

Non-financial Rewards and Job Satisfaction among State University Academics of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Studies on non-financial rewards are scarce among state university academics of Sri Lanka. Therefore, we aim to describe the association between non-financial rewards and job satisfaction. An online survey was conducted to collect data on demography, non-financial reward, and job satisfaction. Binary logistic regression was performed to determine the significant association between variables of interest and job satisfaction ($P < 0.05$). A total of 4675 emails were sent and 309 entries were included in the final analysis. Overall, 54.4% scored ≥ 75 out of 100 for job satisfaction. Recognition by the university for the contribution to the university [OR = 3.3 (95% CI 1.5-7.2)], responsibilities held as a teacher in the university [OR = 6.5 (95% CI 1.8-23.6)] and involvement of the academic in decision-making by the university management [OR = 2.4 (95% CI 1.0-5.5)] were the non-financial rewards significantly associated with job satisfaction. Thus, authorities could focus on enhancing such rewards.

Key Words: Decision-making, Personal Development, Recognition, Work-life Balance, Workplace Environment

Introduction

Non-financial Rewards

Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory considers motivation factors like advancement, work itself, the possibility of growth, responsibility, recognition and achievement to be more important than hygiene factors like interpersonal relationships, salary, policies and administration, supervision and working conditions (Alshmemri et al, 2017). Emphasis is made on the need for support and encouragement of career advancement and employee recognition for the enhancement of the organization (Dim et al, 2020). Many scholars confirmed that there is a significant impact of non-financial rewards on several factors such as employee job satisfaction, employee motivation, and organizational performance (Abdullah and Wan, 2013; Dim et al, 2020; Pushpasiri et al, 2018; Tausif, 2012).

Job Satisfaction

Employee job satisfaction is a key factor in the organization's effective use of personnel (Koeske et al, 1994). Leadership management communication with subordinates, feedback received from one's supervisor, training opportunities for employees, career opportunities within the company, and teamwork among employees are significantly related to job satisfaction (Shoman, 2009). Also, the nature of work, salary, advancement opportunities, management, work groups and work conditions could influence job satisfaction (Aziri, 2011). Further, global studies have revealed a positive association between non-financial rewards and job satisfaction (Bustamam et al, 2014; Ozcan et al, 2015; Sakaya, 2019; Tausif, 2012). Moreover, job security showed the highest factor effect on job satisfaction among academics of private universities (Ahmad, 2018).

Association between Non-financial Rewards and Job Satisfaction

Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation of employees is crucial. Higher motivation could lead to more committed and efficient employees who are effective for the organization. However, if motivation is ignored it could lead to poor performance, demotivation, non-commitment, turnover and absenteeism (Kalhor et al, 2017). Association is observed between non-financial rewards and job satisfaction among public sector school teachers (Tausif, 2012), private companies (Akbar, Riaz, Arif and Hayat, 2018), private bank industry (Pushpasiri et al, 2018), apparel organizations (Sankalpana and Jayasekara, 2017) and vehicle emission test industry (Kumarapeli, 2019). Also, several dimensions of non-financial rewards such as flexible working arrangement, freedom, advancement opportunities, promotion, empowerment, competitive work environment, individual reward preference, recognition, personal development, work-life balance, workplace environment, performance feedback and job autonomy could affect employee job satisfaction (Akbar, Riaz, Arif and Hayat, 2018; Pushpasiri et al, 2018; Ridwan and Anik, 2020; Tausif, 2012).

Problem Statement

Studies on non-financial rewards are scarce among state university academics in Sri Lanka. Moreover, Sri Lanka confirmed its first local case of COVID-19 in March 2020 and it faced the 2nd wave from the beginning of October 2020. During the COVID-19 pandemic, university students are expected to follow their teaching-learning activities through the internet. Therefore, the permanent academic staff had to train themselves in novel teaching methods to adapt to the need of the hour. The above could have had an impact on their job satisfaction and made them online for extra hours. Hence, there is a need for research on non-financial rewards among state university academics in Sri Lanka.

Objective

The study aims to describe the non-financial rewards (independent variable), job satisfaction (dependent variable) and the association between the two among permanent academic staff of the state universities in Sri Lanka using an online survey. The findings of the study would help relevant authorities, like the University Grants Commission (UGC), in planning interventions to enhance job satisfaction among permanent staff.

Conceptual Framework

The academic staff members in state universities in Sri Lanka strive to deliver high-quality knowledge to university students. Hence, their job satisfaction is essential to achieving the above goal. The financial benefits such as salary and allowances alone would not be sufficient to satisfy the academics. Therefore, the present study proposes the following conceptual framework. The “non-financial reward” is the independent variable and it was examined through recognition, personal development, work-life balance and workplace environment. The dependent variable is “job satisfaction” (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Literature Review

Herzberg’s two-factor theory says that extrinsic rewards (salary, allowances, etc.) help only to reduce job dissatisfaction while intrinsic rewards (non-financial rewards) help to increase employee job satisfaction (Gawel, 1996). Most managers can motivate their subordinates by using positive reinforcement (Beatty and Schneier, 1975). Also, job satisfaction is a feeling and it varies according to efficiency in work, current work status, fringe supervision and co-worker relationship (Amarasena, Ajward and Haque, 2015; Parvin and Kabir, 2011). Moreover, employees are more satisfied with teamwork (El-Hosany, 2016). According to previous studies conducted around the globe including the developing countries in Asia, there is a positive relationship between non-financial rewards and job satisfaction (Bustamam et al, 2014; Ozcan et al, 2015; Sakaya, 2019; Tausif, 2012).

Non-financial rewards are not direct payments of cash. Employees are encouraged by respecting their autonomy, involving them in decision-making, improving work conditions and recognizing their work (Abdullah and Wan, 2013). In addition, flexible working hours, career advancement and training opportunities are also considered non-financial rewards (Schlechter et al, 2015). Hence, optimum work-life balance helps to reduce work-family conflicts and enhance personal and professional development (Mendis and Weerakkody, 2018). Further, job satisfaction is a positive feeling toward the profession while negative feelings would lead to dissatisfaction (Shahab and Nisa, 2014). Unmanaged employee job dissatisfaction may badly affect the smooth running of the organization. The management needs to understand the impact and potential of job satisfaction on the employees. Most organizations are not in a

position to satisfy all needs of the employee at once. Therefore, the relevant management has to prioritize non-financial rewards to implement step-by-step intervention according to the available resources and institutional regulations.

There are few related studies from Sri Lanka which show an association between incentives and employee job satisfaction in the private bank industry (Pushpasiri et al, 2018), apparel organizations (Sankalpana and Jayasekara, 2017) and vehicle emission test industry (Kumarapeli, 2019). Further, the state university academics of Sri Lanka are satisfied with their job which is associated with their salary (Amarasena, Ajward and Haque, 2015). Nevertheless, studies on non-financial rewards are scarce among state university academics in Sri Lanka.

Method

Study Design, Setting and Population

An email-based, online, cross-sectional survey was conducted. All permanent academic staff of the state universities established under the UGC were considered as the study population. According to the Sri Lankan parliament act number 16th of 1978, fifteen state universities have been established under the UGC of Sri Lanka (“Universities and Higher Educational Institutions established under the purview of the University Grants Commission”, 2021). Around 6,321 academic staff are serving university students. Out of the academic staff, 896 are senior professors or professors, 3382 are senior lecturers and 2043 are probationary lecturers or lecturers (“University Statistics”, 2019). Working hours of academic staff are 8 am to 4 pm from Monday to Friday except on public holidays. The academics are involved in academic teaching, research and university-related administration.

Study Instrument

A self-administered questionnaire via google form was used to collect data on demography, non-financial rewards and job satisfaction. The questionnaire was administered in the English language as it was intended for the permanent academic staff of state universities. Questions for non-financial rewards and job satisfaction consist of a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree – 1, disagree – 2, not sure – 3, agree – 4, strongly agree – 5). The questions on non-financial rewards (Munga, 2014) and job satisfaction (Bustamam et al, 2014) were adapted from prior literature with permission from the relevant corresponding authors. Bustamam and the team have adapted the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire for job satisfaction which is available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (“Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire”, 2022). The content validity was acceptable as the questions on non-financial rewards include recognition, personal development, work-life balance and workplace environment domains of non-financial rewards (Munga, 2014). Also, the questions on job satisfaction include intrinsic, extrinsic, and general domains of job satisfaction (Bustamam et al, 2014). The questionnaire was pre-tested by 03 temporary academics to check its content, language, clarity and sequence. The questionnaire was modified based on their feedback. The Cronbach's alpha of questions representing recognition, personal development, work-life balance, workplace environment and job satisfaction were 0.77, 0.64, 0.55, 0.74 and 0.94, respectively, indicating acceptable internal consistency in the responses.

Sampling Method and Data Collection

The questionnaire was sent to the e-mail addresses of permanent state academic staff which were available on the state university websites. The investigator of the study who was an academic staff was excluded. The self-administrated questionnaire was sent as a google form via confidential e-mail. The first round of emails was sent from the 26th of July 2020 to the 28th of September 2020. A reminder was sent to all academics the from 29th of September 2020 to the 28th of November 2020. The form was open for completion until the 30th of November 2020. Informed consent was collected before the participants could access the questionnaire. Permanent academic staff of the state universities who provided informed consent was included in the study. No data was collected from those who did not provide informed consent. No identifiable data (name of participant and identity of the institution) were obtained from the participants. The data, except the age and years of experience of the participants, are presented in Additional file 1.

Data Description and Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the findings on demography, non-financial reward (recognition, personal development, work-life balance and workplace environment) and job satisfaction. Binary logistic regression was performed to determine the significant association between variables of interest and job satisfaction ($P < 0.05$). Variables of interests were staff category, education level, experience, monthly personal income, distance from the workplace to the residence, age, sex, marital status and non-financial reward (recognition, personal development, work-life balance and workplace environment). Odds ratios with a 95% confidence interval were presented for each variable of interest.

Results

Demographic Data

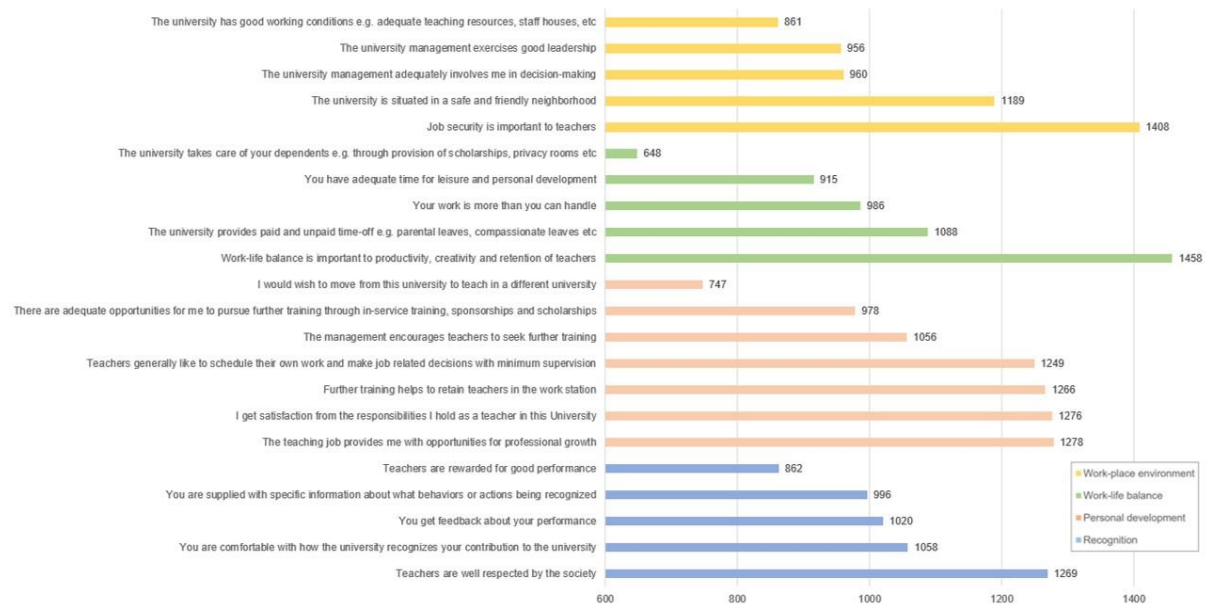
A total of 4675 email addresses of permanent academic staff were found on state university websites. Overall, 351 participated; out of which 315 consented (89.7%). Further, 06 were omitted due to incomplete and temporary academic staff details. A total of 309 entries were included for the final analysis. Most were females [57.3% (177/309)]. Also, most were grade II senior lecturers (26.5%) followed by probationary lecturers (24.3%), grade I senior lecturers (20.7%), professors (15.5%), lecturers (7.8%), senior professors (3.9%) and associate professors (1.3%). Further, most had a doctoral degree (57.6%) followed by a master's degree (31.1%), a graduate degree (10.7%) and a postgraduate diploma (0.7%). Most had an income of < Rs 250,000/= (55.7%) and the rest had an income of \geq Rs 250,000/=. Most were either registered or customary married (82.5%) and the rest were either never married, widowed, divorced or separated (legally or not legally). Age ranged from 26 to 64 years with a mean (SD), median (IQR) and mode of 43.1 (9.9), 43 (17) and 36 years. Distance to the workplace from residence ranged from 0.2 to 400 km with a mean (SD), median (IQR) and mode of 32.4 (61.7), 8 (21) and 2 km. Experience in the university system ranged from 0.25 to 45 years with a mean (SD), median (IQR) and mode of 13.5 (9.7), 11 (15) and 3 years.

Non-financial Reward

“Teachers are well respected by the society” scored the highest while *“teachers are rewarded for good performance”* scored the lowest under the category of recognition. *“The teaching job provides me with opportunities for professional growth”* scored the highest while *“I would wish to move from this university to teach in a different university”* scored the lowest under the category of personal development. *“Work-life balance is important to productivity, creativity*

and retention of teachers” scored the highest while “the university takes care of your dependents” scored the lowest under the category of work-life balance. “Job security is important to teachers” scored the highest while “the university has good working conditions” scored the lowest under the category of the workplace environment (Figure 2).

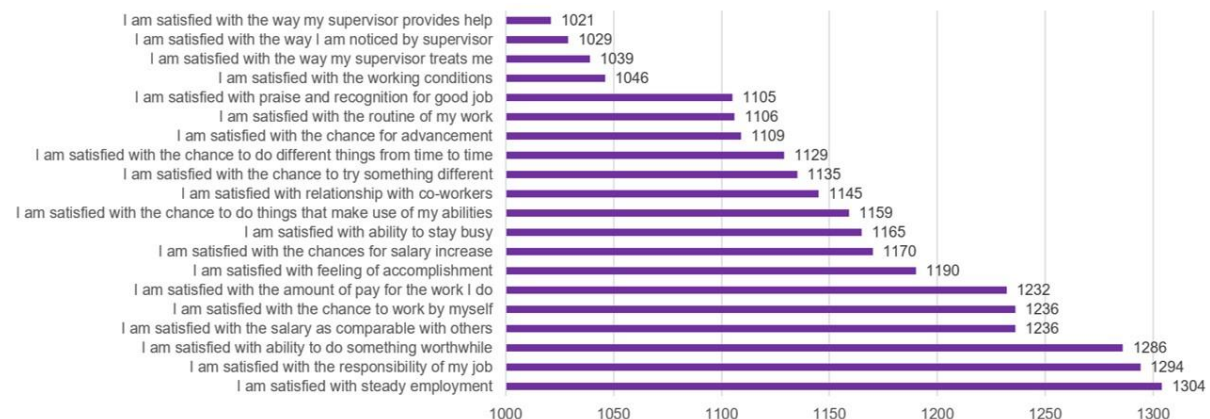
Figure 2. Total Scores received by each Item related to Non-financial Rewards



Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction scores ranged from 31 to 100 with a mean (SD), median (IQR) and mode of 74.9 (14.3), 76 (18) and 83. Eight academics (2.6%) scored 100 out of 100, 54.4% (168/309) scored ≥ 75 out of 100 and 94.8% (293/309) scored ≥ 50 out of 100. Therefore, a score of ≥ 75 was considered a cut-off for job satisfaction. Satisfaction with steady employment achieved the highest score while satisfaction with the way supervisor provides help scored the lowest (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Total Scores received by each Item related to Job Satisfaction



Association between Non-financial Rewards and Job Satisfaction

Logistic regression revealed that the following were significantly associated with job satisfaction: “you are comfortable with how the university recognizes your contribution to the university” (recognition) [OR = 3.3 (95% CI 1.5 – 7.2)], “I get satisfaction from the responsibilities I hold as a teacher in this university” (personal development) [OR = 6.5 (95% CI 1.8 – 23.6)] and “the university management adequately involves me in decision-making” (work-place environment) [OR = 2.4 (95% CI 1.0 – 5.5)]. However, there was no significant association between job satisfaction and the following variables of interest: staff category, education level, experience, monthly personal income, distance from workplace to residence, age, sex, marital status and other items related to non-financial rewards (Table 1).

Table 1. Job Satisfaction against the Variables of Interest

	Item	Description	Job satisfaction		Logistic regression		Odds ratio	95% Confidence interval	
			Total score ≥ 75	Total score < 75	Coefficient	p-value		Lower	Upper
Demographic data	1. Staff category	Lecturers, Senior Lecturers (grade II), Senior Lecturers (Grade I), Associate Professors, Professors and Senior Professors	139	95	0.682	0.306	1.979	0.536	7.307
		Probationary lecturers	29	46					
	2. Education level	Doctoral	102	76	-0.195	0.698	0.823	0.308	2.199
		Masters, Postgraduate Diploma and Graduate	66	65					
	3. Experience	≥ 10 years	102	71	0.176	0.765	1.193	0.375	3.798
		< 10 years	66	70					
	4. Monthly personal income	\geq Rs 250,000/=	84	53	0.511	0.305	1.667	0.627	4.430
		$<$ Rs 250,000/=	84	88					
	5. Distance to the workplace from the residence	≥ 10 km	102	76	-0.097	0.798	0.908	0.432	1.906
		< 10 km	66	65					
	6. Age	≥ 40 years	110	76	-0.228	0.704	0.796	0.246	2.577
		< 40 years	58	65					
7. Sex	Male	77	55	0.522	0.177	1.685	0.790	3.593	
	Female	91	86						
8. Marital Status	Registered or customary married	138	117	-0.002	0.996	0.998	0.350	2.842	
	Never married, widowed, divorced and separated (legally or not legally)	30	24						
Recognition	1. You are comfortable with how the university recognizes your contribution to the university.	Strongly agree, agree	134	37	1.178	0.004	3.249	1.458	7.244
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	34	104					
	2. You are supplied with specific information about what behaviours or actions are being recognized.	Strongly agree, agree	100	35	0.703	0.069	2.020	0.946	4.315
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	68	106					
	3. Teachers are rewarded for good performance.	Strongly agree, agree	77	19	-0.014	0.976	0.986	0.403	2.414
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	91	122					
	4. You get feedback about your performance.	Strongly agree, agree	116	43	0.604	0.127	1.830	0.842	3.980
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	52	98					
	5. Teachers are well respected by society.	Strongly agree, agree	150	95	0.749	0.122	2.116	0.819	5.469
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	18	46					

Personal development	1. Teachers generally like to schedule their work and make job-related decisions with minimum supervision.	Strongly agree, agree	138	105	0.015	0.974	1.015	0.407	2.533
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	30	36					
	2. The management encourages teachers to seek further training.	Strongly agree, agree	120	51	0.262	0.542	1.299	0.560	3.012
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	48	90					
	3. Further training helps to retain teachers in the workstation.	Strongly agree, agree	131	109	0.048	0.916	1.049	0.433	2.543
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	37	32					
	4. There are adequate opportunities for me to pursue further training through in-service training, sponsorships and scholarships.	Strongly agree, agree	101	33	0.455	0.297	1.577	0.670	3.713
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	67	108					
	5. I get satisfaction from the responsibilities I hold as a teacher at this University.	Strongly agree, agree	164	90	1.866	0.005	6.460	1.770	23.576
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	4	51					
	6. The teaching job provides me with opportunities for professional growth.	Strongly agree, agree	158	96	0.388	0.466	1.473	0.520	4.173
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	10	45					
	7. I would wish to move from this university to teach at a different university.	Strongly agree, agree	24	56	-0.846	0.070	0.429	0.172	1.071
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	144	85					
Work-life balance	1. Your work is more than you can handle.	Strongly agree, agree	59	80	-0.526	0.172	0.591	0.278	1.258
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	109	61					
	2. Work-life balance is important to productivity, creativity and retention of teachers.	Strongly agree, agree	166	136	1.239	0.341	3.451	0.270	44.120
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	2	5					
	3. The university takes care of your dependents e.g., through the provision of scholarships, privacy rooms etc.	Strongly agree, agree	31	6	0.715	0.284	2.044	0.552	7.571
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	137	135					
	4. You have adequate time for leisure and personal development.	Strongly agree, agree	93	27	0.633	0.140	1.883	0.812	4.364
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	75	114					
	5. The university provides paid and unpaid time-off e.g., parental leaves, compassionate leaves etc.	Strongly agree, agree	112	61	-0.128	0.738	0.880	0.415	1.864
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	56	80					
Workplace environment	1. The university has good working conditions e.g., adequate teaching resources, staff houses, etc.	Strongly agree, agree	88	19	0.742	0.118	2.100	0.829	5.321
		Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	80	122					
	Strongly agree, agree	103	30	0.439	0.288	1.550	0.691	3.480	

2. The university management exercises good leadership.	Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	65	111						
3. The university is situated in a safe and friendly neighbourhood.	Strongly agree, agree	143	85	0.066	0.877	1.068	0.464	2.457	
	Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	25	56						
4. The university management adequately involves me in decision-making.	Strongly agree, agree	104	23	0.855	0.047	2.350	1.011	5.465	
	Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	64	118						
5. Job security is important to teachers.	Strongly agree, agree	159	128	-0.767	0.279	0.465	0.116	1.859	
	Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure	9	13						
<i>Italic values indicate significance with a p-value of < 0.05</i>									

Discussion and Conclusion

The study showed high job satisfaction with 54.4% and 94.8% of permanent academics scoring ≥ 75 and ≥ 50 out of 100 respectively. Job satisfaction was comparable to local (Amarasena, Ajward and Haque, 2015), regional and global findings (Tahir and Sajid, 2019). Satisfaction with steady employment had the highest score. However, satisfaction with the way the supervisor provides help had the lowest score. Previous evidence emphasizes the importance of supervisor support on job satisfaction (Griffin et al, 2001; Kang et al, 2015; Stringer, 2006). There were mixed findings for non-financial rewards. The participants were highly satisfied with the recognition they obtain from society and the opportunities for professional growth. Munga B highlights the importance of recognition for teachers by society (Munga, 2014). And, Bosley M shows that adjuncts who attend professional development activities are generally satisfied with their jobs (Bosley, 2004). Also, the academics of the present study strongly agreed with the importance of job security and work-life balance which echoed the finding of previous literature (Wolor, Kurnianti, Zahra and Martono, 2020; Zeytinoglu et al, 2013). Further, they scored low on chances of moving to a different university which is an indication of satisfaction at their present workplace. However, the participants' agreement was low with regards to rewards received for good performance, care taken by the university on their dependents and working conditions at the universities. Employees' performance is significantly influenced by rewards (Salah, 2016; Woolley and Fishbach, 2018). Therefore, employers could use a reward system to enhance employees' performance. Further, on-site child care paid leave, flextime and family-friendly workplace culture would help support the dependents of the academics (Friedman, 2001). Moreover, the recognition by the university for the academics' contribution, responsibilities held by the academics and the opportunity for involvement in decision-making were significantly associated with job satisfaction. The findings further strengthen the need for involving employees in decision-making (Gündüz, 2014).

The present online study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic was cross-sectional in design and the number of participants was around 5% of the total academics in the Sri Lankan state sector. Therefore, the findings cannot establish a causal association and neither could be generalised. However, the data are unique as it was obtained from all fifteen state universities established under the UGC of Sri Lanka during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the study re-reinforced the need for addressing certain non-financial rewards like recognition, personal development and workplace environment to enhance job satisfaction among university academics.

A high level of job satisfaction was found among permanent state academics of Sri Lanka along with a significant association between job satisfaction and non-financial rewards. Addressing and enhancing such rewards would help increase the job satisfaction of Sri Lankan state academics. The relevant authorities, especially the UGC, need to implement strategies to enhance the support received by state academics from supervisors and non-financial rewards like recognition, personal development and workplace environment. The above would help improve the job satisfaction of the state academics. Trends from annual surveys could help emphasize and evaluate the findings of the present study. Further, pre-post studies are proposed before and after introducing non-financial rewards for state academics. These would help to assess improvement in job satisfaction and find out gaps which need further interventions among the state academics.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Medicine and Allied Sciences, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka (ERC/2020/43). Informed consent was collected through the google form before the participants could access the questionnaire.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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The study was self-funded. No funding was received for conducting this study.

Availability of Data and Materials

All data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article (and its additional files).

Author's Contributions

HW and DR conceived the idea and designed the survey. HW was involved in data collection. DR was involved in data analysis and interpretation. DR drafted the manuscript while HW critically revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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