



## **Career and job satisfaction of pre-primary teachers**

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### **Abstract**

Promoting quality education depends on teacher job satisfaction. Student learning outcomes can improve when teachers are motivated, committed and dedicated to their work. This is more likely to happen when they are satisfied with their jobs. On the other hand, teachers who are not happy in their position may be more prone to burnout, which can have a negative impact on both their performance and student achievement. Helping children learn and develop is enjoyable for many instructors who choose to pursue this wonderful profession of teaching. One of the negative factors affecting teachers' job satisfaction is the lack of appreciation of the teaching profession as a whole. As in any job, there are difficulties that can reduce job satisfaction. Workload, salary, work environment, and support from peers and management are some variables that can affect a teacher's career and job satisfaction. Teachers should have access to professional development opportunities, resources and support, as well as a supportive work environment to promote job satisfaction and career success. Teachers may also benefit by seeking coaching or mentoring from more experienced instructors. In this paper, satisfaction with working conditions and motivation in the profession pre-primary teachers' perceptions of satisfaction with working conditions and motivation in the profession are examined using a qualitative methodology through a questionnaire with 217 respondents. The study aims to clarify the satisfaction with working conditions and motivation in the profession in kindergarten teachers through a questionnaire with suggested solutions. The questionnaire dealing with teacher's competencies was administered to 217 teachers of Slovak schools. The result is teachers' overall satisfaction with pay periods, working hours, amount of leave or length of notice period. On the other hand, salary as a means of motivation is an alarming result, while time and material equipment have worse motivational results.

**Keywords:** Teacher, pre-primary education, motivation, profession, questionnaire

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## **Introduction**

Helping children learn and develop is a rewarding experience for many instructors who choose to pursue this wonderful profession of teaching. As in any job, there are difficulties that can reduce job satisfaction. Workload, salary, work environment, and support from peers and management are some variables that can affect a teacher's career and job satisfaction. Teachers should have access to professional development opportunities, resources and support, as well as a supportive work environment to promote job satisfaction and career success. Teachers may also benefit by seeking coaching or mentoring from more experienced instructors.

Qualifications for working as a kindergarten teacher can be obtained in a number of ways. One option is to graduate from high school with a high school diploma focused on kindergarten teaching and education. A post-secondary education in kindergarten teaching will also provide the necessary qualifications. It is also possible to train for work at university and to take a bachelor's or master's degree in teaching and educational sciences in a programme focusing on early childhood education. It is also possible to add teaching to an existing degree in another field by completing an extension degree in early childhood education at a university (Minedu, 2022).

A school's ability to provide a happy and effective learning environment depends on the happiness of its teachers. Relaxation and the adoption of a healthy lifestyle are also advised for adequately motivating educators.

In this paper we address satisfaction with working conditions and motivation in the profession pre-primary education teachers perceive satisfaction with working conditions and motivation in the profession in Slovak schools in order to point out current problems and offer concrete solutions.

The reference point for teachers' job satisfaction is the cognitive evaluation of their overall work situation as well as the sub-work conditions compared to their expectations. Thus, the adaptation of a particular teacher to the working conditions is important, which should match the teacher's abilities and also interests. They must also not compromise the teacher's values, health, family life or dignity (Lazarová, 2011). According to Paulík (1999), positive satisfaction is generally influenced by socio-economic conditions which include remuneration for work, opportunity for career advancement, quality organization and management, quality leadership of the work group, friendly work climate, social prestige of the job, opportunity for independent decision making, interestingness of the job, meaningfulness of the activity, and availability of feedback. In her research, Smetáčková (2020) identified meaningfulness of work as the most fundamental source of job satisfaction among teachers, which is identified with the opportunity to develop children, to perceive their progress and to share joy with children. Also, a significant factor is precisely the teacher's contribution to society, in the sense of educating a

new generation and thus the possibility of partially influencing the future.

Factors influencing teacher satisfaction may include teachers' professional identity, meaningfulness of work and self-fulfilment, kindergarten climate, school leadership and cooperation with colleagues, demographic factors, the difficulty of the teacher's work and the lack of appreciation of the teaching profession.

*- Teachers' professional identity, meaningfulness of work and self-fulfilment*

One of the factors influencing teachers' job satisfaction is their professional identity and the values associated with it. Identity is a process of maturation of a teacher that is influenced by work, social, political or cultural conditions and self-reflection. By work values we mean the goals that a teacher wants to achieve and that are meaningful to him/her. Professional identity is already built during training for the profession, it also develops during entry into the profession and also during identification with the teaching profession (Göbelová and Seberová, 2012).

Perceiving one's own work as a meaningful activity translates into higher job satisfaction and also improves the overall relationship with work (Paulík, 2019). In 2017, Paulík conducted research with 317 participants, i.e., primary and secondary school teachers, and found that teachers tend to perceive their work as more meaningful. Job meaningfulness was reinforced by job satisfaction as well as teacher engagement. Conversely, teachers who perceived their work as less meaningful also found it more burdensome (Paulík, 2017). The possibility of self-development increases teachers' job satisfaction even when the teacher faces a high workload (Paulík, 1999). Conversely, the impossibility of self-realization is one of the most stressful factors in the work of teachers, together with work overload (Holeček, 2001).

*- Kindergarten climate, school leadership and cooperation with colleagues*

School climate can be defined as the relatively stable quality of the school's internal environment that is experienced by those working in it (Mareš, 2013). The most important interactions for a teacher are with students, parents and also with the school staff (Paulík, 1999). School leadership is also an important factor for school climate. Leadership influences not only the culture and setting of the school, but also the relationships between people in the school. Wong (2010) in his research findings supports the claim that school culture has a strong link with teacher satisfaction. An interesting finding of his research was that teachers in for-profit preschools were more satisfied in their jobs than teachers in for-profit institutions. The principal is an active creator of the school's image as well as material, organizational and ideological conditions (Smetáčková, 2020).

For a positive climate in the kindergarten it is necessary to maintain not only functioning relationships between teachers and children, but also between teachers with each other. Thus, the willingness and ability to cooperate between teachers is important. Teachers in a given

classroom should have the same view on the choice of educational and educational approaches, and in such a way that they act in the best interests of the children. If educators are not in agreement, tension and an uncomfortable classroom climate is created. Therefore, if we want the classroom climate to be of good quality, it is necessary that the cooperation between educators is working properly (Kofátková, 2014).

*- Demographic factors*

Job satisfaction increases with increasing age, peaking in middle adulthood and remaining at a similar level or decreasing thereafter (Kollárik, 2011). The duration of employment as a teacher also affects job satisfaction. For roughly the first year or first two years on the job, teachers are less satisfied than their colleagues who have more work experience. Adaptation problems during the first years may have an impact (Lazarová, 2011). The teaching profession is characterised by a high average age of the teaching staff and also a high level of feminisation. The largest proportion of female gender in education is in the teaching corps in kindergarten (Urbánek, 2005). While women are more satisfied in this position and consider only inappropriate behaviour of pupils as a problem, men are often dissatisfied with the salary and also the school facilities (Lazarová, 2011).

*- The demands of a teacher's job*

The teaching profession is time-consuming. In addition to the actual teaching, the teacher is required to make plans for teaching. According to Urbánek (2005), up to 30% of teachers engage in professional activities beyond their duties. Teaching is one of the helping professions. This implies that the teacher is there for the students and should be able to lend a helping hand when it is needed. Therefore, a committed inner relationship with the pupils is required, which can be overly burdensome (Kopřiva, 2011).

The high demands associated with being a kindergarten teacher are associated with teacher job dissatisfaction. Increased workload is associated with high numbers of children in classrooms, frequent turnover of stakeholders, staff shortages and also increased sickness. If there is a shortage of qualified teachers, the nursery management has to recruit unqualified staff who have to learn everything or are not suitable for the job at all. Possible conflicts with parents or problems with children caused by the poor social situation of the children's families also contribute to the workload. Psychological burden can also be caused by conflicts at work between colleagues or even pressure from superiors (Poschkamp, 2013). Rentzou (2012), in his research in kindergartens in Greece, found that the most burdensome factors for the kindergarten teachers themselves are considered to be the long working hours, which is associated with the fact that it is practically impossible to take a break in the activity; next is the large amount of indirect pedagogical work, and thus the preparation of curricula or consultation with the children's guardians and so on, and also very low or even no personal

remuneration.

*- Undervaluing the teaching profession*

At present, unqualified persons are often recruited for kindergarten teaching positions, thus underestimating the need for sufficient education to enter the profession. In the public imagination, the position of kindergarten teacher is often perceived as merely a kind of all-day babysitting while parents are at work and is associated with all-day play. When this perception is further combined with the educational institution's lack of preparation for practice, dissatisfaction on the part of new teachers is coupled with uncertainty and discontent (Smetáčková, 2020).

In case the teacher is not satisfied with his/her job for a longer period of time, it may lead to burnout syndrome. The teaching profession is one of the groups most at risk of this syndrome (Johnson, 2005). According to research conducted by Johnson and his colleagues (2005) on 25,000 people with different occupations, the teaching job ranked second worst in terms of physical strain and psychological well-being and also ranked sixth worst in terms of job satisfaction. Burnout syndrome has a negative impact not only on the life of the educator, but also on the students being taught (Mareš, 2013).

*- Contemporary demands on the profession and the teacher*

For kindergarten teachers, we can define three basic professional roles. The teacher is an inspirer, a facilitator and a consultant. As an inspirer, the teacher inspires the children and therefore motivates and creates conditions for personal development. He takes into account children's possibilities, needs, developmental specificities and also their interests. As a facilitator, he helps the child to understand not only the world around them, but also themselves and the relationships around them. In the role of a consultant, he supports children's communication skills and develops the ability of self-reflection (Šmelová and Prášilová, 2018). Duchovičová and Lazíková (2008) include helping the child to adapt to kindergarten among the activities that belong to kindergarten teachers, helping the child to socialise and prepare him/her for future entry into school. The teacher must also be able to implement the education of the pre-school child in accordance with the principles of the national curriculum policy. At the same time, he or she must adhere to the documents relating to the National Curriculum for Pre-primary Education.

The aim was to find out how pre-primary teachers perceive satisfaction with working conditions and motivation in the profession. We paid attention to the view on the part of the teacher's competences related to his/her personality. The survey will also be aimed at finding out the correlation between the teacher's life satisfaction and his/her self-assessment in the teaching practice, in which at the same time there spondents can preserve their identity, more honestly Express their opinions and feelings in the field of the issue understudy.

## **METHODS**

### ***Research Model:***

The questionnaire is one of the most commonly used methods in research. It is used in the social sciences for the mass and rapid ascertainment of facts, opinions, attitudes, preferences, values, motives, needs, interests, etc (Gavora et. al., 2010).

### ***Population-Sample (Study Group):***

The unstructured questionnaire was distributed to pre-primary teachers. It dealt with perceptions of their own competence. It had 17 supporting questions and served to analyze the detection of professional competencies perceived by the teacher in terms of professional, social, organizational, diagnostic and emotional aspects. Teachers expressed themselves on a scale to what extent do you have the competencies described in the question, on the basis of which they marked the option from "excellent" to the option "insufficient", "yes" or "no" or answered in a short answer. There was no right or wrong answer in these questionnaires.

### ***Data Collection Tools:***

The questions we will use to find out the satisfaction and motivation of the pre-primary teacher, namely I am satisfied with the working conditions and My motivation in the profession is. Respondents could answer yes, no and don't know. The primary questions included the teacher's institutional affiliation, region of practice, place of practice, age, length of teaching experience, and highest level of education attained. Teachers' ages ranged from 18-30 years 19.4%; 31-40 years 19.4%; 41- 50 years 25.8%; 51-60 years 28.1% and 61 years and above 7.4%. The length of teaching experience ranged from 0 - 5 years 20.7%; 6 - 10 years 18.9%; 11 - 15 years 6.9%; 16 - 20 years 8.8%; 21 - 25 years 4.6%; 26 - 30 years 8.8% and 31 years and above 31.3%.

### ***Data Collection:***

We collected data through Google forms. We contacted specific kindergartens across Slovakia via emails. Out of 332 teachers contacted, 217 respondents completed the questionnaire. We collected data from January to March in 2022.

### ***Data Analysis:***

As part of the statistical analysis, we used Pearson chi-square test of independence (at  $\alpha = 0.05$  level) to compare the satisfaction of pre-primary teachers with their working conditions (pay dates, working hours, amount of leave and length of working hours) based on selected socio-demographic factors - length of teaching experience, age, highest educational level attained, type of pre-primary school according to the founder and location of the pre-primary school. In the case of comparison of kindergarten teachers' opinions on satisfaction with working hours and length of working hours, no significant differences (with respect to either factor) were

found between the groups of respondents ( $p > 0.05$ ). The questionnaire was evaluated in the statistical program Statistics. Each question was evaluated separately.

## FINDINGS

**Table 1.** Satisfaction with working hours

Satisfaction with working hours ×	Chi-square	df	p
Type of kindergarten	5,179735	df=2	p=,07503
Residence of the kindergarten	,6734676	df=1	p=,41185
Age	4,645643	df=4	p=,32563
Length of teaching experience	11,74116	df=6	p=,06800
Highest education attained	2,821159	df=2	p=,24400

The given Table 1 describes teachers' satisfaction with working hours and type of kindergarten, location of kindergarten, age, length of teaching experience and highest educational attainment.

**Table 2.** Satisfaction with the length of working hours

Satisfaction with the length of working hours x	Chi-square	df	p
Type of kindergarten	5,822485	df=2	p=,05441
Residence of the kindergarten	,7766272	df=1	p=,37817
Age	9,139585	df=4	p=,05770
Length of teaching experience	10,50000	df=6	p=,10511
Highest education attained	,6122552	df=2	p=,73629

Table 2 describes teachers' satisfaction with length of service versus type of kindergarten, location of kindergarten, age, length of teaching experience, and highest level of education attained.

When comparing the respondents' satisfaction with pay dates, a significant difference was confirmed for one factor, "location of the MO" ( $\chi^2 = 6.435$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.01119 < 0.05$ ). Kindergarten teachers working in kindergartens located in villages are significantly more dissatisfied with pay dates than kindergarten teachers working in cities.

**Table 3.** Satisfaction with payout terms

Satisfaction with payout terms ×	Chi-square	df	p
Type of kindergarten	,0682682	df=2	p=,96644
Residence of the kindergarten	6,434938	df=1	p=,01119
Age	4,334301	df=4	p=,36265
Length of teaching experience	6,666762	df=6	p=,35277
Highest education attained	1,777204	df=2	p=,41123

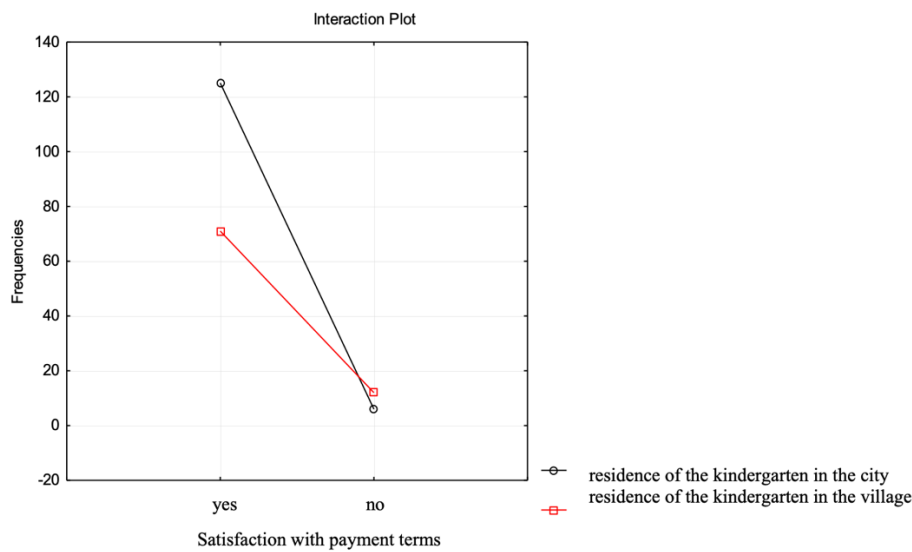
Table 3 describes the Chi-square results of teachers' satisfaction with pay dates compared with kindergarten type, kindergarten location, age, years of teaching experience, and highest level of education attained.

**Table 4.** Satisfaction with payout terms of city and village teachers

Residence of the kindergarten	2-Way Summary Table: Expected Frequencies		
	Satisfaction with payment terms yes	Satisfaction with payment terms no	Row Totals
City	119,9813	11,01869	131,0000
Village	76,0187	6,98131	83,0000
Totals	196,0000	18,00000	214,0000

Table 4 below shows respondents' answers from the perspective of the city and municipality, along with their comments on whether or not they were satisfied with the pay dates.

**Graph1.** Satisfaction with payout conditions - differences and association



Comparison of the respondents' satisfaction with the amount of leave also confirmed a significant difference between teachers working in kindergartens in towns and villages ( $\chi^2 = 5.191$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.0227 < 0.05$ ), where teachers working in kindergartens in villages were significantly more likely to declare dissatisfaction with the amount of leave than teachers working in kindergartens in towns.

**Table 5.** Satisfaction with the amount of holidays

Satisfaction with the amount of holidays ×	Chi-square	df	p
Type of kindergarten	,9166013	df=2	p=,63236
Residence of the kindergarten	5,191175	df=1	p=,02270
Age	3,436657	df=4	p=,48757
Length of teaching experience	4,984775	df=6	p=,54577
Highest education attained	2,831420	df=2	p=,24275

We also addressed the question regarding satisfaction with the amount of leave, Table 5 shows the specific responses of teachers by Chi-square results also compared with the type of kindergarten, kindergarten location, age, length of teaching experience, and highest level of education attained.



**Table 6.** Summary table and expected frequencies

Summary Table: Expected Frequencies			
Pearson Chi-square: 7,15685, df=1, p=,007468. Yates Chi-sqaure=5,191175, df=1, p=0,00270			
Residence of the kindergarten	Satisfaction with the amount of holidays yes	Satisfaction with the amount of holidays no	Row Totals
City	128,6291	4,370892	133,0000
Village	77,3709	2,629108	80,0000
All Groups	206,0000	7,00000	213,0000

The last Table 6 describes whether the kindergarten is located in the city or in the village and expresses satisfaction with the vacation rate.

**Graph2.** Satisfaction with the amount of holidays - differences and association



In the questionnaire survey, kindergarten teachers commented on a number of motivational factors - relationship with children, relationship with colleagues, relationship with parents, creative work, salary, material equipment, socialization, time and the use of new methods and forms of work. In the case of the first seven factors, no significant differences were found between the groups of respondents ( $p > 0.05$ ). The most significant differences between the groups of teachers were observed in the case of the motivational factor "time". Time is a significantly more frequent motivational factor for female kindergarten teachers working in urban kindergartens ( $\chi^2 = 5.075$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.02428 < 0.05$ ), for female kindergarten teachers working in state kindergartens ( $\chi^2 = 6.513$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p = 0.03853 < 0.05$ ) and for tenured female teachers with less than 15 years of experience ( $\chi^2 = 13.181$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $p = 0.04025 < 0.05$ ).

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Teachers' motivation as well as their satisfaction is influenced by factors such as lower pay, social recognition of work, little opportunity for career advancement, high workload, close interconnection of teachers' work and non-work life, difficult to measure job performance, lengthy feedback, and many others (Paulík, 1999).

Give Teachers the Chance to Grow Professionally – Giving teachers the chance to grow professionally will inspire them. To assist them in staying up to date with the most recent teaching techniques and technology, provide professional development opportunities such as seminars and conferences. Promote Teamwork and Collaboration – Teachers flourish in collaborative settings where they may exchange ideas and learn from one another. By giving teachers the chance to collaborate on projects, curriculum creation, and lesson planning, you can promote teamwork. Recognise and Reward Success – Thank and congratulate educators for their efforts and accomplishments. This can be accomplished through formally recognised programmes, such as Teacher of the Year awards, or informally recognised programmes, such as a straightforward thank you card or staff meeting shout-out. Create a Positive Work Environment – Teachers who work in environments that are encouraging and positive are more likely to be motivated. Encourage open communication, cooperation, and a secure and pleasant workspace to create a healthy work atmosphere. Engage Teachers in Decision-Making – When teachers have a voice in choices that affect their classrooms and students, they are more committed to their profession. Asking for their opinions on budgets, school policy, and curriculum development will include teachers in decision-making. Offer Competitive Compensation and Benefits – When teachers believe their efforts are being adequately paid, they are more motivated. To entice and keep great people, provide perks and compensation that are competitive. Celebrate Success – Honour your instructors' and the community's successes at school. Public acknowledgement, such as in newsletters, on social media, and at school activities, can be used to achieve this.

When comparing the views of kindergarten teachers on satisfaction with working hours and length of working time, no statistically significant differences were found between the different groups of respondents. However, compared to urban instructors, those working in rural kindergartens expressed significantly more dissatisfaction with the length of their pay period, and similarly, those working in rural kindergartens often expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of vacation time. For the first seven motivational factors, which included relationships with children, relationships with co-workers, relationships with parents, creative work, salary, material facilities, socialisation, time, and use of new methods and forms of work, there were no significant differences between the groups of respondents. In general, more motivated teachers are more committed to the development of their profession and also engage in various

innovative programs while striving to improve the quality of their students' learning (Cave and Mulloy, 2010). According to experts, the most common reason for teachers leaving their positions is the lack of support for teachers from school leadership (Richards, 2003). Therefore, we can conclude that an important factor in teacher motivation is not only financial remuneration, but also support from the school in professional development or in improving working conditions. According to Matoušková and Spurný (2008), the main factors influencing the level of teacher motivation include the teacher's personality, and thus his/her adaptability, indomitability and openness, as well as social relationships, personal contribution to the profession and specific working conditions. Sufficient teacher motivation then has positive effects on the teacher's work and the motivation is further transferred to the students. Through research, it was found that teachers with higher motivational autonomy felt less burden and were more job satisfied than colleagues with lower motivation. However, according to researchers, the prediction of the emergence of motivation in teachers is still elusive despite intensive research (Shaari, et al., 2002).

**Conflict of Interest:** There is no conflict.

**Statement of Contribution of Researchers:** Author: % 100

**Information about the Ethics Committee Permission:**

The authors agreed with the wording of the questionnaire. The researchers present the above mentioned work as their own. Researchers have correct data that has not been manipulated for any interest. The respondents were informed about the questionnaire and were provided with all the necessary data. With the completion, they agreed to provide anonymous data to process the research.

Ethical treatment of subjects: The research involving the respondents was with all ethical standards and regulations. The data was handled sensitively.

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