

Workers` Job Satisfaction in Japanese Companies in Tan Thuan Export Processing Zone in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Abstract

The purposes of this study are to examine the job satisfaction levels of workers who work in Japanese companies in Tan Thuan Export Processing Zone in Ho Chi Minh City and to find the factors, which affect the job satisfaction of workers namely job characteristics, salary, benefits, and working environment. The sample size includes 315 workers. The descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data in this study.

From the results, the study found that most of the workers were satisfied with the *job characteristics* and *benefits* factor. On the other hand, the satisfaction level of the factor of the *working environment* was not high; the level of satisfaction of the *salary* factor was low. Moreover, the factors of *job characteristics*, *benefits*, and *working environment* have a positive effect on job satisfaction of workers; the “salary” factor does not have a high effect level compared with the three other factors. Although they have a low satisfaction level in factor salary, 81% of workers in the survey still wish to work long term in Japanese enterprises. This study concludes that Japanese businesses should review and adjust the policy of salary to be more reasonable and fair for workers. Job satisfaction research is therefore essential

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not only to help the companies find ways to retain employees but also to help workers work with a passionate and happy attitude and contribute to the development of Japanese companies.

Keywords: *job satisfaction, salary, benefit, working environment*

1. Introduction

Work is an indispensable part of human life today because we spend most of our time on the job. Job satisfaction of workers becomes more “important in their working lives” (Schneider & Vaught, 1993). Therefore, in any company or organization, the level of job satisfaction of employees has a significant role (Schneider & Vaught, 1993) because if employees are satisfied at work, they will work well and effectively. Also, this will bring high efficiency and sustainability to the company (Harputlu, 2014). Similarly, Wright & Bonett (2007) state that a company with more satisfied workers at the workplace will be more successful than other companies. Moreover, workers who are highly satisfied with the job tend to reduce their job search elsewhere and want to make a lasting contribution to the organization. Notably, according to Westover et al (2010), the worker’s job satisfaction is a major concern for management in many modern organizations. Locke (1976) argues that job satisfaction is influenced by the factors like salary, working condition, working environment.

In Vietnam, since the Doi Moi policy implementation in 1986 many industrial zones were established. In addition, many foreign invested companies have come to invest in Vietnam such as Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan etc. This also faces to many labor issues. In some small surveys of Vietnamese researchers such as Cuong (2002), Nghiem (2006), Ninh (2008), Tuyet (2010),

the life of Vietnamese workers becomes more difficult while living standards in the city are increasing and the daily routine is very poor. The reason why Vietnamese workers who are working at Export Processing Zone quit their job is the low salary which affects the daily life of workers. Unstable jobs, difficulties in physical and spiritual life, low income, and high workload, etc. are some characteristics of Vietnamese workers in Export Processing Zone. This situation leads to an increase in the number of workers who quit the job simultaneously. Besides, some statistics show that the rate of strikes in the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) is also increasing annually. According to the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor, since the Labor Code came into effect from 1995 to the end of 2012, there have been 4,922 strikes in the whole country. Of these, 100 strikes were in State-owned enterprises (SOEs); 3,500 strikes in foreign-invested enterprises such as Taiwan, Korea, Japan, etc.; 1,300 strikes in private business. Furthermore, according to statistics from the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, the number of strikes from 2006 to 2015 is as follows 2015 (198), 2014 (351), 2013 (350), 2012 (539), 2011 (978), 2010 (422), 2009 (218), 2008 (720), 2007 (541), 2006 (150), 2005 (147). According to Hue (2016), strikes happened because the business owners pay low wages to workers. Working conditions are poor, the working environment is polluted, lunch meals for workers are not enough nutrition, etc. With the low salary, not enough to pay for daily life, workers have to work overtime to increase income but the payment for overtime of employers does not match their work value. Addition, all the working style of foreign-invested companies requires high professionalism and must be accurate in working hours. This leads to a disagreement in the process of working between the employees and the employers. Also, some companies do not pay benefits such as insurance, unemployment benefits, social security, etc. for workers.

The researcher looks at Japanese companies because Japanese companies are very especially important. According to statistics of MD Manpower Development Company (2018), there is now a large number about 400 of Japanese businesses operating in Vietnam. In addition to the above reasons in general, the problems that Japanese companies currently face be the difficulty of hiring and retaining workers in particular. For example, according to Japan News (2011), Nippon Steel Pipe Company has been established in the Southern Industrial Zone of Ba Ria-Vung Tau province. The company's human resource manager said that it was really difficult for the company to retain workers unless the company offers a wage higher than the minimum wage. Besides, they also said that the workers always find ways to transfer to other companies with better working conditions. Also, according to a survey by JETRO in Japan News (2011), about 20 percent of 400 Japanese companies have difficulties in ensuring a sufficient number of workers. Therefore, the issue of shortage of labor resources is also a problem that Japanese enterprises, in particular, are facing.

According to the annual statistics of Ho Chi Minh City Export Processing and Industrial Zones Authority (HEPZA) and the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, the number of Japanese companies concentrated in Tan Thuan Export Processing Zone in Ho Chi Minh City is relatively large, about 59 companies. On the other hand, there has not been any research survey on the issue of "Vietnamese workers' job satisfaction in Japanese companies in Tan Thuan EPZ in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam". Therefore, this study will be the first research to evaluate accurately how workers perceive their works and what factors affect their job satisfaction. Moreover, creating a stable and qualified workforce will help Japanese businesses save on costs (recruitment costs, new workers training costs, etc.), reduce errors in the work (for new employees), and create a reliable working environment for the employees of the company.

1.1. Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are to examine the job satisfaction level of workers in Japanese companies, Tan Thuan Export Processing Zone, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and to find the factors that affect the workers' job satisfaction.

1.2. Research question

This paper comes along with two research questions:

- What is the level of workers' job satisfaction in Japanese companies in Tan Thuan Export Processing Zone, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam?
- Which factors affect workers' job satisfaction?

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is considered an emotional state due to the evaluation and attitude of workers in the process of performing the work or the resulting work (Aziril, 2011). According to Smith et al (1983), job satisfaction is merely the feeling that workers feel about their work. Spector (1997) also said that job satisfaction is the way in which workers show their attitude about work. Moreover, it will be expressed the levels which workers like or dislike their work. Wright and Kim (2004) stated that job satisfaction is a match between what employees want from work and what they feel from work.

2.2 Theories of job satisfaction

According to Maslow (1943), the demand for workers is divided into five steps, increasing from low to high, when a low demand is supplied, the demand at the next higher level will appear. Hence, employees will be satisfied with the job when the needs are adequately supplied.

According to other studies, the job satisfaction of workers is influenced by many different factors such as the government and policies of the organization, the supervision in the work not being appropriate, the working conditions not meeting expected needs (Herzberg et al., 1959a). The most common causes affecting job satisfaction of workers are work, salary, benefits, work facilities, promotion opportunities (Kreitner et al., 2007; Adams, 1963; Smith, Kendall and Hulin, 1969; Spector, 1997).

Herzberg (1959) also introduced the Two-factor theory. This theory includes hygiene/maintenance factors and motivators/growth factors. Hygiene/maintenance factor consists of salary, job security, working conditions, level and quality of supervision, company policy and administration, interpersonal relations. Motivators/growth factor consists sense of achievement, recognition, responsibility, nature of the work, personal growth and advancement.

Smith and his colleagues introduced the Job Description Index (JDI) model in 1969. The job description index model is well evaluated through many studies. Basically, Smith's model consists of five elements: (1) work, (2) training and advancement opportunities, (3) salary, (4) supervisors, and (5) co-workers.

2.3 Studies related to job satisfaction

The study of Smith, Kendall and Hulin (1969) is at Cornell University. The study developed a job description Index (JDI) to assess the level of job satisfaction of employees through the following factors: work, salary, training and advancement opportunities, co-workers, and supervisors.

In the study of Kathawala, Moore, and Elmuti (1990), they point out that salary is "a major factor in the motivation and job satisfaction" of workers working in factories. The research by St. Lifer (1994), with the topic "*career survey, job satisfaction, are you happy in your jobs?*" is pointed out that job satisfaction is income and benefits are factors that influence job satisfaction.

In the research of Luddy (2005), with the topic “*Job satisfaction among employees at a public Health Institution in the Western Cape, University of the Western Cape*”, he reveals that job satisfaction is affected by “salary”, “training and advancement opportunities”. Thuy (2011) also researches on factors affecting job satisfaction of lecturers in Ho Chi Minh City and points out “job characteristics” and “income” in her research. Also, the factor “work environment” is shown in the research of Manh (2012) titled *increasing the job satisfaction level of employee at Vietnam’s Military Telecom Corporation*. He also mentions four factors that affect workers’ satisfaction: “co-workers and welfare, training and advancement, proactivity and working environment. The factor “work environment” is negatively assessed.

Based on the studies and the theories related to job satisfaction, the factors that this paper wants to focus on are job characteristics, salary, benefits, working environment. These factors are based on Smith (1969)’s Job Description Index. Among these factors, the researcher also added factors benefits and working environment because after collecting information and conducting in-depth interviews with workers. The researcher found that two factors benefits and working conditions are also problems that make workers dissatisfied. They believe that these two factors are also important factors to assess employee’s job satisfaction.

3. Method

3.1 Research design

3.1.1 Sample

There are 59 Japanese companies operating in Tan Thuan Export Processing Zone, district 7, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. In July and August 2017, the researcher received a letter of recommendation from

HEPZA. In the content of the letter, HEPZA only introduced a list of 15 Japanese companies in order for the researcher to conduct the survey. These Japanese companies were first contacted by phone to verify their status and to solicit their participation in the survey. At this stage, a challenge emerged. Initially, eleven companies agreed to participate in the survey. However, as it was a busy season, despite repeated contacts it was impossible to reach an agreement on the schedule for accessing eleven companies. As a result, eight companies participated in the survey research.

The selection of the appropriate sample size is essential. The more samples there are, the more accurate research results are, but due to the cost and time limitation, the sample size was chosen according to the appropriate sample size of Kline (1979) to ensure the reliability of the study. According to Kline (1979), the minimum number of samples is 100 but according to Guiford (1954), the number of samples is 200 and Comrey and Lee (1992) gave the sample size for the respective views is that 100=bad, 200=pretty, 300=good, 500=very good, 1000 or more= excellent. In addition, according to Habing (2003), in factor analysis, each variable needs at least five observations. So the observation rate is five: one, which means that each variable needs at least five observations. There are 20 variables in this study, so the minimum sample size is only 100. However, the expected number of samples was 300 samples. To ensure this sample size, the researcher delivered 400 samples to workers by using random sample method. The workers were asked to respond to the questionnaire with completed items. Then, the researcher reviewed all the data and discarded the questionnaires in which some items were left unanswered. Hence, the final sample size was 315 workers, which included 96 male workers and 216 female workers.

3.2 Measure

The contents of the survey questionnaire are developed based on the Smith (1969)'s Job Description Index and adjusted to be adapted to the research topic through in-depth interviews with managers and workers in Japanese companies. The main contents include 20 items with 4 factors, 6 items of job characteristics, 4 items of salary, 4 items of benefits, and 6 items of the working environment. Workers answered on the 5-Likert scale, which includes 5 items: “strongly disagree”, code 1, “disagree”, code 2, “neutral”, code 3, “agree”, code 4, to “strongly agree”, code 5.

3.3 Data collection procedures

First, the researcher received a letter of recommendation from Ho Chi Minh City Export Processing and Industrial Zones Authority in August 2017 to conduct in-depth interviews with managers and workers. There are many opinions collected in these in-depth interviews, but mainly the opinions are agreed with the contents in the Job Description Index (JDI) model. In addition, the workers think that working environment and benefits are also problems that make them dissatisfied. They believe that working environment and benefits are also important factors to assess employees' job satisfaction, especially in the manufacturing sector. Hence, the researcher added the two factors of “working environment” and “benefits” into the research model.

Then, the researcher developed a questionnaire based on some factors in the JDI model and the results from the interviews with the workers. The content of the questionnaire was translated from English into Vietnamese. The items in the questionnaire were checked and edited by the experts and advisors. Moreover, the researcher conducted a pilot test with 50 workers to evaluate the reliability of the instrument. Third, both male and female workers received a questionnaire measuring their job satisfaction in

December 2018. Finally, the researcher reviewed all the data and discarded the questionnaires in which some items were left unanswered. Therefore, by using a random sampling method, the researcher selected 96 male workers and 216 female workers.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was developed in Vietnamese language and included 20 items. Then, the Content Validity Index (CVI) was used to establish validity three experts were asked to evaluate the questionnaire for clarity, readability, item relevance, discrimination, and inclusiveness of items. CVI of all instruments was 0.98. Afterward 50 workers tested those instruments for internal consistency with the same criteria as the subjects in job satisfaction at Japanese companies, Tan Thuan EPZ, HCMC. Moreover, the coefficient alpha values in the interval of .808 to .833 for 4 subscales (job characteristics, salary, benefit, and working environment), which are above the minimum level of 0.7 recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

3.5 Data analysis procedures

Mean was used to examine the level of workers' job satisfaction. Descriptive Statistic was used to classify gender, age, education level, and industry that workers belong to. This method was also used to analyze factors affecting workers' job satisfaction.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic background

There were 96 male workers and 219 female workers participating in the survey. The workers of age 18-25 accounted for 81.9%, 26-46 accounted for 14.3%, and over 46 accounted for 3.8%. Most workers have a high school education, they account for 55.6%, the level of 2 and 3

years college is 29.5%, and university-level accounted for 14.9%. The industry that workers belong to is electronic components, and it is accounted the most 56.6%, the garment is accounted for 12.9%, plastic is accounted for 8.1%, and the mechanic accounted for 22.4%.

Table 1 Demographic background

Demographic Variables	Frequency (N=315)	Percent (100%)
1. Gender		
Male	96	30.5
Female	219	69.5
2. Age		
18-25	258	81.9
26-46	45	14.3
Above 46	12	3.8
3. Education level		
High school	175	55.6
2 and 3 years college	93	29.5
University	47	14.9
4. Industry workers belong to		
Electronic components	177	56.6
Garment	41	12.9
Plastic	26	8.1
Mechanic	71	22.4

4.2 Workers' job satisfaction level in Japanese companies in Tan Thuan Export Processing Zone in Ho Chi Minh City

Table 2 Results of Mean of workers' job satisfaction in job characteristics (n=315)

Items	Code	Mean	Job satisfaction
The job suits your ability	JC1	3.68	High
The division of work is reasonable	JC2	3.50	High
The work you are doing is interesting	JC3	3.72	High
Work has no pressure, challenge	JC4	3.77	High
You feel safe in work	JC5	3.78	High
Your job is to improve your skills.	JC6	2.73	Neutral

Table 2 shows that the level of job satisfaction of workers has a high satisfaction level in items "JC1" (Mean=3.68), "JC2" (Mean=3.50), "JC3" (Mean=3.72), "JC4" (Mean=3.77), "JC5" (Mean=3.78). Besides, the item "JC6" (Mean=2.73) has a neutral satisfaction level.

Table 3 Results of Mean of workers' job satisfaction in salary (n=315)

Items	Code	Mean	Job satisfaction
Your salary matches the results of your work.	Sa1	2.51	Low
You live on a company salary.	Sa2	2.32	Low
The company's salary and bonus policy are reasonable.	Sa3	2.55	Low
Salary is at the same level as other Japanese companies.	Sa4	3.49	High

Table 3 indicates that the level of job satisfaction of workers has a low satisfaction level in items "Sa1" (Mean=2.51), "Sa2" (Mean=2.32), "Sa3" (Mean= 2.55). However, the item "Sa4" (Mean=3.49) has a high-level satisfaction.

Table 4 Results of Mean of workers' job satisfaction in benefits (n=315)

Items	Code	Mean	Job satisfaction
The company offers a full of social insurance policy.	Be1	3.95	High
Day-off and holiday policy are reasonable.	Be2	3.91	High
The company has regular medical examinations.	Be3	3.89	High
You get support from the labor union.	Be4	3.77	High

Table 4 shows that the level of job satisfaction of workers has a high satisfaction level in items “Be1” (Mean=3.95), “Be2” (Mean=3.91), “Be3” (Mean=3.89), “Be4” (Mean=3.77).

Table 5 Results of Mean, Standard deviation of workers' job satisfaction in the work environment (n=315)

Items	Code	Mean	Job satisfaction
The temperature in the working place is cool.	WE1	3.18	Neutral
The light in the working place is light.	WE2	3.02	Neutral
Sound level in the working place is not too noisy not too quiet.	WE3	3.33	Neutral
The working place is clean.	WE4	3.19	Neutral
The company equips fully with labor protection equipment for workers.	WE5	4.10	High
Work environment is comfortable.	WE6	3.79	High

Table 5 reveals that the level of job satisfaction of workers has a neutral satisfaction level in items “WE1” (Mean=3.18), “WE2” (Mean=3.02), “WE3” (Mean=3.33), “WE4” (Mean=3.19). Besides, the items “WE5” (Mean=4.10), “WE6” (Mean=3.79) has high satisfaction level.

4.3 Factors affecting workers’ job satisfaction in Japanese companies

Table 6 Overall level of workers’ job satisfaction in Japanese companies

Factors affecting job satisfaction	Mean	Percentage
Job characteristics	3.63	72.6%
Salary	2.87	57.4%
Benefits	3.87	77.4%
Work environment	3.42	68.4%

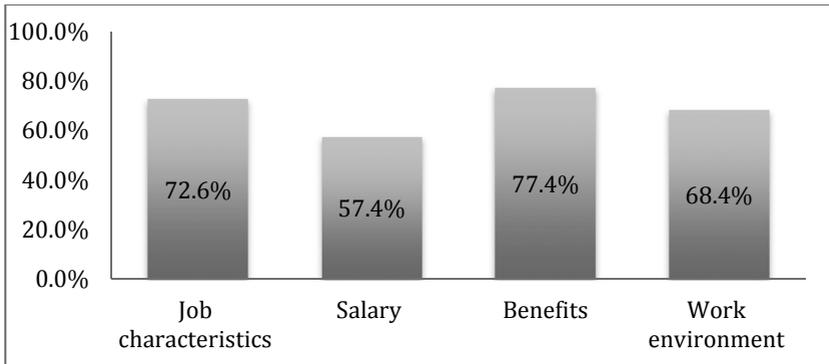


Figure 1 Factors affecting workers’ job satisfaction in Japanese companies

4.3.1 Level on job characteristics

In items of level on “job characteristics”, the study found that 6 respondents’ perceived atmosphere to be “unhappy”. About 104 respondents perceived the job characteristics to be “neutral”. 203 respondents rated the job characteristics as “happy” and 2 respondents perceived to be “very unhappy”. The mean score of this item is 3.63, we can see that those job characteristics have a positive effect on workers’ job satisfaction. (See appendix)

4.3.2 Level on Salary

In items of level on “salary”, the research found that 169 respondents perceived salary to be “neutral”. 6 respondents perceived salary to be “very unhappy”. 84 respondents perceived to be “unhappy”. And 56 respondents perceived to be “happy”. At last, the mean score of this item is 2.87. Therefore, the salary is “somewhat unhappy”, and we can see that salary affects workers’ job satisfaction.

4.3.3 Level on benefits

In items of level on “benefits”, the study found that a lot of 285 respondents perceived benefits to be “happy”. About 22 respondents perceived benefits to be “neutral”. And 8 respondents perceived benefits to be “unhappy”. The mean score of this item is 3.87; we can see that benefits have a positive effect on workers’ job satisfaction.

4.3.4 Level on a working environment

In items of level on “working environment”, the study found that 154 respondents perceived the working environment to be “happy”. 141 respondents perceived these items to be “neutral”. Moreover, only 20 respondents rated the working environment to be “unhappy”. The mean score of working environment dimension is 3.42. Hence, we can see that the working environment affect workers’ job satisfaction.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The “job characteristics” factor has a positive effect on the job satisfaction of workers. The job satisfaction level of five items “the job suits your ability”, “the division of work is reasonable”, “the work you are doing is interesting”, “work has no pressure, challenge”, “you feel safe at work” is high. This result shows that workers work at Japanese companies with a clear schedule at work. Moreover, the company gives them a sense of security, fun on the job and they do not feel pressure to work. These findings support Wang and Feng (2003), who pointed out that the more satisfied a worker is at work; the more positive is the job. However, the job satisfaction level of the item “your job is to improve your skills” is neutral. Perhaps the Japanese business is only focused on production but not much attention is given to improving the skills for their workers.

The “salary” factor has not a high effect level compared with the three other factors. Moreover, the job satisfaction level of three items “your salary matches the results of your work”, “you live on a company salary”, “the company’s salary and bonus policy are reasonable” is low. The item “salary is at the same level as other Japanese companies” gets a high job satisfaction level. This shows that the policy of salary of Japanese companies in the Tan Thuan Export Processing Zone is the same. In the survey of (Kathawala et al., 1990), they state that salary is “a major factor in the motivation and job satisfaction” of workers working in factories. Besides, money is a perfect motivation factor; actually workers need a good salary to cover daily life expenses. This is one of the essential factors in job satisfaction of workers.

The “benefits” factor has a positive influence on workers’ job satisfaction level. Besides, the level of all items “the company offers a full of social insurance policy”, “day-off and holiday policy are reasonable”,

“the company has regular medical examinations”, “you get support from the labour union” is high. The company pays all employees working at Japanese companies for medical check-up and social insurance. Furthermore, they all have the policy of holiday off by the provisions of the Labor Code of Vietnam, and Labor unions support Vietnamese workers if they have difficulties.

The “working environment” factor also has a positive effect on workers’ job satisfaction level. The satisfaction level of the items “the temperature in the working place is cool”, “the light in the working place is light”, “sound level in the working place is not too noisy not to be quiet” is neutral. Japanese companies should check the working environment in the factories to create the highest level of satisfaction for workers to help them work better and increase productivity. This is supported by Davis (2012), who described the element at work to create a good sense of the working environment, work conditions. This is a positive result of work efficiency. However, the satisfaction level of items “the company equips fully with labor protection equipment for workers”, “working environment is comfortable” is high. Japanese companies are considered as the top companies in equipping workers with safety equipment while working.

Summary, with two main objectives of this paper, is to examine the job satisfaction level of workers in Japanese companies, Tan Thuan Export Processing Zone, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and to find the factors, which affect the workers’ job satisfaction. This study found that most of the workers were satisfied with the job characteristics and benefits factors. The satisfaction level of the factor of the working environment was not high. Moreover, the level of satisfaction of the salary factor was low. However, according to the survey of 315 respondents, 81% of workers in the survey agree to continue working in Japanese companies. This proves that although the workers are dissatisfied with Japanese companies’ salary, they highly appreciated other

factors such as feeling safe working there. Moreover, they receive full benefits and are well equipped with safety instruments. Hence, Japanese businesses should review and adjust the policy of salary to be more reasonable and fair for workers. Job satisfaction research is therefore essential not only to help the companies find ways to retain employees but also to help workers work with a passionate and happy attitude and contribute to the development of Japanese companies.

6. Recommendation

The results of this study are the first discoveries to supply more evidence for the dissertation in labor policy for workers at Japanese companies in Vietnam. The research shortly should be considered in the following suggestions:

- The qualitative method should be used in the future to increase the scientific perspectives of the paper.
- Further study in workers' job satisfaction should be in areas such as organizational factor, relation with co-workers, and relation with supervisor factors.

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