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REFLECTION ON JOB SATISFACTION AND JOB STRESS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN KERALA DURING COVID-19

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Abstract: Education is a major factor to achieve sustainable human development in any country; and improve the quality and achieve equity are the two main goals of any educational reforms (Alaraji, 2016). In this era of technological and information revolution, the progress of any nation depends solely on the quality of education. The 21st century teachers are expected to learn modern technologies, go global, go ahead in social settings and build positive digital footprints (Odebode, 2018). The covid pandemic situation had shook the world severely and has demanded for a revamp from traditional offline mode of teaching to online mode. The present study is a reflection on job satisfaction and job stress of primary school teachers in Kerala during covid-19 pandemic period. A survey was conducted on a sample of 32 primary school teachers in Kerala. The investigator obtained different opinions with respect to different components of the variables under study. With respect to components of job satisfaction like physical facilities, rapport with students, the teachers expressed dissatisfaction, but with respect to the components like satisfaction with authorities, satisfaction with social status and family welfare, relationship with co-workers, teachers were found to be more satisfied. The components -intrinsic aspect of the job, promotional avenues and services conditions, institutional plans and policies were found to be unaltered. Job stress with respect to the components-responsibility, powerlessness, working conditions, personal inadequacy and lack of motivation, are found to be increased. The components of job stress like work relationships, work load, role ambiguity, groupism and external pressure were found to be decreased. The negative impacts on job satisfaction and job stress can be attributed to the unavailability of facilities required for teaching in an online platform and increase in over interference of parents. The positive impacts might be due to the decrease in additional works assigned to teachers, increased recognition for their work and better relationship with co-workers. The study throws light to the fact that an effort from the government and policy makers to provide adequate digital facilities might improve the satisfaction and decrease the stress level of teachers.

Index Terms – Job satisfaction, job stress, psychosocial variables, primary schools, covid-19 pandemic.

I. INTRODUCTION

We are living in an era of technological and information revolution. An educational system which can pace with these changes without compromising its quality has become a necessity across the globe. The quality of education depends on many factors and teacher is the most important one. Education is a man making process and it is the teacher who nurture and guide the future generation in a socially acceptable way. In many societies around the world, teachers are looked upon as guiding lamps to bring about positive changes in the lives of people. In addition to the role of teachers as scaffolders in the process of knowledge construction by students, they are often perceived as leaders who can render advice on various issues in the community. However, minimum reputation and low wages are forcing teachers in many societies to leave the profession. Policy makers, school principals and other education stakeholders are challenged with questions about how to identify, recruit and retain effective teachers (Zakariya, Bjorkestol and Nilsen, 2020). The level of satisfaction a person has with respect to his/her job is a good indicator of his/her effectiveness in that particular job. Robbins and Coulter as cited by Ali and Bashir (2018) states that satisfied employees are committed to their organizations and show a positive attitude towards their job and perform well.

Job satisfaction can be defined as the extent to which a person is pleased or satisfied by the content and environment of work or is displeased or frustrated by inadequate working conditions and tedious job content (Page & Thomas, 1977). Locke (1976) as cited by Demirtas (2010) defined job satisfaction as a positive or pleasant emotional state resulting from a person's appreciation of his/her own job or experience. According to Locke, teachers' job satisfaction is a cognitive judgemental process, which should include all characteristics of the job itself and the work environment, which may be rewarding, fulfilling, satisfying, frustrating or unsatisfying.

According to Gligorovic et al (2014) as cited by Beegum and Bindu (2021), apart from teaching, the teachers are entrusted with students' security, providing them healthy atmosphere, communicating and collaborating with fellow teachers, parents, administrators, developing their own skills and knowledge, organizing school trips etc. To perform these functions flawlessly, they are expected to possess high level of job satisfaction. According to Bhakta (2016) as cited by Beegum and Bindu (2021) job satisfaction has significant effect on the motivation of teachers, teachers' performance and students' learning. A study conducted by Kapri in 2017 revealed that job satisfaction is necessary for the development of any educational organization as it influence attitude, morale, absenteeism and production level of teachers. Many studies on this area considered intrinsic aspect of the job, salary; promotional avenues and services conditions, physical facilities, institutional plans and policies, satisfaction with authorities, satisfaction with social status and family welfare, rapport with students and relationship with co-workers as major factors that affect the job satisfaction of a teacher.

Job stress refers to unpleasant emotions experienced such as anger, tension, frustration, anxiety, depression and nervousness resulting from different aspects of work (Pearsall, 2000). It can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker (NIOSH, n.d).

Harish and Jayaprabha (2018) as cited by Beegum and Bindu (2021) pointed out poor pay, working conditions and lack of public support as contributing factors to teachers' attrition ratio. The study further states that job related stress causes poor job performance characterized by poor relationship with students, unwillingness to implement new instructional strategies, higher rates of absenteeism and resignation of teaching positions. Most of the studies on teachers' job stress identified work load, role ambiguity, groupism and external pressure, responsibility, powerlessness, work relationships, working conditions, personal inadequacy and lack of motivation as the factors that influence the stress level of teachers.

II. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Economic and sustainable development are the aims of all countries across the globe. Education is an asset to every nation. Quality education is a right of every child across the globe. It is not the monopoly of a particular country or a region, though the educational policies adopt in one country may differ from the other. Educational policies of a country reflect their society, cultural ideology, the learners, the teachers etc. Of the many factors which determine the quality of education, the one factor which is common in all countries and one that assumes significant role is that of a teacher. A teacher who is content with his/her job can only deliver his/her duties responsibly.

Society is changing with the scientific and technological advancements. Teaching, which was once considered as a noble profession, has started to lose its glitter. Teachers, who were once considered next to God in many societies across the globe, is not getting the respect and reputation they deserve. Many teachers consider teaching profession only as a means to generate income. Many studies on absenteeism and organizational commitment ascertain poor level of job satisfaction as the reason behind absenteeism and poor commitment to job. This is a serious issue that has gripped the entire educational system across the globe. So, educationalists and policy makers look forward to addressing this issue of satisfaction amongst the teachers.

All countries which aim at its economic development invest in two factors- health and education. The covid 19 pandemic has brought about significant changes not only in our health sector but also in our educational system. A revamp from traditional offline mode of classes to online mode changed the educational culture of countries across the globe and has brought about changes in the psychological attributes of all human resources in the field. During this pandemic period the teachers as well as the students are not able to attend the schools. As such both the parties are not able to interact with each other beyond the time duration set for their online classes. Teachers and students are expected to establish a rapport with each other for the effective teaching learning process. When it comes to primary stage of education, the establishment of rapport between teachers and students is very imperative and is the first stage of educating primary school children. If this affective domain characteristic is not established well, this might affect the content transaction. Moreover, the teachers are not able to monitor their students' progress just like in regular classrooms. These may leave them less satisfied with their work and may cause stress in them. In addition to this, more parental involvement and parental scaffolding rendering to children in the new technology-based teaching learning platform compared to the traditional classroom, where there was no involvement of a third party, may lead to dissatisfaction and stress in teachers. Teachers often fail to monitor the real progress of children due to parental help in doing the assignments meant for children. These facts make it necessary to conduct a study on the job satisfaction and job stress of teachers especially when the government is opting for blended learning in the future; and such a study will enable the policy makers to take steps which will boost the factors which is rewarding and eliminate the factors which adversely affect the satisfaction of teachers when they implement new methods.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does the revamp from offline to online mode of teaching affect the job satisfaction of teachers?
2. What are the difficulties faced by the teachers during online instruction?
3. Do the digital divide and consequent issues increase the stress of teachers?

IV. OBJECTIVES

1. To reflect on the job satisfaction of primary school teachers in Kerala during Covid-19 pandemic.
2. To reflect on the job stress of primary school teachers in Kerala during Covid-19 pandemic.

V. METHOD IN BRIEF

The investigators collected data from 32 primary school teachers using an open-ended questionnaire regarding job stress and job satisfaction during Covid-19 pandemic. The free responses were analysed keeping the dimensions of job satisfaction – Intrinsic aspect of the job, Salary; promotional avenues and services conditions, Physical facilities, Institutional plans and policies, Satisfaction with authorities, Satisfaction with social status and family welfare, Rapport with students and Relationship with co-workers; and job stress –work load, role ambiguity, groupism and external pressure, responsibility, powerlessness, work relationships, working conditions, personal inadequacy and lack of motivation. The investigators also conducted unstructured telephonic and in person interviews with primary school teachers. The primary school teachers have expressed their opinion and level of job satisfaction and job stress in a descriptive language. The audio responses were recorded and qualitatively analysed.

VI. REFLECTION ON JOB SATISFACTION AND JOB STRESS

The detailed description of experiences of primary school teachers in Kerala revealed that students are suffering from lack of facilities in the context of online learning during Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. There is a discrimination between students having sufficient facilities to avail online learning resources and those who are not having these facilities. The job stress that the teachers have faced was reported mainly due to digital divides in a class. The non-availability of devices to get online connection with the teacher was also the concern of the teachers. Many of the teachers tried to compensate this loss by sending images, videos, e-texts,

audio records in the form of whatsapp messages. But some of the parents complained that they are not having sufficient “daily data package” to download the e-materials. Teachers tried many ways to support the students. Some teachers tried to support the children by providing hard copies to them. Some purchased smart phones for the students who didn't have them. Some of the teachers helped the students by charging data package. This was for getting satisfaction while teaching. Teachers have planned to make alternative arrangements for scaffolding digitally disadvantaged students by providing media facilities and internet connection at school. But some of the parents were not ready to send their wards due to the fear that their children might get infected with the virus. So many of the alternative plans could not find any result. After the failure of this plan, the teachers tried to contact their children through phone calls. But the teachers found difficulty in continuous evaluation processes. So, the progress of children couldn't be monitored properly. It leads to dissatisfaction in teachers.

Those who are having smart phones with their parents were not available at day time as the parents are working in different places. So, the children are not able to submit the assigned works on time. In such cases the teachers are expected to pressurize their students as well as parents and it leads to job stress in them. Some parents view it positively and some others negatively. Also, some parents do the assignments on behalf of their wards which leads to non-achievement the learning objectives by the children. This leads to lack of pre-requisites for next class. This might have created two distinct groups in the class- one with pre-requisites and the other without. It would have demanded extra effort on the part of teacher to teach them together. This might be the reason for increased stress among teachers. Further, the individual difference could not be considered properly by teachers during online classes. In offline classes the teacher could address the individual difference well. So the online teaching was stressful for the teachers.

Teachers handling conceptual subjects like science, mathematics etc. could find it difficult to develop correct concepts among students. Doubt clearance sessions in these subjects are not satisfactory as well. Language teachers are bothered about the poor reading and writing skills of students. These teachers make efforts to improve their skills by letting the students to read books over phone. This is highly time consuming and the teacher could not connect all the digitally disadvantaged students over the phone, regularly.

In classrooms, the teacher must establish rapport with the students as it is essential to ensure participation of students in the teaching-learning process through interactive sessions such as questioning, discussion etc. It is very crucial for the processing of information. In the case of newly joined students, since they haven't seen their teachers directly, the teachers are failing to establish rapport with them. This affects the children's attitude towards learning.

Many teachers reported that the interpersonal relationship between teachers got enhanced during this pandemic situation. This might be due to the collaborative and cooperative efforts done by them to develop online supporting materials for the children. This leads to reduction in stress with respect to the interpersonal relationship.

With respect to salary and other incentives, teachers in some sectors of education incurred a reduction in their salary. Many of the teachers considered this as against norms, as they are putting more efforts in the online platform. Also the covid pandemic and the subsequent lockdown do not bring about much reduction in their life expenses.

Many teachers opined that their relationship with the parents of their students have improved and parents have started appreciating teachers for their effort to make their wards educated. This might be because the parents could watch the efforts put forward by teachers in the online class and hence could realise and recognise the real effort put forward by the teachers in the offline class.

VII. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Contrary to the result obtained from quantitative studies conducted by Beegum and Bindu (2021), the teachers expressed high level of dissatisfaction and stress in a descriptive language when the investigator interviewed them telephonically. These contradictory results may be due to the emergence of new factors or the already existing minor factors which gained dominance in the entirely new educational scenario. If we look deep into the factors that affect the job satisfaction and job stress of teachers, the factors like parental involvement, facilities at students' home were not a matter of concern and these were often discarded or considered with less importance. However, the interview with the teachers revealed how important it is to limit the over interference of parents. Some parents are not bothered about the negative outcomes when they do the assignments of their wards on their behalf. Teachers found it really difficult to monitor the real progress of such students who do the activities with the help of their parents. This actually makes the continuous and comprehensive evaluation process meaningless. In such a scenario the teacher will be dissatisfied. Similarly, the inability of parents to provide necessary technological assistance/aid to their wards at home is a matter

of tension among the teachers. The students cannot attend the schools due to the lockdown even if the teachers are willing to provide facilities at the school.

The job stress is found to be decreased with respect to external pressure and work load. This might be due to the increase in appreciation for their job and decrease in the additional duties assigned to them apart from teaching. The parents could see and realise the real effort put forward by the teachers in educating their wards through online classes, which otherwise was impossible in an offline classroom. So they have started appreciating teachers for their effort. A classroom is a heterogeneous one. Students of different nature, interest, attitude, aptitude and capabilities are put together in a classroom. Education is a man making process and as such the teachers have to design instructional activities according to these individual differences. To plan, design and execute these in a classroom requires lot of effort and patience on the part of teacher. So teaching is a job which requires equal amount of mental and physical efforts. Neglecting this fact, the teachers were often entrusted with other duties apart from teaching by the authorities. There is a considerable reduction in the number of such tasks assigned to them due to the Covid outbreak and the subsequent lockdown. This would have alleviated the job stress. Also, Kerala is a state having more number of female teachers than male teachers especially in the primary schools. Even though our constitution guarantees equality the stereotype that women have to do household chores and look after kids and older people at home even if she is working, haven't yet changed. As such, the female teachers, who found difficulty in balancing family life and professional life, are now trying to balance both without compromising one for the other. This would also have an impact on their job satisfaction and job stress.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Teachers' job satisfaction needed to be enhanced through providing better physical environment: facilities such as computer, proper INTERNET connection, digital devices, etc., better payment and better policies for creation of digital hubs, provision of digitally disadvantaged students to access them etc. In the Covid pandemic situation the primary school children were away from the school environment. Primary school teachers are expected to give due support to children during this mentally unbalanced period of time. To support the students, it is essential that the teachers themselves need to be away from stress generating situations and environment. They are expected to remain motivated, calm and composed. From the interview with the teachers it is noticed that the dissatisfaction and the stress experienced by them are mainly because the students are physically away from them and the children's home environment. When the children are at home, the teachers find it difficult to monitor their progress and cater education according to the individual needs and proximal development level. Also, parental involvement in tasks assigned to children make it further difficult to achieve the objectives. This generates a confusion and stress among teachers regarding the attainment of learning objectives. This creates tension in the teachers and they are found to be less satisfied with the job. The government is expected to support the teachers through policy changes so as to bring the children back to school. The policies need to be practical, feasible and be able to address students', teachers' and staffs' safety. The local bodies are expected to create awareness among parents and ensure safe working environment in the schools.

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