How satisfied are academics with their primary tasks of teaching, research and administration and management?

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Abstract Higher education (HE) is currently undergoing changes and facing challenges in the UK, including coping with growth in the mature student entry, the removal of the binary divide, the reduction of student grants and the likelihood that students will increasingly have to pay more for their education. This article reflects on sustainable development in HE and probes how satisfied academics are with their primary tasks of teaching, research and administration and management. Using a questionnaire survey, the study found that about 65 percent of the university teachers were satisfied, very satisfied or extremely satisfied with research. Similar figures for teaching and administration and management are about 80 and 40 percent respectively. The study further investigated operational aspects of universities and in particular, whether satisfaction with each of their core tasks was related to age, gender or rank. The results show that significant associations exist between age and satisfaction in the core aspects of the university teachers’ job. However the nature of the impact of age on the job satisfaction of academics varies from one aspect of the job to another. The nature of the relationships between age and research, teaching and administration and management is not clear, although the relationships themselves are statistically significant. While it appears that, generally, the older one is, the greater the satisfaction enjoyed with respect to teaching and administration and management, the reverse appears to be true with research satisfaction. The results also reveal, expectedly, that research satisfaction was related to rank – the higher the rank, the greater the level of research satisfaction. It was also found that gender satisfaction is not related to teaching, research or administration and management. The interpretations of these results and their implications to sustainability in higher education institutions are explored.

Introduction
The primary tasks of academics are in three areas, namely, teaching, research and administration and management. Together these tasks constitute the work of academics, although some people would argue that administration and management is of lesser importance to academics compared with the other two tasks. Indeed some would argue that the primary concern of academics is research excellence and that the other two tasks are of secondary importance. These differences in views represent principal contentions in a debate of what universities are for (Oshagbemi, 1988, pp. 148-53). What is not contestable is that the work of academics is an important organisational activity, which may affect the job satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the workers. Work is one of the
five indices incorporated in the Job Descriptive Index (JDI), a formulation which is used internationally as a measure of overall job satisfaction. The other four elements in the formulation are, pay, promotions, supervision and co-workers’ behaviour (Smith et al., 1969, 1985). While several researchers have investigated the satisfaction of workers with their pay, promotions, supervision and co-workers’ behaviour, not many of them have focused on the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of academics with their core obligations. The present study provides insight into the satisfaction of academics with their work. This will complement studies, which concentrate on other dimensions of the overall job satisfaction of academics.

This article examines how satisfied academics are with their primary tasks of teaching, research and administration and management and undertakes an assessment of the relative satisfaction levels among the three tasks, which are core aspects of their job. Furthermore the article looks at whether satisfaction levels in each of the three tasks is related to the age, rank or gender of the academics. Instead of adding the three tasks together and treating the sum of the tasks as constituting the work of academics, it was decided to examine each task independently. This is because there are often significant differences in the satisfaction levels received by various individuals in the performance of each of the three tasks or sets of activities (Oshagbemi, 1996).

The balance of this article will review the relevant literature and outline details of the method adopted for the study. Next, the background of respondents to the study will be described followed by a discussion of the results of the study where the implications of the results will also be explored. A summary and the conclusions of the study will finally be highlighted.

Literature review

While there have been several job satisfaction studies, very few of them are about the university teachers or academics in general (Oshagbemi, 1996). A few job satisfaction-related studies conducted with university teachers as subjects were, however, reported before 1981. The studies identified included those conducted by Gruneberg et al. (1974a, b); Startup et al. (1975); Gruneberg and Startup (1978); Startup and Gruneberg (1973, 1976); Nicholson and Miljus (1972). One of these studies discussed the relationship of the turnover decisions of the sampled university teachers with their overall job satisfaction. Other studies were concerned with the university teachers’ satisfaction with one or two facets of their job such as teaching, research or promotion prospects.

It is important to observe that the majority of these relevant studies were published over 20 years ago. In addition, without exception, each of the studies was carried out within only one university situation. One common problem with these studies is the difficulty of generalising their findings, as they were more or less case studies of the situations in particular universities. Twenty years is also long enough to regard these studies as dated, in view of the recent and current changes occurring in higher education in the UK. Numerous university policies and practices, which could affect the job satisfaction of the
academics, have been introduced or modified significantly especially over recent years. Motivated in part because of the identified gaps in knowledge, the current research was undertaken. It should be stated though that since 1996, a few job satisfaction studies specifically about university teachers, have been published by Oshagbemi (1996; 1997a, b, c; 1998; 1999a, b).

Method
To investigate how satisfied academics are with their primary tasks of teaching, research and administration and management and whether age, gender or rank, has any impact on the level of satisfaction, which they experience, the following research method was employed in the study.

Sample
A questionnaire survey was conducted in 1994. The population for the study comprised academics in the UK. A total of 1,102 questionnaires were administered to potential respondents chosen from 23 universities. The universities were selected to include sample institutions from all the regions of the country. A total of 554 usable questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 50.3 per cent. The names of the potential respondents were obtained from the Commonwealth Universities Yearbook (The Association of Commonwealth Universities, 1993).

Questionnaire
To measure job satisfaction, a questionnaire comprising a slightly modified form of the Job Descriptive Index (Smith et al., 1969; 1985) and some demographic questions was constructed. The Job Descriptive Index is one of the most popular measures of job satisfaction and has been found to produce highly reliable results (Imparato, 1972). The questionnaire designed attempted to measure overall job satisfaction, as well as satisfaction with different components of university teachers’ overall job satisfaction, including their primary tasks of teaching, research and administration and management (Hickson and Oshagbemi, 1999).

Each of the scales employed in the questionnaire was measured from a range representing (1) extremely dissatisfied to (7) extremely satisfied. Thus (4) on the scale represented indifference, i.e. neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. The demographic questions in the questionnaire included age, gender, rank, length of service in present university and length of service in higher education as a whole. Other questions sought to know satisfaction with their primary tasks of teaching, research and administration and management. The present study attempts to answer the question of how satisfied academics are with each of their core obligations in the university.

Statistical methods
To study how satisfied academics are with their primary tasks of teaching, research and administration and management and each one’s relationship with
age, gender and rank, a one-way analysis of variance, ANOVA, was performed. The analysis enables us to examine the individual impact of the independent variables on the level of satisfaction. Thus, the direct effects of age, gender and rank on satisfaction with each of their primary tasks were investigated. Descriptive statistics were computed to examine different levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with each of their primary tasks. In addition, histograms showing the nature of the relationships between gender, rank and age and satisfaction with each of teaching, research and administration and management were presented to depict the nature of the relationships graphically.

Background of respondents
Table I shows a breakdown of the university teachers who responded to our questionnaire. The table shows the distribution of respondents’ age, sex, rank, length of service in present university/higher education, areas of academic discipline, and their leadership or management responsibilities.

The information in Table I shows that the academic backgrounds of the respondents were very wide and cover most subject areas in the universities. The distribution of the length of service spent in higher education shows that respondents included relative new comers who had spent less than five years (about 15 percent), to workers who had spent more than 30 years in the university system (about 6 percent). As would be expected, perhaps, a large percentage of workers (almost 80 percent) fall in-between the new comers, and the workers whose service had been for a much longer period.

It was useful to find that almost 30 percent of the respondents had not worked for more than five years in their present universities. This percentage is about double the corresponding percentage of respondents who had worked in higher education during the same period. The comparison suggests some rates of staff turnover, retirement or new recruitment necessitated perhaps because of expansion of universities, which makes about a third of the academic staff relatively new in their present institutions. In fact, almost 50 percent of the respondents had worked for only ten years or less in their present universities. The corresponding figure for those who had worked in higher education during the same period is 36 percent. It is possible, however, that these figures would compare favourably with similar figures of the length of service of workers within other employment sectors, especially workers within other public sector organisations.

Table I also shows that the majority of the respondents were lecturers (about 55 percent), while a significant percentage were of senior lecturer rank. The relatively few readers and professors appears to be representative of the percentage of these top officers in the academic population. Only about 39 percent of the respondents were females. However, considering the estimated proportion of females in the total population, the percentage of those who responded to our questionnaire can certainly not be considered low.
It was observed from the results of the data analyses, that only one respondent was less than 25 years of age. One is not sure whether this finding suggests an ageing academic population or whether the average age of academics tends to be higher than the average age of workers in other employment sectors. It was further observed that the percentage of respondents who were less than 35 years old was about the same as the percentage of those who were older than 55 years. Over 70 percent of the respondents were between the 35-54 age bracket.

About 12 percent of the respondents held managerial posts as head of department or division, director of school, dean of faculty, provost or head of a
unit, e.g. an Institute or Centre. The percentage of those who held other management posts, such as year tutor, chairperson of a research group, project co-ordinator, director of undergraduate programmes, etc. was about double the figure of 12 percent. Clearly, the majority of the respondents were not currently in charge of an academic unit or group. However, it does not follow that this group did not have some administrative assignments, at least on occasional, if not, on a regular basis.

Results and discussion
Table II presents a frequency distribution and some statistics showing satisfaction, dissatisfaction and indifference of university teachers with their primary tasks of teaching, research and administration and management. It can be observed from the table that almost 65 percent of the university teachers were satisfied, very satisfied or extremely satisfied with research. Similar figures for teaching and administration and management are about 80 and 40 percent respectively. This means that university teachers are most satisfied with their tasks of teaching, research and administration and management in that order. Moreover there appears to be widespread differences in the satisfaction levels which university teachers enjoy by performing their tasks. For example, the percentage of those satisfied with teaching was about double the percentage of those satisfied with administration and management. Various statistics shown in Table II suggest that the satisfaction levels derived from each of the three tasks are very different indeed.

Table III confirms that the differences between the levels of satisfaction derived from core aspects of the university teachers’ job are statistically significant at 99.9 percent confidence level. This means that the satisfaction level derived from performing teaching is significantly different from that enjoyed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Research Frequency</th>
<th>Teaching Frequency</th>
<th>Administration and management Frequency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 = extremely dissatisfied</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 = very dissatisfied</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 = dissatisfied</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 = indifferent</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 = satisfied</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 = very satisfied</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 = extremely satisfied</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction (5+6+7)</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction (1+2+3)</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. A frequency distribution and some statistics showing satisfaction, dissatisfaction and indifference of university teachers with their primary tasks of teaching, research and administration and management.
from performing research which in turn is significantly different from the satisfaction level derived from performing administration and management. The very high t-values on Table III suggest that there are indeed major perceived differences among the three tasks.

Our results are consistent with earlier findings by Gruneberg and Startup that “teaching is a more satisfying aspect of the university’s life than is research” (1978, p. 76). From the list of the factors which contributed to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction, which the respondents were requested to include, the respondents appeared to have largely enjoyed the courses they taught, and it would appear that most staff chose the content of their courses. However, some teachers expressed dissatisfaction with class size and their teaching load. In the traditional universities, however, the importance of research tends to overshadow that of teaching. It is important to observe the relatively high standard deviation on satisfaction with research in Table II. Perhaps this suggests considerable variation among academics in their levels of competence and confidence in research.

It is believed that where teaching is related to research, the teachers tend to be more satisfied with both teaching and research. Unfortunately, as Halsey and Trow found from their own study, academics who were primarily oriented towards teaching rated their promotion chances lower than those primarily oriented towards research (1971, pp. 337-41). Thus, while there may be intrinsic gains from teaching, intrinsic gains and extrinsic rewards appear to flow more from research.

With the current changes in university policies, however, research as well as teaching will now both be assessed in most, if not all, universities in the UK. In the 1996 research assessment exercise, some universities chose not to take part referring to themselves as specialising in undergraduate teaching only. One is not sure if the government will allow “teaching only” universities, a term which some commentators have referred to as contradictory. It is, perhaps, debatable whether university education can really occur in an atmosphere devoid of enquiry and research.

On research, one area where university teachers have expressed dissatisfaction is the emphasis often given to quantity instead of the quality of the publications. The government appears to be responding to this concern. For example, unlike in the previous research assessment exercises, in the future ones, only a limited number of publications will be assessed per member of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table III.</th>
<th>Test of differences between the levels of satisfaction derived from core aspects of the university teachers’ job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ranking of job</td>
<td>Mean score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>5.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>4.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration and management</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
academic staff as a basis of estimating the research rating of academic units. Nevertheless the assessment panels still ask for a listing of overall publications of each member of the academic staff.

Unlike teaching and research, where the university teachers generally expressed a high level of satisfaction, they were, in comparison, dissatisfied with their administrative activities. Many respondents complained of the excessive paperwork demanded of them and that the time spent on administrative duties reduces the time left, especially for research. Some academic staff also detested the nature of some of their administrative obligations. In the words of one of the respondents, “the government has commercialised university education”.

Perhaps the dissatisfaction which the university teachers derived from administrative and managerial duties stems from the belief of some of them that administration and management, notwithstanding the relatively high proportion of time spent on those duties, was not really one of their primary functions. In an earlier study by Oshagbemi (1988), the sampled British academic leaders indicated that compared to research, for example, administrative duties did not constitute a core obligation. Moreover, the academic leaders enjoyed doing research in preference to administration and management (Oshagbemi, 1988, p. 136). Additionally, competence in administration and management contributes little to promotion prospects.

Table IV presents one-way ANOVA results showing, among other things, the satisfaction of academics with one of their primary tasks, teaching. It shows that age is significantly related to satisfaction with teaching, at the 99 percent confidence level. Figure 1 shows histograms depicting the nature of relationships between teaching satisfaction and age, gender and rank. It reveals that younger academics who are under 35 years of age are more satisfied with teaching than some older academics. This initial satisfaction level may be explained by the enthusiasm of new entrants to a profession. However, the satisfaction level of university teachers with teaching reduces by the time they

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of job</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F value</th>
<th>Pr &gt; F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.485</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.035</td>
<td>0.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.368</td>
<td>0.244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.389</td>
<td>0.050**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.626</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration and management</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.309</td>
<td>0.057*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.733</td>
<td>0.392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>0.975</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV. One-way ANOVA results showing the satisfaction of academics with their primary tasks of teaching, research and administration and management.

Notes: *p < 0.10; **p ≤ 0.05; ***p ≤ 0.01
are in the 35-44 age range. This is a phase when academics appear to appraise and appreciate the realities of this aspect of their jobs better. As they grow older, until retirement age, their level of satisfaction with teaching increases, perhaps as a result of their more skilful approach to the task and their consequent better performance of that aspect of the job.

Table IV also shows that gender and rank are not significantly related to satisfaction in teaching. Figure 1 reveals that while the job satisfaction scores on gender and rank are fairly high, they are not much different from one another. It means that academics are generally satisfied with this task across gender and rank.

Table IV also presents ANOVA results showing the satisfaction of academics with research which is one of their primary tasks. It shows that age and rank are significantly related to satisfaction with research while gender is not. Figure 2 shows histograms depicting the nature of relationships between research satisfaction and age, gender and rank. It reveals that research satisfaction decreased consistently with age and this finding was rather surprising. Perhaps the explanation may lie in the probability that older academics will not be executing new research projects as such, but may be busy supervising research students and writing papers from previous research. Another possible explanation is that, over the years, the method of funding research projects has changed dramatically. Unlike previously, when “blue skies” research was encouraged, applied research currently receives most
financial support from funding bodies. Thus satisfaction derived from initiating and executing new research projects may have declined in higher education. Over time, opportunities for promotion have also reduced vis-à-vis eligible applicants. Several eligible lecturers have no vacant professorial positions to aspire to and this consideration could possibly give rise to dissatisfaction with success in research as a means of helping them to obtain a Chair.

The histograms on Figure 2 also depict the interesting relationship between rank and research satisfaction. It shows a consistent rise from lecturer through to professor on the level of satisfaction received from research. Perhaps these results are as expected. While lecturers are at the bottom of the academic rank professors are at the pinnacle of their academic ladder.

Figure 2 also shows the relationship between research satisfaction and gender revealing an almost identical level of satisfaction between the sexes. Not surprisingly, Table IV confirms that research satisfaction is not statistically related to gender. On the other hand research satisfaction is statistically related to rank at the 99 percent confidence level and also to age at the 95 percent confidence level.

ANOVA results showing the satisfaction of academics with administration and management are presented in Table IV. It reveals that age is significantly related to satisfaction with administration and management while rank and
gender are not. Figure 3 shows histograms depicting the nature of relationships between satisfaction with administration and management and age, gender and rank.

Satisfaction with administration and management did not follow any consistent pattern relative to age as Figure 3 shows. Academics appear to be satisfied with administration and management when they are less than 35 years of age. The satisfaction level drops when they are about 40, only to rise some ten years later, with a further rise again towards retirement age. Age would not appear to be a very strong predictor of a consistent satisfaction pattern with this task. However age is related, although rather weakly, with satisfaction with administration and management at the 90 percent confidence level (refer to Table IV). Neither gender nor rank is statistically related with satisfaction with administration and management. Figure 3 shows the weak ratings on this task by most respondents, with mean job satisfaction scores of generally less than 4 and with very close ratings.

From the overall analyses, with the exception of rank, on which research satisfaction seems to depend and does so highly, age is the only variable shown to affect satisfaction levels on teaching, research and administration and management.

It would be observed that the levels of satisfaction among staff in universities and colleges might influence their interest or ability to deal with complex issues such as sustainable development in several ways. For those

![Figure 3](image-url)

**Figure 3.**
Histograms showing the nature of relationships between satisfaction with administration and management and age, gender and rank.

**Key**
- Satisfaction with administration and management
with high levels of satisfaction with research, for example, they may tend to be proactive with new and development projects, methods and issues of relevance and application, not only in their academic areas, but also in society at large. For those with high levels of satisfaction with teaching, they tend to be more innovative in educational philosophies and methods useful in imparting or disseminating knowledge. For skilled and interested academic administrators, they complement the teachers’ and researchers’ actions by providing, as much as possible, a conducive working environment.

Summary and conclusions
This research has concerned itself with exploring the job satisfaction levels of UK academics focusing, in particular, on their primary tasks of teaching, research and administration and management. This quest is justified as Abu-Saad and Hendrix (1995) suggest, teachers’ satisfaction with the work itself is the dominant job satisfaction factor. The study has examined the effects of age, gender and rank on the level of job satisfaction among UK academics on their primary tasks. The purpose is to examine the issue of sustainability in higher education and explore factors, which have relevance to the subject.

The results of the study showed that significant associations exist between age and satisfaction in teaching, research and administration and management, i.e. the work of the academics. The nature of these relations was discussed with reference to Figures 1 to 3. Our findings, therefore, reveal that age is related to satisfaction levels in the core aspects of the university teacher’s job. However, the nature of the impact of age on the job satisfaction of academics varies from one aspect of the job to another. The nature of the relationships between age and research, teaching and administration and management is not clear. While it appears that generally the older one is, the greater the satisfaction enjoyed with respect to teaching and administration and management, the reverse appears to be true with research satisfaction.

Another important finding confirms the almost obvious statement that research satisfaction is related to rank – the higher the rank, the greater the level of research satisfaction. All other investigations and analyses in this study are not statistically significant (refer to Table IV). In particular it was revealed that gender satisfaction is not related to teaching, research or administration and management.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to highlight the fact that the relationships found in this study are only associations, not cause-and-effect relations. For example, finding that younger university teachers are more satisfied with research does not imply that age is the cause of their satisfaction with that aspect of their work. Perhaps, as a direction for future research, more extensive studies can be carried out to examine other factors, which affect the level of job satisfaction of academics working in universities. If we are going to make any progress in respect of sustainability at higher educational institutions, we need to look further at the issue of satisfaction of academic workers.
References


