



The Current Status of Secondary School Teacher's Perception of Happiness in Nam Dinh Province during the Implementation Period of the 2018 General Education Program

Pham Thi Hong Tham¹

Pham Thi Phuong Thuc²

Phan Thi Huong Giang³

Nguyen Thanh Tam⁴



(✉ Corresponding Author)

^{1,2,3,4}The Vietnam Institute of Educational Sciences, Vietnam.

¹Email: thampt@vnies.edu.vn Tel: +84(0913873966)

²Email: thucpt@vnies.edu.vn Tel: +84(0977636411)

³Email: giangpth@vnies.edu.vn Tel: +84 (0988261852)

⁴Email: tamnt@vnies.edu.vn Tel: +84 (0979978773)

Abstract

In the current context of a major revolution in the Vietnamese education system, teachers' perception of happiness makes an important criterion in evaluating effectiveness of the changes made to educational programs. The initial investigation of the positive effects of this renovation was conducted on the scale of Nam Dinh province and the results show multidimensional sources of information. In addition to positive information, there is still information that raises many questions for leaders to pay attention to. The outcome of the investigation suggests the evaluation of "The job is meaningful" is 3.10 out of 5 points, which is the lowest in assessment criteria. Meanwhile, the rates for "Completely disbelieve" and "Slightly disbelieve" in happiness of their profession in the future take up a large proportion (24.4%). However, other criteria namely "Being satisfied with current position" and "Feeling motivated with the job" received higher evaluation scores, respectively 4.05/5 points and 4.11/5 points. Via the results of the research, the author is looking forward to appropriate actions taken by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam with a view to enhancing the perception of happiness among teachers.

Keywords: Perception of happiness, Current status, Secondary school teachers, Well being, Happiness, Secondary school.

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Contribution of this paper to the literature

The article is the result of a survey on feelings of happiness during the period of educational reform in Vietnam. This study has provided completely new survey data. In addition, the study has concluded to help the Ministry of Education have a more accurate view of the current teachers' feelings.

1. Introduction

There are several different conceptions of happiness. According to Corey (2002) happiness is a marker of mental health and includes manifestations of existence or non-existence of positive feelings about life. In terms of people's careers, happiness can be defined as job satisfaction, where laborers can fulfill their professional ideals, promote their own potential and experience joy in their work. For teaching, happiness at work is extremely important because it affects the positive psychological development of teachers as well as indirectly influences their professional attitude. Moreover, happiness also affects teachers' initiative and creativity. That is the reason why managers and headmasters need to pay more attention to promoting teachers' job satisfaction so that they can love their job more and commit to them. In the current context of a transforming phase of Vietnam's general education program, in line with modern models and international development trends, the teacher's happiness plays an even more important role. To what extent can teachers be satisfied with the new program? Finding a way to debunk this question is equivalent to contributing to the effectiveness of reform.

2. Research Content

2.1. Research Topics Overview

The team has been in search of the information from journals on professional happiness of teachers, most notably the studies of Bui and Nguyen (2018); Pham (2018); Tran (2013); Duong and Ha (2018). The results of all studies showed that the current sense of job satisfaction among teachers is not high, specifically 10.2% of teachers are unhappy, 9.3% are quite unhappy, 11.2% happy, 31.3% quite happy, and only 3.6% feel very happy (Bui & Nguyen, 2018). Since the implementation of the 2018 General Education Program, more attention has been paid to the study of job satisfaction. However, current studies are seemingly not receiving enough devotion and commitment.

Based on the overview of domestic research, it can be acknowledged that there is a lack of studies on teachers' perception of happiness and it requires much more attention from all departments, researchers, and especially teachers - the most essential factor in educational activities.

2.2. Survey Participants and Duration

2.2.1. Participants

In order to obtain the basis for making initial judgments about the psychological performance of teachers when new programs took place, we conducted a survey on 290 teachers from 7 different secondary schools in Nam Dinh Province, 1 of which is located in Nam Dinh city area, two in town and 3 in different district areas. Information on the surveyed subjects is as follows:

- Educational background: University accounts for the highest rate 94.8%; upper-university accounts for 1%; sub-university accounts for 4.1%.
- Gender: female 94,1%, male 5,9%.
- Age: under 30 years (17.9%); from 31-40 years (29.7%); from 41 to 50 years (37.2%); over 50 years (15.2%).
- Work seniority: less than 10 years (21.7%); from 11-20 years (34.5%); more than 20 years (43.8%).

2.2.2. Duration

This survey of teachers' perception of happiness was conducted in late September, early October in the academic year 2020-2021, one month after the implementation of the General Education Program and a certain period of teacher training in order to adapt to the new program. Initial assessment of job satisfaction during this period is of great importance as it is, later, the most objective assessment, helping the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam make reasonable adjustments during the implementation of the 2018 General Education Program.

2.3. Study Methodology

Survey methods: Authors use the following research methods to conduct the research: 1/questionnaire; 2/in-depth interview; 3/observation; 4/theoretical research; 5/mathematical statistics.

2.3.1. Survey Tool

1/ Design a questionnaire based on the theory of Do and Phan (2019) and refer to some other domestic and foreign authors. The questionnaire consists of 38 questions divided into 3 parts: part 1/general information; part 2/actual situation of teachers' happiness feeling; part 3/factors affecting teachers' health feeling.

2/ Scale: The author referred to the scale of happiness in the work of Bagheri, Kousha, Janati, and Asghari-Jafarabadi (2012); the scale of happiness in the work of Do and Phan (2019) and tailored this study to measure the level of happiness of teachers based on the research objectives. However, in this study, the author focused on exploiting satisfaction and faith in the work of teachers today.

3/Interview and observation sheet: The author used this method to maximize the level of satisfaction and faith of teachers in the work, as the basis to better confirm the authenticity of the research.

The evaluation scale: The author uses a 5-point scale (1-5).

3. Research Results

3.1. Concepts

Perception of happiness: According to Diener (2000) it is the evaluation of perception and feeling towards life. Thus, it dwells an even broader meaning including satisfactory experience, low status of negativity and high life satisfaction. Keyes and Waterman shared their views of this concept as individual perception and assessment when one is in positive mood. Meanwhile, Phan (2014) linked the perception of happiness to a subjective assessment of people's satisfaction and comfort with their lives, considering satisfaction as the most effective measure of quality of life, human satisfaction with the work they are doing. Sharing the same idea with Phan Thi Mai Huong, the author uses satisfaction as a measure of the sense of well-being of each individual in their life.

Perception of job satisfaction: Carver and Scheier (1990) think that feeling professional happiness is more of the frequent experience of positive emotional states (such as satisfaction, interest, care, love...) than negative emotions (boredom, sadness, anxiety...). According to Bagheri et al. (2012) the feeling of professional happiness is the employees' satisfaction with the work, which is the harmony between the perception of employees about their needs and what they get from the work.

In this study, the author uses the view of Bagheri et al. (2012) agreeing that the feeling of professional happiness is satisfied with what they are doing and achieving at work.

3.2. Initial Assessment of Job Satisfaction of Teachers in Secondary Schools of Nam Dinh Province

3.2.1. Job Satisfaction

At work, satisfaction can arguably be the principal factor that encourages individuals to work. As for teachers, not only does satisfaction affect their attitudes and affection for their career but it also directly impacts their students' morale and emotions. Therefore, it can be said that the level of satisfaction of teachers has a great impact on their performance. So, to what extent are teachers currently satisfied with their work? The results in Table 1 will show this.

Table 1. Teachers' satisfaction of occupation nowadays.

Are teachers satisfied with their current job?

| Level | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Very dissatisfied | 12 | 4.1 | 4.1 |
| | Somewhat dissatisfied | 18 | 6.2 | 10.3 |
| | Neutra | 123 | 42.4 | 52.8 |
| | Somewhat satisfied | 69 | 23.8 | 76.6 |
| | Very satisfied | 68 | 23.4 | 100.0 |
| Total | 290 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

It can be seen that the "Very Satisfied", "Somewhat Satisfied" and "Normal" ratings are significantly higher than the "Very Dissatisfied" and "Somewhat Dissatisfied" ratings.

Approximately 20 percent of teachers in Vietnam's secondary schools felt dissatisfied with their career 10 years ago (Nguyen, 2012) and that data has sharply declined nowadays to only 10% (see the table). Accordingly, the percentage of teachers who are "Somewhat satisfied" and "Very satisfied" with the profession increased. At this level of assessment, we have only made a preliminary survey of the subjective perception of teachers when they have just applied the new general education program rather than taking in-depth measurements. However, with these completely subjective assessments, we are partly aware of the fact that teachers are feeling satisfied with the changes when implementing the new education program.

Table 2. Job satisfaction of middle school teachers in Nam Dinh province.

| Satisfaction level | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---------------------------------------|-----|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
| Being satisfied with current position | 290 | 2.00 | 5.00 | 4.0552 | 0.95054 |
| Being aware of their labour values | 290 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.1862 | 0.93739 |
| Feeling self-fulfilling at work | 290 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.3517 | 1.17959 |
| Feeling motivated with the job | 290 | 2.00 | 5.00 | 4.1138 | 1.07382 |
| Feeling meaningful work | 290 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.1034 | 1.50535 |
| Feeling a sense of contribution | 290 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.9966 | 1.06696 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 290 | | | | |

Table 2 presents the job satisfaction of teachers in the period since Vietnam started implementing. The new general education program in 2018.

3.2.2. Specific Expressions of Satisfaction

From the statistics table, we can clearly see that teachers now show relatively high job satisfaction, with the highest score 4.11/5 going for the evaluation criterion "Feeling motivated with the job" and the lowest evaluation score is greater than 3 (average). In addition, other criteria also received relatively high evaluation scores.

"Perceiving the significance of the job" is a very important criterion to evaluate the feeling of teachers for the work as they can only be dedicated to the job once they perceive the significance of what they are doing. However, teaching, which is considered as "the most noble of all occupations", in this survey, received the lowest rating compared to other criteria, showing that teachers are currently not appreciating their work. This finding is explicable concerning long-lasting weaknesses and embarrassments in the organization of Vietnamese education. Additionally, the lack of social appreciation for teaching in recent years has made teachers feel insecure about the job. This has resulted in a tangible undermined mentality among them and it requires time to eliminate.

Criteria such as "Being aware of their labour values" and "Feeling a sense of competence" are not highly evaluated compared to other criteria despite being above average.

Comparison of job satisfaction on the basis of gender shows that there is no marked difference in job satisfaction. While female participants show a level of satisfaction or mean = 3.56, that of their male counterparts is 3.52 (mean = 3.52). It can be seen that at secondary level, teachers in Nam Dinh province feel relatively satisfied with their jobs and there are no excessive differences between sexes.

Comparison of job satisfaction on the basis of educational background shows that job satisfaction varies differently based on qualifications. The Sub-university group possesses the highest level of satisfaction with means = 5.00, while the group of University level has the lowest level of satisfaction means = 3.49 and the group of Upper-university level subjects reaches mean = 4.00.

Comparison of job satisfaction on the basis of age shows that the 41-50 age group has the highest level of job satisfaction compared to the other groups (mean = 3.89). At these ages, most teachers are proficient enough in knowledge, skills and basically fulfill career goals, so they are more confident at work. Stress and tension are often seen among teachers in the 31-40 age group when teachers have gone through a period of work and are in the stage of completing career plans. In group below 30, they have the satisfaction level or mean = 3.46; mean = 3.31 for group 31-40; and mean = 3.34 for group above 50.

Table 3. Influential factors on teachers' job satisfaction nowadays.

| Factor | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|-----|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
| Social respect towards teaching | 290 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.0517 | 1.20009 |
| Professional development policy for teachers | 290 | 2.00 | 5.00 | 3.4862 | 0.96378 |
| Appropriate regulations of working time | 290 | 2.00 | 5.00 | 3.3828 | 0.84123 |
| Reasonableness in teacher assessment | 290 | 2.00 | 5.00 | 3.9724 | 0.94810 |
| Empathy from leaders and colleagues | 290 | 2.00 | 5.00 | 3.9828 | 1.01018 |
| Good relationships with colleagues | 290 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.2793 | 0.95645 |
| Students' good attitude towards their study | 290 | 2.00 | 5.00 | 4.0414 | 0.89114 |
| Teachers' satisfaction with students' results | 290 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.2931 | 1.48357 |
| Self-efficacy | 290 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.1034 | 1.03050 |
| Suitable teaching expertise | 290 | 3.00 | 5.00 | 4.2138 | 0.78644 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 290 | | | | |

Table 3 presents the factors affecting teachers' perceived happiness at work, conducted by surveying and interviewing the teachers. By and large, the level of job satisfaction of different age groups during the implementation period is relatively high, although the satisfaction level is quite high at any age. This indicates that the 2018 General Education Program is making teachers feel more satisfied in their professional activities.

3.2.3. Influential Factors on Teachers' Job Satisfaction

From the data, we can see that the teacher "Good relationships with colleagues" has the highest score among factors affecting their perception of happiness (4.21/5 points) while the lowest score goes for "Teachers' satisfaction with students' results". Factors such as "Suitable teaching expertise", "Self-efficacy" and "Students' good attitude towards their study" obtain relatively high scores. Among all factors, "Teachers' satisfaction with students' results" is rated the lowest by teachers (3.29/5). This ranking seemingly contradicts the aforementioned. What is the root of this phenomenon? Nam Dinh has so far achieved numerous remarkable achievements in education sector, ranked at the top of the whole country. Apparently, teachers of this province have been put under great pressure regarding students' academic performance, which can be seen in the final outcome of this research and many other ones, and they want their students to go further in their academic performance. It is the high expectations of teachers that make them always feel dissatisfied with what students have achieved (Pham, 2020). "Appropriate regulations of working time" is not highly rated by teachers, either. According to statistics, up to 68.3% of teachers have to work from 8-10 hours and 30.3% of teachers need to use more than 10 hours to complete the daily workload. Secondary teachers in Nam Dinh province now have to use their excessive resources to work and this also shows that the workload of teachers compared to 10 years ago has not changed much (referring to the research results of Nguyen (2012).

"Professional development policy for teachers" is another factor not highly appreciated by teachers.

In the stage of implementing the new educational program, professional training needs to be paid more attention to. The current professional supplementation for teachers is largely carried out by training sessions, seminars, and professional exchanges while these forms of development are still not really appreciated in Vietnam. Many teachers still consider these training forms as "breaks" and actually "gain nothing" after those training sessions.

The results of this survey have partially revealed the initial assessment of teachers' perception of happiness in the early stages of implementing the 2018 General Education Program.

3.3. Teacher's Faith in Future Professional Happiness

There are two types of beliefs: positive beliefs and negative beliefs. In this study, we conducted a survey of teachers' beliefs based on the former. After a period of going through practical activities and getting trained to prepare for the implementation of the 2018 General Education Program, so far, whether or not teachers believe in a good future, we will review the survey results in Table 4.

Table 4. Do teachers believe that in the future you will be happier in their profession?.

| Believe level | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent | |
|---------------|-----------------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|-------|
| Valid | Completely disbelieve | 30 | 10.3 | 10.3 | 10.3 |
| | Slightly disbelieve | 41 | 14.1 | 14.1 | 24.5 |
| | Neutral | 122 | 42.1 | 42.1 | 66.6 |
| | Slightly believe | 60 | 20.7 | 20.7 | 87.2 |
| | Completely believe | 37 | 12.8 | 12.8 | 100.0 |
| Total | 290 | 100.0 | 100.0 | | |

Judging from the statistics table, we can clearly see that the percentage of teachers who choose the “neutral” level accounts for the highest rate of 42.1%, which may ambiguously represent “disbelieve” and “not disbelieve” at the same time. In Vietnamese culture, “neutral” expresses “uncertain feelings and attitudes towards subjects” (Vu, 2012). The rate of teachers who “slightly believe” in job satisfaction in the future is only 12.8%. Meanwhile, up to 10.3% of teachers today “completely disbelieve” in their future career satisfaction. Besides, there are also 14.1% of teachers who are “slightly disbelieving” about their professional happiness. However, if there were a correlation between “believe” and “disbelieve”, the number of teachers choosing “believe” would still take up a higher proportion. This is a positive sign for the change in the current 2018 General Education Program. However, concerning the context of education where teachers play core roles and determine the prosperity of this profession, these “disbelieve” statistics above indicate an unwanted “risk”.

The question is: why do teachers value their job satisfaction while not placing too much faith in the future? The interviews with some teachers clearly show that. “I don't put too much faith in it, at first it was nice to do so, but then I don't know how it will be in the future”. (Teacher No. 21), or Teacher No. 172: “I think we only have to be in this situation for the next few years then get accustomed to it and we will have to do all the unnamed things as before”. “The biggest change of the 2018 General Education Program is to pass on knowledge to develop the qualities of learners, whereby teachers also need to change teaching methods and techniques to meet those requirements. That said, most teachers are familiar with traditional teaching methods. In order to change, it takes a lot of time. In addition, with the current interdisciplinary integration, teachers' knowledge also needs to be broad enough to meet this requirement. There are still too many problems to solve to achieve that” (Teacher No. 205).

4. Conclusion

Job satisfaction is an extremely important measure for any industry, which provides leaders with a more comprehensive view of employees' attitudes and motivation. Education in Vietnam is in a period of general renovation, teachers are the people who bring inspiration, and are able to create a prosperous education system. Within the framework of the survey, the author pointed out the level of job satisfaction of teachers and specific expressions of that satisfaction and, at the same time, stated the factors affecting teachers' perception of happiness as follows:

- Teachers are currently evaluating their job satisfaction at a relatively high level.
- Teachers appreciate a few criteria for job satisfaction but many are still underestimated.
- There are many factors that affect teachers' perception of happiness, among which factors related to the relationship with colleagues is most rated.
- Teachers do not fully believe in their future professional happiness.

For that reason, The Ministry of Education of Vietnam needs more effective measures to better improve teachers' occupational happiness.

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