sense, relationships with students and peers; and in the social sense, the social status conferred on the profession.

The high level of satisfaction with their profession among the teachers that was expressed in the present study is in line with findings by other authors<sup>8-10,18</sup>, which confirms that the teaching

profession is a motive for pleasure for many teachers.

The most valuable aspects of the present study were linked to personal issues such as personal fulfilment through performing interesting work that allows autonomy and flexibility, work that allows individuals to develop new knowledge, and work that is valued and which promotes the development of students.

The choice of the profession of teacher as a vocation was also reported by Costa<sup>10</sup>, who states that the factors that lead to motivation and satisfaction are related to intrinsic characteristics such as self-realization, recognition and growth. The opportunities to perform research were also mentioned as a factor of satisfaction, which was corroborated in a study by Cox et al.<sup>19</sup>.

The possibility of working in different areas is related to the welfare of teachers<sup>20</sup> and this highlights the importance of valuing teachers and encouraging their activities. This fact reveals the variety of knowledge and skills that are embodied in teaching<sup>21</sup>.

Peters et al.<sup>22</sup> found that seeing their students learn was cited by teachers as being the main reason for satisfaction in their work. Although in the present study this was not found to be the main factor for satisfaction it is clear that student development also influences the satisfaction of teachers.

In the present study one of the reasons for dissatisfaction that was highlighted was overwork, which agrees with the results of a study by Marquize and Moreno<sup>8</sup>. Teaching in the classroom is only one part of the work to be developed by university teachers; there is also growing pressure for increased scientific production through research and publications in specialized journals<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, implementing assistance and extension activities requires arduous preparation and planning<sup>9,23</sup>.

According to the study participants, the scenario in which teaching occurs overloads teachers, reducing their interest and dedication to teaching activities and causing job dissatisfaction and questions about teachers' professional competence. A further negative factor is the high number of students in the classroom; this is due to the democratization of higher education in Brazil and increasing access to university and extracurricular activities, which are regarded as informal working hours.

According to Alves et al.<sup>2</sup>, there seems to be a consensus regarding the recognition of unease expressed by teachers, which has been caused by



increasing demands and pressures in relation to the activities that are performed by them.

The satisfaction of individual needs is a determining factor in the perceptions and attitudes of teachers, including their own professional practice. In other words, teachers work in order to satisfy both their personal and professional needs, which “reflect values and which may differ from one person to another”<sup>21</sup>.

Similarly to the findings of the present study, Bunton et al.<sup>9</sup> found that the style of coordination/management and a lack of organization were factors that caused dissatisfaction, which highlights the influence of relationships with colleagues and managers on the satisfaction of professionals, regardless of the area in which they work.

Dissatisfaction related to the factors of integration and relationships is linked to the formulation of curricula in the area of health within universities which, in most cases, tends to fragment education into basic and professional cycles, thereby promoting the dislocation and isolation of teachers and activities<sup>24</sup>. The development of the capacity of teachers, involving individual and collective dimensions, with formal and informal approaches that facilitate learning with colleagues, is an alternative to improve the integration and the training of educators<sup>25</sup>.

Difficulties related to the profiles of students have prompted research aimed at finding ways to retain students’ attention and making them active being in the teaching-learning process<sup>26</sup>. It is necessary to involve students in this process through innovative teaching methodologies which develop critical capacity and reflection. These educational innovations tend to minimize problems and improve the satisfaction of both teachers and student with the educational process<sup>27,28</sup>.

Regarding the possibility of teachers choosing the same profession again, the results found in the present study were also confirmed in studies by Bunton et al.<sup>9</sup> and Costa<sup>10</sup>, which found that most teachers would choose the same career again if they had the chance. This demonstrates that despite the difficulties teaching is a significant activity for health professionals.

Job satisfaction increases in line with interventions that are intended to provoke changes,

not only in terms of organizational aspects, which simply decrease dissatisfaction, but also in terms of the relations between individuals and their work. This means that satisfaction increases when the relationships that teachers have with their work are improved, as in situations which result in greater autonomy in decision making, the development of new skills, expectations in terms of personal growth in their profession, and greater recognition of the work that is performed.

## Conclusions

Most of the teachers who participated in this study were satisfied with the activities that they performed and the main reasons for satisfaction were related to personal factors. Dissatisfaction was mainly related to the role of the institution in the development of teaching activity.

The overall view of teaching is often accompanied by positive and negative comments about the profession. The adverse conditions often connected with teaching are cited by teachers who have a generally positive view of their profession, as well as those who have a generally negative view. Consequently, any overall view will depend on the prevalence of aspects that are considered positive or negative, which, by the way, fits with the bipolar concept of satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

Thus, a positive view of the profession reveals that teachers essentially value intrinsic reasons for satisfaction, which pushes into the background the extrinsic conditions that are perceived as unfavorable.

It is not sufficient to simply decrease the factors which cause dissatisfaction, it is also necessary to stimulate satisfaction so that teachers are comfortable in their role and can experience the beginning, middle and end of their career with enjoyment and pleasure.

Further research is required in order to increase understanding about the factors which cause satisfaction and dissatisfaction for higher education teachers in the health field because increased satisfaction for teachers leads to the possibility of improving universities and the quality of training processes that occur in them.

## Collaborations

CGLV Cardoso participated in the conception and design of the article; the collection, organization, analysis and interpretation of the data; and the writing and critical review of the article. NMSC Costa participated in the conception and design of the article; the analysis and interpretation of the data; and the writing and critical review of the article.

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