# What Makes Them Still Tick?
# A Study of Job (Dis) Satisfaction among Long Serving Teachers in Malta

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### ABSTRACT

The paper seeks to investigate factors leading to teacher job satisfaction or dissatisfaction among a sample of 108 long-serving teachers in Malta. Literature on teacher satisfaction shows that teachers are increasingly dissatisfied with their work and this has prompted the researcher to delve into the concept to teacher job (dis)satisfaction among long-serving Maltese teachers by identifying factors affecting both phenomena. The researcher identifies the relationships which job satisfaction has with respect to a number of teachers' characteristics such as age, teaching experience and sector of education. He also identifies the frequency of factors responsible for levels of job dis(satisfaction). A mixed method of investigation was used throughout the study. Results show that long-serving teachers derive great satisfaction from working with their students and from contributing to society. The study concludes by suggestions aimed at counteracting the effects of job dissatisfaction factors.

Keywords:

## INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction as a social construct does not have a precise definition despite having drawn the attention of a number of researchers. Teacher job satisfaction may be defined as the teacher's "affective relation to his or her teaching role and is a function of the perceived relationship between what one wants from teaching and what one perceives it is offering to a teacher" (Zembylas &Papanastasiou, 2006). According to Spector (1997), job satisfaction is defined as "simply how people feel about the different aspects of their jobs". Additionally, Mbua (2003) defines job satisfaction as "the fulfillment acquired by experiencing various job activities and rewards" whereas for Robbins (2005), the concept job satisfaction refers to the employee's feelings about her or his job. Similarly, job satisfaction is "a positive feeling about one's job resulting from an evaluation of its characteristics" (Robbins & Judge, 2008). However, Evans (1997) contends that whether researchers in this field agree or disagree on the definition of certain concepts is not an issue of significance. Job dissatisfaction is not the contrary of job satisfaction. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (Merriam-Webster, online, 2013) the term dissatisfaction denotes "an emotion felt when one's expectations are not met". This is similar to Saari and Judge (2004), who argue that an employee's attitudes towards her or his work are either positive or negative. Therefore, if workers have negative attitudes towards their work, they are then said to be dissatisfied.

### Research on Teacher Satisfaction

Research on job satisfaction is one the most classic in academic literature. Among the most famous is the Hawthorne study carried out by the Western Electric company at their Hawthorne plant in the 1920's (Franke &Kaul, 1978). Recent studies have however devoted particular focus on particular professions notably the teaching profession. Naylor (2001) claims that teaching is mirroring society's tendency towards harder while (Hargreaves, 1994) suggested that teaching is becoming more "intensified". Lack of professional autonomy, imposed accountability procedures,

curricular changes, meager resources, lack of recognition from society and low pay have an impact on low teacher job satisfaction levels in many countries. (e.g. Dinham and Scott, 1998, 2000a; Scott et al., 2001; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999; van den Berg, 2002). The effects of these trends include lower job satisfaction levels, lack of aptitude to meet students' needs, increase in emotional disorders leading to stress, anxiety, and increased absenteeism (Farber, 1991; Troman & Woods, 2000). Also, and perhaps more significant, is the link between teacher dissatisfaction and teachers leaving the profession (Huberman, 1993; Woods et al., 1997). Thus, job satisfaction research among those in the teaching profession is becoming an integral part of policy making exercises since a significant number of teachers are leaving the profession and those who remain are besieged by feelings of discontent and distress.

Research on job satisfaction conducted by Dinham and Scott (2002) has shown that teachers derive satisfaction by matters intrinsic to the role of teaching such as student successes, counseling students, positive relationships with parents and students, and personal growth. External factors such as salaries, holidays and working hours did not rank high in teacher satisfaction levels. It is for this multiplicity of reasons that researchers (Eg: Bonsangand & Farber, 1991; Friedman & Farber, 1992; Kyriacou, 1987; Mykletun, 1984; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1979; Smithers & Robinson, 2001) argue that *context* seems to be the most powerful predictor of overall satisfaction. As Cherniss (1995) points out: "People can make their lives better or worse but what they think, how they feel and what they do are strongly shaped by the *social contexts* in which they live".

Other studies have concluded that teacher job satisfaction is clearly related to levels of intrinsic motivators such as the intellectual challenge of teaching and promoting professional growth. On the other hand, teachers perceived job dissatisfaction has also been linked to work overload, poor pay and the portrayal of teachers by the media. A number of studies have also focused on individual and school characteristics as determinants of job satisfaction (Eg: Rapti & Karaj, 2012). Lawler (1973) argued that teacher satisfaction refers to a teacher's affective relation to his or her job and depends on perceived relationship between what one wants and what one achieves from the teaching itself. On a similar line of thought, Watt and Richardson (2008) argue that career development aspirations are important factors in job satisfaction. Therefore if the teaching environment does not facilitate the satisfaction needs of teachers, then teachers are unhappy and unproductive. On a rather parallel track, Maeroff described teachers' "sense of empowerment" as a major way "to make teachers more professional and to improve their performance" (1998).

Singh and Rawat (2010) and Shann (2001) identified other factors that contribute to increased teacher discontentment: problems arising from changes in administrative routines, overwork – especially paperwork, students' evaluations, schools' grading procedures, behavior problems, low pay, student indiscipline, few possibilities for career progression and the overall decline of society's esteem towards teaching. Furthermore, Arnett and Polkinghorne (2010) identified the following factors as contributing to teacher's satisfaction or dissatisfaction: nature of recent education reforms, inclusion of students with special needs, support and recognition from school administrators, teacher's salary, physical conditions of the school, daily work of teaching itself, class size, student discipline and behavior, lack of resources and lack of opportunities for career progression.

In 1997, the US Department of Education conducted a large scale on American teachers. The study showed that a large proportion of American teachers were not happy with their workload, lacked resources to perform their duties, lacked support school administrators and were not happy with the auditing procedures used to evaluate their work. The report identified "more administrative support and leadership, good student behavior, a positive school atmosphere, and teacher autonomy" as the working conditions that were associated with higher teacher satisfaction (US Department of Education, 1997). Other factors such as sector of education (state or independent schools), teachers' background characteristics or school demographics were not influential towards increasing levels of job satisfaction. The study also found that those teachers who received parental support reported higher levels of job satisfaction than teachers who did not. The study also revealed that there was no correlation between teacher satisfaction and benefits such as salary, holidays and working hours. Research conducted by Lumsden (1998) showed that teachers spent most of their time in the classroom and therefore had few opportunities to share their successes with colleagues. Hence they tended to rely more often on the students' level of response.

The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (Markow & Pieters, 2012) revealed some interesting results which are interesting to the context of our study:

o   Teacher job satisfaction has dropped 15 points since 2009, from 59% who were very satisfied to 44% who are very satisfied, the lowest level in over 20 years.

o   The percentage of teachers who say they are very or fairly likely to leave the profession has increased by 12 points since 2009, from 17% to 29%.

o   The percentage of teachers who do not feel their job is secure has grown since 2006 from eight percent to 34%.

o   Majorities of parents and teachers say that public school teachers are treated as professionals by the community (71% of parents, 77% of teachers), that public school teachers' health insurance benefits are fair for the work they do (63% of parents, 67% of teachers), and that public school teachers' retirement benefits are fair for the work they do (60% of parents, 61% of teachers).

o   Slightly more than half (53%) of parents and two-thirds (65%) of teachers say that public school teachers' salaries are not fair for the work they do.

o   Teachers with lower job satisfaction are less likely than others to feel that their job is secure (56% vs. 75%) or that they are treated as a professional by the community (68% vs. 89%).

o   Teachers with lower job satisfaction are more likely to be in schools that have had layoffs of teachers (49% vs. 37%) or other school staff (66% vs. 49%), or the reduction or elimination of arts or music programs (28% vs. 17%), after-school programs (34% vs. 23%), or health or social services (31% vs. 23%).

o   Teachers with lower job satisfaction are more likely to report that in the last year they have seen increases in: average class size (70% vs. 53%), students and families needing health or social services (70% vs. 56%), students coming to school hungry (40% vs. 30%), students leaving to go to another school (22% vs. 12%), and students being bullied/harassed (17% vs. 10%), (ibid, 2012).

Other factors have been suggested that promote teacher's enthusiasm and how these factors are related to teacher satisfaction. These include opportunities to try new ideas, participation in decision-making and reform efforts, social relations, self-esteem, independence, intellectual growth, expression of creativity and opportunity for learning (Barnabe and Burns, 1994; Bishay, 1996; Borg and Riding, 1991; Dinham and Scott, 2000b; Evans, 1998, 2001; Odell and Ferraro, 1992; Zigarelli, 1996). Researchers of the International Teacher 2000 Project also identified a "three domain model" of teacher career satisfaction which highlights "the growing yet variable influence and importance of societal based factors and forces which are acting to influence teacher and school executive career satisfaction, dissatisfaction and stress" (Dinham and Scott, 2000a). The report also highlighted that, an overemphasis on educational attainment, lack of participation in decision-making processes, failure to provide essential instructional resources, lack of administrative support, and lack of trust in the professional expertise of teachers seem to increase the degree of teacher dissatisfaction (Kelchtermans, 1999; van den Berg, 2002). Dinham et al, (2000) reported that teachers rated their overall satisfaction as low and many found themselves more dissatisfied as their career into teaching progressed however, levels of dissatisfaction were not uniform across all aspects of the work.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s report *Teachers Matter* found that the numbers of teachers retiring reached large proportions in schools residing in disadvantaged areas and could not predict a positive change in the recruitment and retention of teachers in such schools (McKenzie & Santiago, 2005; Quartz, 2003; Guin, 2004). Some of these studies also portrayed long-serving teachers as being unmotivated as they reached the final stages of their career (e.g. Huberman, 1993). Other researchers presented more positive images of teachers who, in these later years, have reached a sense of purpose and fulfillment (Cohen and Moffitt, 2009; Day and Gu, 2013). Similarly, Woods and Weasner explain that teachers who began teaching in the 1980s have had to engage in identity work "as they have had to realign their values in their later working lives as the human element gives way to the commodified experience" (2002: 96). Goodson and Hargreaves suggest that this has been a deliberate consequence of globalised educational discourses such as "school improvement" and "performance management" (1996). Long serving teachers have experienced a move to a performance culture, characterized by targets and accountability, within the workplace where, according to Ball, 'value replaces values –commitment and service are of dubious worth within the new policy regime' (2003: 217). It is this emphasis on accountability and the administrative aspects of teaching that has led to the production of policy documents encapsulating the official view of what constitutes teachers' work. It has also been recognized that experienced teachers differ from less experienced ones in terms of knowledge, attitudes and skills and therefore it can be concluded that they also differ in their professional and development needs. Hence, as teachers continue to advance in their career, the importance of lifelong professional learning becomes of vital importance.

**The Maltese Educational System and the Social Context of the Study**

The Maltese Educational system offers a three tier system of elementary and secondary education. The Maltese government offers free and compulsory education to all children from the age of 5 to the age of 16, regardless of gender, beliefs or socio-economic background. The system provides education from state, church and independent schools which offer curricula to children and adolescents from elementary to secondary, and sometimes even upper-secondary education. The Education Act of 1988 provides the necessary guidelines upon which schools operate. Students may then proceed to Junior College or opt to study at the Malta College of Arts Science and Technology or the Institute for Tourism Studies. Here students specialize in specific subject and may also further their studies at the University of Malta.This study took place in parallel with a consultation strategy for the Maltese National Curriculum framework which took place between May 2011 and January 2012. In the document entitled 'The National Curriculum Framework 2011, The Way Forward', the Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family is calling for a paradigm shift in the way learning, teaching and the curriculum are perceived by the various professionals working within the educational system. Through its document, the Maltese Ministry of Education is furthering its commitment towards a collective effort to "challenge the status quo, to challenge entrenched views and positions and to create meaning with different stakeholders" (MEDE, 2011). The document emphasizes the commitment from all stakeholders and is strongly urging everyone to take part in the consultation and implementation phases. Currently, the Maltese National Curriculum framework is under a period of evaluation and it is hoped that the study provides insight into the various reforms intended by the Ministry.

## METHODOLOGY

The snowball sampling method was used to recruit teachers for the study. Teachers were asked to indicate other teachers with long term experience as teachers and who were willing to participate in the questionnaire and interviews. The research was carried out over two years, from March 2010-March 2012. The first part of the study consisted of data collection through a survey sent by e-mail to elementary and secondary school teachers (with at least 20 years of teaching experience) in Malta and in its sister island Gozo. The purpose of the questionnaire was primarily to elicit demographic data and other information related to Teacher Job Satisfaction. Secondly, the survey would also provide the researcher with a group of teachers that would compose a solid base on which interviews could be conducted. Overall, there were 108 respondents who took part in this phase. In the second phase of the study, interviews were conducted through skype (a voice-over-Internet Protocol service) with 52 teachers. While the quantitative method provided insight as to what factors are incumbent on satisfaction or dissatisfaction, the qualitative method provided more opportunity to examine other sources which might have a contribution and also to triangulate evidence obtained from quantitative methods.

### Quantitative Method

The main objectives of the quantitative method was to investigate the extent to which in-service teachers differ in their satisfaction levels on a number of background variables namely age, gender, years of experience, sector of education and highest qualification reached. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of demographic data related to respondents. The second part of the questionnaire asked participants questions related to their level of satisfaction with regards to their teaching profession, including whether they were influenced in choice of profession, the extent of which they are satisfied with the school administration, their current working conditions, opportunities to participate in seminars, involvement in school decision making, the current auditing procedures and others. The questions on this section of the questionnaire were measured on a 7-point likert scale that ranged from 1=highly dissatisfying, to 7= highly satisfying. Hence, the maximum score of job satisfaction as indicated by the questionnaire was that of 294 (42x7) while minimum was 42 (42x1).

### Qualitative Method

The qualitative study was designed to shed light to the following research questions:
1. What are the critical factors influencing job satisfaction among long-serving Maltese teachers?
2. What are the critical factors influencing job dissatisfaction among long-serving Maltese teachers?
3. To what extent are these factors (satisfying or dissatisfying) influencing the commitment of teachers to further extend (or not extend) their number of years in teaching.

The interviews typically lasted around 45 minutes providing plenty of opportunity for interviewees to express themselves freely. The interviews were semi-structured based on a small number of basic questions on what satisfied

(or dissatisfied) them in their job, why they enjoyed (or did not enjoy) their jobs and whether the factors they identified are contributing to extend (or otherwise) their careers as teachers. Interviews were recorded and through the use of NVivo- a Qualitative Data Analysis software, emerging patterns were noticed. These patterns were triangulated with findings from the surveys distributed in the first part of the study. Analysis proceeded by recoding references teachers made to the sources of satisfaction in their work such as: working with children, interaction with colleagues, centralized policies, autonomy, etc., or dissatisfaction such as: student failure and lack of discipline. Themes were described in great detail by the teachers and these provided the foundation for the interpretations of findings.

## RESULTS

### Quantitative Study

The sample consisted of 40 (37%) male and 68 (63%) female teachers with over 20 years of teaching experience. The average age of the sample was 51.1 years old, with a standard deviation of 11.22. The average number of years during which this sample has been teaching is 30.03 years (SD=9.33).The questionnaire examined possible reasons that might have motivated these teachers to choose the teaching profession. Sixty-four percent of teachers indicated that they always wanted to become a teacher while 29.6 % respondents indicated that they were attracted to the teaching profession because of the benefits of the profession such as salary, holidays and short working hours. Twenty-eight percent indicated that they entered the teaching profession because they were attracted by the hours and holidays of the profession, while 30.5% were attracted because of the salary. Only 13.9% indicated that there was pressure from their families to become teachers.

This strongly contrasts with research conducted by Zembylas and Papanastasiou (2004), who in their study on Job Satisfaction among teachers in Cyprus stated that only 32.3% of the sample indicated that they always wanted to become teachers. It can therefore be concluded that satisfaction itself is a predictor of a prolonged engagement in teaching activities. The average job satisfaction of long-serving teachers was measured at a score of 549 out of a maximum score of 746. This results in an overall job satisfaction of 73.6%. The mean score for males was 5.28 while that for females was 5.37.  One-way Anovas were then conducted to determine whether the means obtained were statistically different from each other. The results showed an $F_{obt}<F_{crit}$ (at $F_{crit}$ = 3.94, P=0.720, α= 0.05) which means that *gender* is not a predictor of job satisfaction among long serving school teachers in Malta (see table 1).

Table 1: The effect of *gender* on long-term job satisfaction.

| Source | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | P | α |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender: Male | Between =0.22 | 1 | 0.221 | 0.129 | 0.720 | 0.05 |
| Gender: Female | Within =172.87 | 101 | 1.712 | | | |
| | Total= 173.09 | 102 | | | | |

The effect of *teaching experience* was also measured. The mean score for teachers with experience between 20 and 29 years was 4.14, for teachers whose experience ranged between 30 to 39 years had a mean score of 5.26 while those more than 40 years of experience gave a maximum score of 7. This shows that teachers with the most experience in teaching rated themselves as highly satisfied. In order to test for significance a one way analysis of variance was performed and this resulted in an $F_{obt}$= 24.81 (at $F_{crit}$ =4.82, P=0, α= 0.05). This indicates that the mean scores obtained from the three sets differed statistically from each other, with the longest serving teachers (40+) scoring a maximum of 7 – the highest possible score (Table 2). This is an important result because it shows that satisfaction improved steadily with teaching experience.

**Table 2: The effect of *teaching experience* on job satisfaction of long-serving teachers**

| Source | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | P | α |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Years of Experience (between 20 and 29 years) | Between =112.93 | 2 | 56.47 | 24.81 | 0 | 0.05 |
| Years of Experience (between 30 and 39) | Within =238.97 | 105 | 2.28 | | | |
| Years of Experience (40+) | Total = 359.90 | 107 | | | | |

Then, the effect of *age* on job satisfaction of long serving teachers was calculated. The mean score of teachers between 40-49 years of age was 4.54 while for those between 50 and 59 years was 5.06 while for those teachers whose age was more than 60, the mean score was 5.73. A One-way Analysis of Variance was computed to determine whether these results have statistical significance on the entire sample of teachers. This revealed an $F_{obt}$ of 14.47 (against an $F_{crit}$ of 4.82, P=0, α=0.05). This means that the three means obtained were statistically different from each other with the oldest age scoring the highest on Job Satisfaction (Table 3). This result is of great significance since it illustrated the need for educational authorities to nurture teachers as they move into the later stages in their careers, as these are the most satisfactory.

**Table 3: The effect of *age* on job satisfaction of long-serving teachers**

| Source | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | P | α |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Years of Experience (between 40 and 49 years) | Between =20.59 | 2 | 10.30 | 14.47 | 0 | 0.05 |
| Years of Experience (between 50 and 59) | Within =74.72 | 105 | 0.71 | | | |
| Years of Experience (60+) | Total = 95.31 | 107 | | | | |

Next, the effect of *level of education* (elementary or secondary) on job satisfaction was investigated and analysed. The sample revealed that from a sample of 108 teachers, 45(42%) were elementary school teachers while 63 (48%) were secondary school teachers. The mean score for long serving teachers at primary level of education was 5.66 while that at secondary level was 5.81. A one-way Analysis of Variance revealed that the two means did not differ statistically from one another ($F_{obt} < F_{crit}$) with $F_{obt}$ being scored as 0.88 (as compared with $F_{crit}$ of 6.90, p=0.35, α = 0.01) (Table 3). This means that the *level of education* taught (elementary or secondary) is not a predictor of job satisfaction for long-serving Maltese teachers.

Table 4: The effect of *Level of Education* on job satisfaction of long serving teachers

| Source | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | P | α |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Elementary Level of Education (Teaching 5-11 year olds) | Between = 0.59 | 1 | 0.59 | 0.88 | 0.35 | 0.01 |
| Secondary Level of Education (Teaching 11-16 year olds) | Within = 70.96 | 106 | 0.67 | | | |
| | Total = 71.55 | 107 | | | | |

Next, the effect of *sector of education* was analysed in order to determine whether teachers in state, church or independent school could be affected in their level of job satisfaction by the particular sector they teach. The means of the three different sectors of the resulted in a mean of 5.24 for state school teachers, a mean of 5.57 for church school teachers and a mean of 5.70 for independent school teachers. The three means, together with their standard deviations were used to compute a one way analysis of variance (Anova). This resulted in an F score of 1.67 which is less that $F_{crit}$ of 4.82 (P=0.193, α =0.01). The results mean that the three means obtained did not differ statistically from each other (Table 5), which implies that the sector of education that the teachers work in is not a predictor of the level of job-satisfaction.

Table 5: The effect of *Sector of Education* on job satisfaction of long serving teachers.

| Source | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | P | α |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sector of Education: State School | Between = 3.15 | 2 | 1.57 | 1.67 | 0.193 | 0.01 |
| Sector of Education: Church School | Within = 99.0 | 105 | 0.94 | | | |
| Sector of Education: Independent School | Total = 102.1 | 107 | | | | |

Next, the effect of *Educational Qualifications* on job satisfaction was analysed, with the results being displayed in Table 6. The mean score obtained from teachers with Bachelor's Degree was 5.73, while the mean obtained from teachers with Masters degree was 6.06. For teachers who hold other qualifications the mean was 5.57. An Analysis of Variance was conducted to examine whether the three means were significantly different from each other. This resulted in an $F_{obt}$ of 1.77 (at $F_{crit}$ =4.82, P= 0.176 , α=0.01). This shows that $F_{obt}<F_{crit}$ and hence the three means are not statistically different from each other. Therefore qualifications possessed by teachers were not a significant determinant on perceived job satisfaction levels among long-serving teachers.

Table 6: The effect of *educational qualifications* on Job Satisfaction.

| Source | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | P | α |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Highest Educational Qualification: Bachelor's Degree | Between = 2.74 | 2 | 1.369 | 1.77 | 0.176 | 0.01 |
| Highest Educational Qualification: Masters Degree | Within = 81.29 | 105 | 0.77 | | | |
| Highest Educational Qualification: Others | Total = 84.03 | 107 | | | | |

Quantitative analysis has shown that the factors having effect of job satisfaction among long serving teachers in Malta were teaching experience and age. On the other hand factors which did not have an effect on teacher job

satisfaction were gender, level of education, sector of education and qualification.

## Qualitative Study

Fifty-two teachers from the initial sample of 108 teachers wished to take part in the second part of the study. This consisted of an interview of about 45 minutes in which long-serving teachers explained the factors leading to their job satisfaction or dissatisfaction and also explained the influence that these factors had on their long term experience as teachers. The results of the interviews were then grouped according to the importance which teachers themselves gave to the factors identified. Factors were then ranked and categorized into themes that most clearly captured the emotions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction underlying teachers' work.

## Sources of Satisfaction

Findings in this study confirmed those documented in many studies (Eg: Dinham and Scott, 1999, 2000a), i.e. that the main sources of teacher job satisfaction are the daily satisfactions derived from working with children, aiding their development and seeing them being actively involved in society whilst making a contribution to the welfare of others. Many expressed the joy of seeing past students in their school establishing themselves in society and earning a good living. Long Serving Teachers also derived high levels of satisfaction when working collaboratively with colleagues and achieving personal professional growth. Teachers being interviewed also confirmed earlier findings that salary, short working hours and holidays were not high in their satisfaction list.  According to the teachers, these were merely associated benefits which made the profession more attractive.

All teachers interviewed revealed that their primary source of satisfaction is the children themselves. Many recounted different experiences of 'miracles' which they performed while taking care of their students.  Many teachers spoke about feelings of excitement at the beginning of every scholastic year and of their ability to 'touch lives'. These findings confirm the results obtained by Cockburn, 2000; Lortie, 1975 and Nias, 1989 who contended that the satisfaction of working with children, forming relationships with them, having the opportunity to contribute to the growth and achievement of young individuals, may be common internationally, regardless of country context. The emotional rewards of teaching effect what teachers teach, the way it is taught and the modalities and curricular adaptations which they undergo in order to make sure that all students under their care are benefiting from the teaching they are providing. Many teachers spoke about "loving *their* children", "going out of their way to help them" and "establishing a warm and safe environment in their classrooms". From the interviews it became clear that long-serving teacher have successfully attempted to develop warm and lasting emotional relationships with students and their parents. Such relationships are so inherent in this work that "… separating myself from such experiences is almost impossible" (teacher's statement).

An area from which teachers appear to derive a sense of self-fulfillment and satisfaction is their *contribution to society*. They highlighted the importance of being able to guide students in their life choices and thus contributing effectively to society. Most teachers emphasized their commitment to society as an important precept towards their general job satisfaction despite the negative effect that social problems have on their work and the "lack of respect for teachers nowadays". Most teachers felt proud that some of their past students are now teachers themselves and that they are following their own footsteps. As one teacher commented:

> I feel proud of my work. When I remember my students and recall their achievements, some in politics, some in medicine, some in teaching, I say to myself… well this is my contribution to society! Well done! … and I think that this is what kept me going for so long in my career.

Many teachers emphasized the importance of collegial relationships as a prime determinant towards strong feelings of job satisfaction. Although some emphasized that colleagues are cooperative, others shared different opinions, stating that sometimes, the drive for promotion overrides the spirit of collaboration among teachers.  Thus, collegial collaboration can both be a source of satisfaction and of dissatisfaction. This is concomitant with research conducted by Cockburn (2000) who found out that colleagues at work are seen as a source of friendship and a source of social and emotional support. When this emotional support is absent, teachers feel sad, depressed and lonely.

Most of the teachers interviewed stated that during their career that had some opportunities for professional growth but they would have liked tailor-made courses which took into account their experience. These comments clearly indicate that the teachers' sense of satisfaction is connected to intellectual and professional stimulation and also opportunities for growth. As long as teachers are provided with opportunities for innovation, stimulation of their intellectual curiosity and increased creative outputs, then they would still be kindling the passion for their profession and further contribute towards students' achievements.

During the interviews teachers repeatedly stressed that their long staying in the profession was not at all influenced by holidays, salaries and short working hours. This is similar to research conducted by Bastick (2002), who found that long-serving teachers were less extrinsically motivated (e.g. by salary) and significantly more intrinsically motivated (e.g. from working with children) than were teachers with lesser experience. Nevertheless teachers highlighted the importance of good salary. Although many teachers, in the first part of the study commented that their salary was adequate for their daily needs, they still felt that their salary was rather low compared to the amount of work they perform and compared to the salaries of other professions.

With regards to *short working hours* most teachers commented that working hours are not at all short. They firmly iterated that after a *long* day of work they are expected to prepare resources, construct lesson plans and schemes of work, and correct an 'infinite' number of copybooks, workbooks and examination papers. As one teacher stated, " … if I am paid for the amount of hours I spend correcting and preparing material for the next day, then my salary will have to be at least *double*" (her emphasis). Another teacher however had a different view about teaches benefits and stated that for many teachers, benefits such as salary, short hours and holidays are important factors when one chooses a profession. He stated that teaching still provides "a lure for women who need that amount of flexibility to manage a profession and at the same time execute all functions of a full time mother".

With regards to holidays most teachers emphasized that these were not the primary reason for the choice of their career. However, similar to the concept of *short working hours*, holidays were certainly an important factor which kept them going so long in their career. As one teacher eloquently states:

> if it weren't for the holidays, it wouldn't be possible to sustain the stress which teaching itself brings with it … just imagine … piles (of copybooks) for correction, handouts, past papers, designing examination papers, construction of Individualized Educational Programs for the students, etc etc. I think that holidays are a right and much deserved too.

**Sources of Dissatisfaction**

The study also researched sources of dissatisfaction among long serving school teachers.  These were ranked according to the number of times these were mentioned by the teachers.  Student failure, the effect of social problems, work overload, lack of student discipline, lack of respect from students and parents, lack of recognition from society, lack of autonomy as a result of perceived centralization, lack of collegial relationships, time constrictions and extensive syllabi were the factors mentioned by teachers and contributing to job satisfaction.

Most teachers recounted that the major source of dissatisfaction lies in the failure of students to achieve the desired academic outcomes. As one teacher emphatically puts it:

> I plan, I organize, I approach students as groups and individually, I speak to their parents … but sometimes there are situations that you cannot do away with… there are situations where all your efforts result in nothing…These are, by far, most dissatisfactory.

 "Work overload" is an expression which came up often during interviews. Teachers seem to derive particular dissatisfaction at the amount of paper work they do especially "piles of copybooks", "file keeping", "printed lesson plans", "schemes of work", "individualized educational plans" and "paperwork, paperwork, paperwork…*too daunting*!" (teachers' emphasis). Most teachers commented that while they saw the validity of organizing one's work, teaching has become "too technical" and "(work overload)…is robbing the joy of teaching".

Many social problems were mentioned in the interviews. These included both the teachers' social problems and the student ones. Social problems interfere in communication processes between teachers and students and these have an effect on the performance of both teachers and students in the teaching and learning process. Among those mentioned were the steady rise in family problems, increased number of marital separations and divorces, arrival of children from immigrant parents, multiculturalism in the classroom, poverty and others. During interviews teachers shared intense feelings of dissatisfaction as a result of having to deal with the effects of social problems in their classrooms. A number of teachers shared the fact that many a time they had to deal with students' lack of resources themselves. As one teacher states:

> It is not the first time that I had to deal with pupils who did not have lunch or adequate stationary. These are the things which everyone takes for granted but they are very much in existence… yes in 2012! There is no

recognition whatsoever for the work a teacher does where s/he have to go beyond their duties to make sure a child gets the necessary care. This is very disappointing and demotivating.

Many of the teachers interviewed insisted that respect towards teachers from both parents and students has diminished.  Most comments conveyed a sense the disenchantment resulting from perceived expectations for respect and recognition which have never been fulfilled through the years. This has given rise to general feelings of dissatisfaction and low morale. The lack of respect and recognition of teachers has been the subject of research in many studies (eg: Konanc,1996; Lumsden, 1998; Ingersoll, 2001). Hence, these sources of dissatisfaction are not unique to Malta but are present in many countries across the world.

Some of the strongest feelings of disappointment expressed by teachers during interviews were related students' academic failure, discipline problems and morality issues such as cheating, bullying, threatening, stealing and others. According to the teachers interviewed, there have been many times that they have it difficult to cope with the situations outlined above and there were also times when they considered quitting because "it was simply too much to take".

Some of the teachers interviewed commented about their perceived lack of autonomy as a result of the Maltese Educational System. Some teachers were dissatisfied with their lack of autonomy, others with imposition of extensive curricula and others with "too many changes in such a short time". This issue was intensified by the fact that the present research study was carried put in the midst of Educational reform for which, some felt, haven't been consulted enough. During their interviews teachers compared their autonomy to that of other professionals such as doctors and lawyers. That stated that, being professionals, teachers need to have more autonomy so that they could direct students to better career paths.

Many of them mentioned the auditing process (part of the current reform) at which they expressed concern over the way it is being managed. This is concomitant with research conducted by Ball who claims that teachers are overwhelmed by the '…performance culture, characterized by targets and accountability, within the workplace where value replaces values –commitment and service are of dubious worth within the new policy regime' (2003: 217). Interviewed teachers stated that they felt a sense of disempowerment over a number of issues being discussed. These findings are also concomitant with results published by Dinham & Scott (1998, 2000) who state that a major influence in determining how teachers feel about their work comes from factors at the system level, as well as wider social forces, such as teacher status, centralized policies, and the portrayal of teachers in the media. Findings from interviews suggest parallelism with research conducted by Dinham and Scott, 2000) who claim the existence of a 'third domain' i.e. the existence of societal based factors in teacher job (dis)satisfaction. Promotion prospects were also cited as sources of great dissatisfaction for the majority of long-serving school teachers. Many teachers expressed their intense disdain about their perceived lack fairness in the current teacher evaluation system which, according to the teachers interviewed: "is creating negative feelings and undesirable consequences on teachers' motivation, general health and perceived job satisfaction levels".

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this work was to use a mixed-methods approach to investigate factors leading to satisfaction and dissatisfaction of long-serving Maltese teachers. Both methods of investigation showed that long-serving teachers in Malta chose the teaching profession for intrinsic reasons since the majority of them indicated that they always wanted to become teachers. On the one hand, a deeper look at qualitative data indicated that Maltese teachers were, to some extent, also influenced by external factors to choose their career such as salary, short working hours and holidays associated with this profession. The discrepancy between the results obtained from the two methods could be explained from the fact that the sample in the two methods of investigation was different (108 teachers for the quantitative method and 52 teachers for the qualitative method). Hence, the results obtained from the two methods have to be interpreted differently based on the respective samples and methodology. Also, the quantitative method of investigation provided statements which did not necessarily come up in the teacher interviews during the qualitative method. The qualitative method dealt with the presence of factors related to teacher job (dis)satisfaction rather than with their frequency and this could explain the disparities in results.

The findings presented in this paper make a significant contribution to the investigation of job (dis)satisfaction

among long-serving school teachers in Malta. Maltese teachers' perceptions of their job-satisfaction strongly correlated to the pleasure derived from working with children, overseeing their growth and their contribution to their general well being. Maybe surprising is the emphases that teachers placed on the importance of their job into making a 'contribution to society'. The importance of this powerful source of satisfaction cannot be ignored and more research needs to be done as to how Educational authorities can extend this source of satisfaction into meaningful activities. Salary, short working hours and holidays were considered important but not superseded by the satisfaction derived from *working with children* and *contribution to society*.

The study shows that teachers' (dis)satisfaction is a complex social construct which is influenced by a number of factors in continuous flux. Research findings also reveal many aspects of dissatisfaction which need to be counteracted effectively to limit dissatisfaction among teachers. Particular attention need to be directed to measures which deal effectively with social problems, students' misbehavior, a decline in teachers' respect and status, improving relationships with educational directorates, and increase in teachers' contribution in the educational decision-making processes. A greater recognition and understanding of teachers' work would enable them to focus on those factors that they enjoy most, i.e. working with children and contributing to society. A change in criteria for teacher evaluations could develop into a fairer system of auditing. If teachers' work was more positively expressed, especially through the media, then an increase in perceived job satisfaction levels would be expected. This would, in turn, have a positive effect on the performance of both teachers and students.

### Limitations of The Study

The sample of 198 teachers and the selection of 52 teachers for interviews could in no way be representative of the entire teaching population Besides, the further categorization of teachers into gender, sector of education and years of teaching experience has given rise to even smaller numbers to be considered in any way representative. As with all self-reporting studies, the results are limited by the participants' responses. The participants may have felt the need to provide answers the researcher was looking for rather than what they believed to be true. Also, singular interviews have limitations in terms of trust and comfortableness in disclosing feelings which can touch the personal lives of respondents.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study brings to the surface the complexities involved in understanding teacher job satisfaction in a manner which could be way which could be of utility to policy making. The study, however does give food for thought towards more serious considerations of how the understanding of the concept of teacher job satisfaction could be applied when considering reforms in the Maltese educational system and how these reforms are incumbent on teachers' working lives. The findings clearly indicate that there is an urgent need for school directorates and administrators to recognize the fact that educational quality is closely linked teacher job satisfaction. As teachers continue to evolve, so do their professional needs. Professional training courses emphasizing the importance of lifelong learning is central to this goal (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001).

Improvement in teachers' working conditions is not a luxury we can do away with, but an essential component of effective policy-making (Hargreaves, 1994; Pollard et al., 1994). As Hean & Garrett (2001) eloquently phrase it: 'happier teachers are better teachers' and it is therefore important for all educational stakeholders to be vigilant on teachers' needs and do their utmost to maximize teacher's job satisfaction and minimize dissatisfaction not only for the benefit of teachers themselves but also for the sake of the learners under their care. Surely, the experience of long-serving teachers must not be disregarded when considering reforms. Judging from the responses of teachers interviewed and from the body language during the interviews it was clear that long-serving teachers could contribute a great towards policy making and effecting reform implementation. This research has clearly raised further questions for research: What factors transform some teachers' perceptions from satisfaction to dissatisfaction over time? Why do some teachers enjoy their jobs while others do not? What can be done to counteract feelings of dissatisfaction and what can be done to cultivate increased satisfaction? How might long-serving teachers be more included into policy-making processes? How can increased autonomy help in increasing satisfaction levels among teachers? Are there other factors which can give rise to fluctuating levels of job satisfaction?

Experienced teachers need opportunities to share collaborative and self-reflective practices in an environment which recognizes the acquired knowledge and sensitive judgment developed in the course of their careers. Professional development seminars should be designed in a way which challenges them to take other roles and functions within schools (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). For example they might be challenged to act as mentors for newly qualified teachers, as this

would ensure that their experience is positively transmitted to others, while at the same time providing them with opportunities to rekindle their enthusiasm for teaching whilst keeping abreast to new theoretical frameworks. More research needs to be commissioned to delve into other factors affecting job satisfaction among teachers. Such research would be an indispensable tool towards a collective effort to '…challenge the status quo, to challenge entrenched views and positions and to create meaning with different stakeholders' (MEDE, 2011).

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**APPENDIX**

**Questionnaire: PART 1**

*Instructions: For each question please tick  (√)  in  one of the spaces provided.*

**1. Teaching Experience (years), Please trick  √**

**Less that  20**  ☐    **20- 29**  ☐    **30- 39**  ☐  **40+**  ☐

**(If you have ticked *Less than 20* please do not proceed. Thank you for your participation.)**

**2. Gender Male (   ) or  Female (   )**

**3. Age: …….. in Years**

**4. Level of Education: Elementary,  5- 11 years (      );  Secondary 11-16,  years (      )**

**5) Sector of Education**

**State School**  ☐  **Church School**  ☐  **Independent School**  ☐

**6. Highest Educational Qualification reached:**
    **Bachelor Degree (        ), Masters Degree (      ),**
    **Others (      )  please specify** _____.

**Questionnaire PART 2**

**Please read carefully the following statements.**

**Circle from ( ) (Strongly Disagree)………to…………   ( Stronlgly Agree) ( )**

**1)   I always wanted to become a teacher.**

        1        2        3        4        5        6        7

**2)   I was influenced by my parents (or other acquaintances) to become a teacher.**

        1        2        3        4        5        6        7

**3)   I entered the teaching profession because of its good pay.**

        1        2        3        4        5        6        7

**4) I entered the teaching profession because of the holidays.**

      1    2    3        4        5        6        7

**5)   I had a realistic view of teaching before I become a teacher.**

        1        2        3        4        5        6        7

**6)   Teaching is an interesting job to me.**

1    2    3    4    5    6    7

7)   I feel satisfied with my professional ability to perform my job.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7

8) I am satisfied with autonomy I have in making decisions about my daily tasks.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7

9) I am satisfied with the successes gained by my students

1    2    3    4    5    6    7

10) I am happy with the cooperation I receive from my workmates.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7

11) I feel comfortable with my present level of responsibility in my job.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7

12) Society appreciates my job as a teacher.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7

13) I am satisfied with opportunities for workshops organised within and outside the school.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7

14) I am satisfied with my yearly increments.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7

15)  I am satisfied with in-service training opportunities available for me as a teacher.

1    23    4    5    6    7

16) I feel comfortable with rewards I get for doing a good job at school.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7

17) I am satisfied with the appreciations I get from my employer for the contribution I make in the school.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7

18) I am comfortable with the geographical location of the school in which I teach.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7

19) I am not intending to look for another well paying teaching job in another school.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7

**20) I am satisfied with the school' s physical working environment.**

  1      2      3      4      5      6      7

**21) My colleagues value my contribution in the school.**

  1      2      3      4      5      6      7

**22) I am comfortable with the promotion opportunities available to me as a teacher**

  1      2      3      4      5      6      7

**23) I enjoy collegial relationship with fellow teachers.**

  1 2      3      4      5      6      7

**24) I am satisfied with support I get from school administrators.**

  1      2      3      4      5      6      7

**25) I would not like to be transferred to another school.**

  1 2      3      4      5      6      7

**26) I feel fairly paid by my employer.**

  1 2      3      4      5      6      7

**27) I feel satisfied with opportunities for training and professional development available.**

  1      2      3      4      5      6      7

**28) I am not intending to change my profession.**

  1      2      3      4      5      6      7

**29) Teaching provides me with opportunity to use all my skills.**

  1      2      3      4      5      6      7

**30) Teaching is a challenging job to me.**

  1 2      3      4      5      6      7

**31) The promotion process and procedures used by my employer are fair.**

  1      2      3      4      5      6      7

**32) I am satisfied with bonuses I receive from my employer.**

  1 2      3      4      5      6      7

**33) I am satisfied with opportunities to attend seminars within and outside the school.**

  1 2      3      4      5      6      7

**34) I am satisfied with the auditing procedures employed by the Directorate of Quality and Standards for Education.**

1 2        3        4        5        6        7

**35) I am satisfied with my perceived level of professional autonomy.**

1 2        3        4        5        6        7

**36) I am satisfied with my involvement in school decisions.**

1 2        3        4        5        6        7

**37) I am satisfied with the changes the Maltese Educational System is currently undergoing.**

1 2        3        4        5        6        7

**38) I am satisfied with the amount of resources I am given to work with.**

1 2        3        4        5        6        7

**39) I am satisfied with my current working hours.**

1 2        3        4        5        6        7

**40) I am satisfied with the way the educational system recruits teachers**

1 2        3        4        5        6        7

**41) I am satisfied with media criticism on teachers' work**

1 2        3        4        5        6        7

**42) It is my intention to continue teaching**

1 2        3        4        5        6        7


**Please indicate whether you would like to participate further in the study by volunteering for an interview based on your responses:  YES          NO**