

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

Quality of Work Life, Job Satisfaction and Happiness among Academics at a University of Technology in South Africa

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Abstract

Higher education institutions are competing globally to attract and retain accomplished academics to contribute to an institution's performance. However, the efficiency of a higher education institution might depend on how it manages one of its most important assets contributing to the human capital of the institution, the academics. Therefore, an academic's quality of work life, job satisfaction and happiness should be considered and evaluated on a continuous basis to holistically ascertain an institution's effectiveness. This study examines the relationships between QWL, job satisfaction and happiness among academics at a university in South Africa. A quantitative research approach was followed entrenching a post-positivist research paradigm, sampling 300 academic employees at the applicable university. The Quality of Work Life Scale, the Brief Job Satisfaction Measure II, and the Subjective Happiness Scale were applied in this study and demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity. The results revealed significant positive relationships and positive significant predictive relationships between the constructs. A generic academic workload policy should be followed by all faculties at the university to ensure that workloads are equitable and flexible.

Keywords: quality of work life; job satisfaction; happiness; university academics

Introduction

Higher education in democratic South Africa has undergone significant changes notable consequences for the experiences of academic staff and the quality of education (Breetzke and Hedding, 2018). Academic restructuring, rising student enrolment, strategic planning, changes to educational programs, quality assurance projects, and a drive for more research outputs are among these changes (Dorasamy and Letooane, 2015; Ogunshe, 2023; Orzhel, Trofymenko, Porkuian, Drach, Halhash and Stoyka, 2023). Although these developments have assisted the education system to improve, it has also impacted academic staff's quality of work life (QWL), influencing their job satisfaction and happiness. Consequently, higher education academic staff faces difficulties, including increased workloads, inadequate resources and role conflicts, which can lower both their job satisfaction (Zhang and Horta, 2023) and happiness. Understanding how the higher education environment affects QWL will help create a more encouraging and motivating academic work environment that improves academic staff's subjective well-being, ensuring job satisfaction (Akram and Amir, 2020) and happiness.

QWL is a multidimensional concept that includes adequate and fair compensation, a safe and healthy environment, development of human capacities, growth and security, social integration, constitutionalism, total life space and social relevance (Timossi, Pedroso, Francisco and Pilatti, 2008; Sinha 2012). Holistically, these factors support employees to be healthy and perform their jobs (Oo, 2024). Workload, support systems and work-life balance—especially at higher education institutions—significantly influence QWL in academic settings (Ngcamu, 2017). QWL refers to the behaviours and systems intended to establish a workplace where staff members feel appreciated, supported and capable of making meaningful contributions (Leitão, Pereira and Gonçalves, 2019). In the higher

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education framework, QWL is defined by several elements, including fair remuneration, career development opportunities, work-life balance and job security (Majumder and Biswas, 2022). Therefore, "QWL is an idea, a set of principles that considers people to be the most important resource in an organisation because they are trustworthy, accountable and capable of making sound contributions" (Butt, Altaf, Chohan and Ashraf, 2019: 1908). Not only is a high QWL necessary for recruiting and retaining qualified academic staff, but it also assists to improve the overall quality of education (Eriyanti and Noekent, 2021). QWL has a positive effect on the motivation, engagement and—pertinent to this study—job satisfaction of academic staff as well as students who are taught by the academic staff (Golkar, 2013; Mohammadi, Kiumarsi, Hashemi and Niksima, 2016). Fisher (2010) concurs that QWL and job satisfaction are positively correlated. Therefore, increasing the QWL of an individual will enhance job satisfaction, which will in turn positively influence performance, motivation and organisational commitment (Nekouei, Othman, Masud and Ahmad, 2013). It can, therefore, be deduced that lower absenteeism rates, higher job satisfaction and improved performance result directly from enhanced QWL (Golkar, 2013).

Job satisfaction is defined as "a sense of satisfaction for doing a job in an organisation" (Mazidi 2016: 5). Furthermore, the subjective assessment of an employee's work, whether it concerns certain qualities or overall performance, is known as job satisfaction (Fernández-Macias and de Bustillo Llorente, 2023). Job satisfaction is an individual's emotional reaction to their work and surroundings, influenced by organisational characteristics, organisational rewards and perceptions of fairness (Ramasodi, 2010; Lunenburg, 2011). Workload, institutional support, professional development opportunities and the general working environment also define academic job satisfaction (Aswathy and Jayalakshmi, 2025). Attracting and retaining faculty members and advancing a positive academic culture depends on job satisfaction, which is improved when fairness and recognition—key elements of QWL—are present (Ahmed, Khudari, Hussein and Jais, 2023). Opatha (2019) asserts that when individuals are content with their life their job satisfaction increases. Therefore, academics experiencing job satisfaction are more likely to be active, proactive and involved in their teaching and research roles, ensuring the delivery of quality education (Calaguas, 2017). Feelings of happiness and enthusiasm towards one's work are naturally associated with job satisfaction (Mazidi, 2016). Studies reveal that job satisfaction directly relates to happiness and vice versa (Calaguas, 2017). It is further suggested that the concepts of employee job satisfaction and happiness are interconnected and thrive in environments where QWL is prioritised (Othman, Mahmud, Noranee and Noordin, 2018). Building a competent and effective academic workforce therefore relies on addressing these factors.

Happiness, for its part, is a complex and sometimes elusive concept and has been referred to as "subjective well-being", "psychological well-being", "quality of life" and even "satisfaction" (Khalil, 2019; Romero-Rodriguez and Castillo-Abdul, 2019). However, in the workplace context, happiness is the positive emotional state encompassing job satisfaction, involvement and fulfilment (Mehrdadi, Sadeghian, Direkvand-Moghadam and Hashemian, 2016). Research on happiness management has developed, linking subjective well-being to the broader field of happiness studies (Helliwell and Aknin, 2018). Happiness is a fundamental objective in all societies, joy is a basic human feeling that drives the human experience most of the time (Fisher, 2010). Organisations, including higher education institutions, which prioritise employee well-being and happiness, will positively impact their employees (Stoia, 2015), in turn, contributing to organisational effectiveness (Stoia, 2015; Chu, Chan and So, 2022; Firmansyah and Wahdiniwati, 2023). Therefore, happiness in the workplace promotes higher productivity, creativity and organisational citizenship behaviour, thus, encouraging a positive work environment (Mcgonagle, 2015; Salas-Vallina, Pozo-Hidalgo and Gil-Monte, 2020). Although, happiness affects well-being, job performance and general involvement with work, it is further acknowledged that happy academics are more likely to be committed to their institutions and more productive (Johnson, Robertson and Cooper, 2017; DiMaria Peroni and Sarracino, 2020). Hence, happiness is essential for academics in the higher education environment as it will improve subjective well-being and effectiveness, including having a positive influence on student outcomes, the upliftment of society and the advancement of national research and development initiatives (Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020). It is expected of higher education institutions to deliver graduates that positively impact their communities and/or workplaces (Du Pre, 2009; Clarke, 2018) and on an international level to contribute to the United Nation's Agenda.

Therefore, intensifying the pressure on South African higher education institutions to present such graduates (Du Pre, 2009; Naidoo-Chetty and Du Plessis, 2021). Higher education institutions must, therefore, be cognisant that academics who are directly involved in graduate successes should have a balanced QWL and experience subjective well-being. Regardless of an employee's position, nearly every employee experiences some degree of discontent with their work life at some point during their careers (Tabassum, Rahman and Jahan, 2011). Employees become more dissatisfied and frustrated with their jobs when QWL is either completely absent or severely lacking

in the workplace (Dhurup and Mahomed, 2013). Although studies on QWL, job satisfaction and happiness have been conducted, little has been researched among academics in the South African context at Universities of Technology. Therefore, understanding the relationship between QWL, job satisfaction and happiness can equip higher education institutions to enhance academics' QWL, to contribute positively to job satisfaction and happiness, including their general quality of living (Calaguas, 2017). This study aims to examine the relationship between QWL, job satisfaction and happiness among academics at a South African higher education institution. Examining these variables will shed light on the QWL of academics, as well as their subjective well-being.

The aim of the study was to examine the relationships between QWL, job satisfaction and happiness among academics at a university in South Africa. Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses were developed to guide the research:

- i. QWL (social integration and constitutionalism, social relevance, adequate and fair compensation, development of human capacities, growth and security, total life space, safe and healthy environment) has a positive relationship with job satisfaction among academics at a university in South Africa.
- ii. Job satisfaction has a positive relationship with happiness among academics at a university in South Africa.

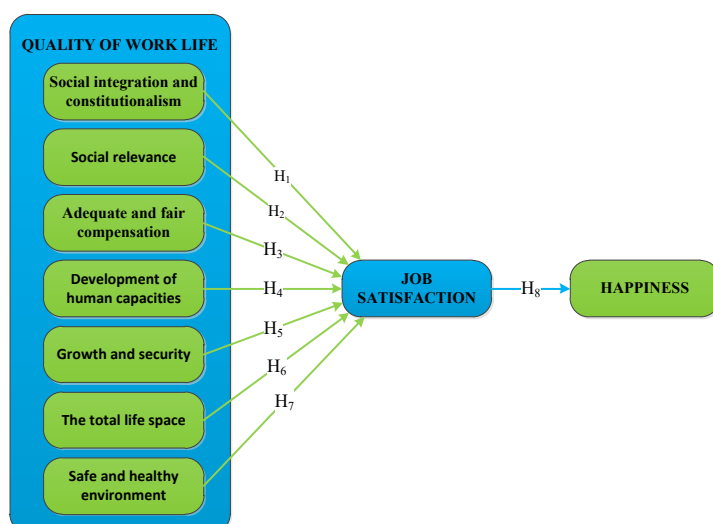


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
(Authors' compilation)

Figure 1 indicates that the dimensions of QWL influence job satisfaction and job satisfaction influences happiness. The research hypotheses proposed for this study are presented below:

- H1: Social integration and constitutionalism have a positive relationship with job satisfaction among academics at a university in South Africa.
- H2: Social relevance has a positive relationship with job satisfaction among academics at a university in South Africa.
- H3: Adequate and fair compensation has a positive relationship with job satisfaction among academics at a university in South Africa.
- H4: Development of human capacities has a positive relationship with job satisfaction among academics at a university in South Africa.
- H5: Growth and security have a positive relationship with job satisfaction among academics at a university in South Africa.
- H6: The total life space has a positive relationship with job satisfaction among academics at a university in South Africa.
- H7: A safe and healthy environment has a positive relationship with job satisfaction among academics at a university in South Africa.
- H8: Job satisfaction has a positive relationship with happiness among academics at a university in South Africa.

Method

The study's target population comprised 753 academic staff members from all four faculties of a university of technology (UoT) in South Africa. 300 university academics completed and returned the questionnaire (refer to Table 1). The majority, 61%, of the academics were male and 37.7% were between the ages 31-40 years. Regarding educational qualifications, 34.3% held a masters' degree and 50.7% had tenure ranging from 3 to 10 years. Table 1 presents the participants' characteristics.

Table 1: Characteristics of participants

Item	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	183	61.0
	Female	117	39.0
Age	20-30 years	40	13.3
	31-40 years	113	37.7
	41-50 years	103	34.3
	Over 50 years	44	14.7
Marital status	Single	74	24.7
	Married	161	53.7
	Divorced	30	10.0
	Separated	19	6.3
	Widowed	16	5.3
Educational level	Diploma	16	5.3
	Bachelor's degree	47	15.7
	Honours	76	25.3
	Masters	103	34.3
	PhD	56	18.7
	Other	2	0.7
Faculty	Faculty of Management Sciences	75	25.0
	Faculty of Human Sciences	76	25.3
	Faculty of Engineering	78	26.0
	Faculty of Applied Science and Computer	71	23.7
Years of service	Less than 3 years	61	20.3
	3-10 years	152	50.7
	11-20 years	56	18.7
	21-30 years	25	8.3
	More than 30 years	6	2.0

The questionnaire was divided into four self-reported sections, namely biographical information, the Quality of Work Life Scale (QWLS) (Timossi *et al.*, 2008), the Brief Job Satisfaction Measure II (Judge, Locke, Durham and Kluger 1998) and the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) (Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999). The scales were scored on a five-point Likert-type scale. The QWLS is a multi-dimensional factor structure, comprising 36 items. The reliability for the dimensions of the QWLS for the current study ranged from 0.816 to 0.919 for the dimensions of QWL. The Brief Job Satisfaction Measure II consists of five items and is a uni-dimensional structure. However, during the main study it was found that items three and five had low reliability and were therefore removed, resulting in a reliability of 0.827 in the present study. The SHS consists of four items and is a uni-dimensional structure. However, it should be noted that in the pilot study, item four had low reliability; therefore, item four was removed from the main study. A three-item SHS was distributed in the main study and achieved a reliability of 0.816. The reliabilities are reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability values

	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items deleted	Number of items
QWL Factor 1: Social integration and constitutionalism (Item B5.1-B5.4, B6.1-B6.4)	0.915	0	8
QWL Factor 2: Social relevance (Item B8.1-B8.6)	0.892	0	6
QWL Factor 3: Adequate and fair compensation (Item B1.1-B1.4)	0.906	0	4

QWL Factor 4: Development of human capacities (Item B2.1-B2.2, B3.1-B3.5)	0.870	0	7
QWL Factor 5: Growth and security (Item B4.1-B4.4)	0.844	0	4
QWL Factor 6: Total life space (Item B7.1-B7.3)	0.919	0	3
QWL Factor 7: Safe and healthy environment (Item B2.1-B2.6)	0.816	0	4
Job satisfaction	0.827	2	3
Happiness	0.816	1	3
QWL = Quality of Work Life			

The research procedures for the study were ratified by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee from the Faculty of Management Sciences of the applicable university (Ethics Reference Number: FRECMS-10032021-062). This study is an extract from a master's dissertation. The questionnaires were delivered to the academics accompanied by a cover letter discussing the purpose of the study and collected again upon completion. By completing the questionnaire, the respondents consented to participating in the study. Participation was voluntary and anonymity was ascertained. Prior to conducting correlations and regression analysis, a factor analysis was performed on the QWLS, the Brief Job Satisfaction Measure II and the SHS. Correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the associations between QWL and job satisfaction and job satisfaction and happiness. Regression analysis was performed to examine if QWL predicts job satisfaction and whether job satisfaction predicts happiness.

Results

The results of the factor analysis, correlations and regression analysis are discussed.

Factor analysis

Preceding the factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and the Bartlett's test of sphericity were computed to test whether the data set is suitable for factor analysis. Table 3 provides the computation of the KMO and Bartlett's test results indicating a KMO value above 0.50 and p-value of 0.000. Therefore, according to Pallant (2016), factor analysis is deemed to be suitable for this data set.

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy		0.944
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. chi-square	7570.227
	Df	630
	Sig.	0.000

The construct validity of QWL, job satisfaction and happiness was determined through factor analysis, retaining "factors with an eigenvalue of 1.0 or more" (Pallant, 2016: 185). Therefore, factor analysis confirmed a multidimensional construct for QWL, with seven factors: social integration and constitutionalism, social relevance, adequate and fair compensation, development of human capacities, growth and security, total life space and a safe and healthy environment. Timossi *et al.* (2008) confirm QWL as a multi-dimensional construct. However, the order of the factors and the item loadings differ slightly for the current study. The item loadings, eigenvalues, percentage of variance and cumulative percentage for QWL are indicated in Table 4.

As a result of the rotated component matrix, both job satisfaction and happiness resulted in uni-dimensional constructs where only one component was extracted for the variables, resulting in uni-dimensional factor structures for both job satisfaction and happiness.

Table 4: Rotated Component Matrix

Item No.	Item description	Factor						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	B1.1 How satisfied are you with your salary (remuneration)?	0.129	0.215	0.824	0.218	0.179	0.111	0.099
2	B1.2 How satisfied are you with your salary, if you compare it to your colleagues' salary?	0.215	0.171	0.809	0.187	0.187	0.078	0.137
3	B1.3 How satisfied are you with the remuneration that you receive from the organisation?	0.233	0.266	0.772	0.136	0.112	0.083	0.173

Item No.	Item description	Factor						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	B1.4 How satisfied are you with the extra benefits (alimentation, transport, etc.) that your organisation offers to you?	0.205	0.086	0.720	0.084	0.201	0.165	0.142
5	B2.1 How satisfied are you with your weekly work journey (quantity of worked hours)?	0.130	0.046	0.235	0.591	- 0.118	0.284	0.256
6	B2.2 According to your workload (quantity of work), how do you feel?	0.299	0.042	0.204	0.540	- 0.118	0.278	0.390
7	B2.3 According to the use of technology in your tasks, how do you feel?	0.171	0.046	0.113	0.170	0.069	0.211	0.744
8	B2.4 How satisfied are you with the level of work conditions in your workplace?	0.049	0.162	0.166	0.105	0.133	0.063	0.803
9	B2.5 How satisfied are you with the security equipment, individual and collective protection provided by your organisation?	0.103	0.260	0.078	0.069	0.187	0.072	0.803
10	B2.6 Regarding tiredness that your work cause to you, how do you feel?	0.203	0.195	0.323	0.336	0.150	0.100	0.435
11	B3.1 Are you satisfied with the autonomy (opportunity to make decisions) that you have at your work?	0.267	0.104	0.241	0.560	0.486	0.103	0.001
12	B3.2 Are you satisfied with the importance of the task/work/activity that you do?	0.209	0.207	0.080	0.725	0.325	0.103	0.099
13	B3.3 Regarding the possibility to perform several tasks at work, how do you feel?	0.299	0.182	0.139	0.610	0.363	0.124	0.043
14	B3.4 How satisfied are you with your performance evaluation at work?	0.218	0.224	0.173	0.517	0.267	0.138	0.220
15	B3.5 Regarding possibilities assigned to you, how do you feel?	0.265	0.262	0.155	0.490	0.484	0.148	0.086
16	B4.1 How satisfied are you with your opportunity of professional growth?	0.346	0.195	0.191	0.158	0.627	0.162	0.169
17	B4.2 How satisfied are you with the trainings you participate in?	0.387	0.142	0.134	0.202	0.590	0.166	0.210
18	B4.3 Regarding the situations that arise from resigning at your work, how do you feel?	0.252	0.200	0.241	0.112	0.646	0.134	0.077
19	B4.4 Regarding the incentive that your organisation gives you to study, how do you feel?	0.234	0.221	0.194	0.135	0.639	0.125	0.186
20	B5.1 Regarding the discrimination (social, racial, religious, sexual, etc.) in your work, how do you feel?	0.570	0.228	0.290	0.124	0.207	0.018	0.049
21	B5.2 Regarding your relationship with your colleagues and bosses at work, how do you feel?	0.712	0.054	0.141	0.132	0.165	0.138	0.048
22	B5.3 Regarding your team's and colleagues' commitment to work, how do you feel?	0.669	0.119	0.165	0.129	0.215	0.108	0.037
23	B5.4 How satisfied are you with the value of your ideas and initiatives at work?	0.731	0.137	0.110	0.168	0.238	0.121	0.144
24	B6.1 How satisfied are you with the organisation for respecting the workers' rights?	0.668	0.311	0.158	0.143	0.165	0.125	0.129
25	B6.2 How satisfied are you with your freedom of expression (opportunity to give opinions) at work?	0.728	0.273	0.146	0.163	0.148	0.200	0.102
26	B6.3 How satisfied are you with the norms and rules at your work?	0.696	0.330	0.108	0.264	0.079	0.221	0.138
27	B6.4 Regarding the respect to your individuality (individual characteristics and particularities) at work, how do you feel?	0.695	0.295	0.090	0.194	0.184	0.201	0.171

Item No.	Item description	Factor						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28	B7.1 How satisfied are you with the work influence on your family life/routine?	0.234	0.174	0.115	0.166	0.129	0.848	0.126
29	B7.2 How satisfied are you with the work influence on your possibilities of leisure?	0.216	0.186	0.179	0.157	0.143	0.801	0.168
30	B7.3 How satisfied are you with your schedule of work and rest?	0.206	0.192	0.106	0.191	0.201	0.804	0.124
31	B8.1 Regarding the pride of performing your work, how do you feel?	0.200	0.415	0.033	0.234	0.191	0.358	0.089
32	B8.2 Are you satisfied with the image this organisation makes to society?	0.169	0.770	0.167	0.114	0.150	0.114	0.147
33	B8.3 How satisfied are you with the contribution organisation makes to the society that the organisation have?	0.246	0.773	0.190	0.086	0.041	0.190	0.169
34	B8.4 How satisfied are you with the services of the organisation?	0.188	0.813	0.144	0.112	0.201	0.098	0.159
35	B8.5 How satisfied are you with the quality of products that the organisation offers?	0.292	0.718	0.127	0.160	0.196	0.142	0.118
36	B8.6 How satisfied are you with the way that the organisation treats the workers?	0.349	0.601	0.275	0.128	0.173	0.104	0.068
Eigenvalue		5.330	4.100	3.426	3.173	3.081	2.854	2.773
% of Variance		14.807	11.389	9.516	8.814	8.558	7.927	7.703
Cumulative %		14.807	26.196	35.712	44.525	53.084	61.011	68.713

Correlations

A positive association between the QWL factors and job satisfaction is indicated in Table 5, with correlation coefficients ranging from $r=0.316$ to $r=0.689$ ($p<0.01$). Therefore, the academic staff are likely to experience greater job satisfaction within the university environment as their QWL improves. Table 6 shows that job satisfaction has a significant positive association with happiness ($r=0.316$; $p<0.01$). This indicates that academics who experience job satisfaction are also likely to be happier.

Table 5: Correlations among QWL and job satisfaction

Constructs		QWL Factor 1	QWL Factor 2	QWL Factor 3	QWL Factor 4	QWL Factor 5	QWL Factor 6	QWL Factor 7	JS
Spearman's rho	QWL Factor 1: Social integration and constitutionalism	1.000							
	QWL Factor 2: Social relevance	0.689**	1.000						
	QWL Factor 3: Adequate and fair compensation	0.527**	0.531**	1.000					
	QWL Factor 4: Development of human capacities	0.607**	0.569**	0.556**	1.000				
	QWL Factor 5: Growth and security	0.657**	0.604**	0.524**	0.636**	1.000			
	QWL Factor 6: The total life space	0.528**	0.542**	0.409**	0.552**	0.457**	1.000		

	QWL Factor 7: Safe and healthy environment	0.420**	0.498**	0.484**	0.519**	0.454**	0.394**	1.000	
	Job satisfaction	0.511**	0.531**	0.526**	0.523**	0.469**	0.474**	0.316**	1.000
QWL = Quality of Work Life; JS = Job Satisfaction **Significant at p<0.01.									

Table 6: Correlations among job satisfaction and happiness

Constructs		JS	Happiness
Spearman's rho	Job satisfaction	1.000	
	Happiness	0.316**	1.000
JS = Job Satisfaction **Significant at p<0.01.			

Regression analysis

The results for predicting job satisfaction from QWL and happiness from job satisfaction are presented in Table 7. As indicated in Table 7, regression analysis did not indicate any statistical significance between QWL factor 1 (social integration and constitutionalism) and job satisfaction ($\beta=0.12$, $t=1.73$, $p=0.085$). Therefore, H1 was not supported. QWL factor 2 (social relevance) positively and significantly predicted job satisfaction ($\beta=0.20$ $t=3.11$ $p=0.002$); therefore, H2 was supported. QWL factor 3 (adequate and fair compensation) also positively and significantly predicted job satisfaction ($\beta=0.23$ $t=3.95$ $p=0.000$); therefore, H3 was supported. QWL factor 4 (development of human capacities) positively and significantly predicted job satisfaction ($\beta=0.22$ $t=3.10$ $p=0.002$); therefore, H4 was supported. QWL factor 5 (growth and security) and job satisfaction did not indicate any statistical significance between ($\beta=0.05$ $t=0.82$ $p=0.41$); therefore, H5 was not supported. QWL factor 6 (the total life space) positively and significantly predicted job satisfaction ($\beta=0.13$ $t=2.28$ $p=0.023$); therefore, H6 was supported. QWL factor 7 (safe and healthy environment) also positively and significantly predicted job satisfaction ($\beta=0.13$ $t=2.50$ $p=0.013$), therefore, H7 was supported. Finally, as shown in Table 7, the independent variable job satisfaction positively and significantly predicted happiness ($\beta=0.38$ $t=7.00$ $p=0.000$); therefore, H8 was supported.

Table 7: Regression analysis between constructs

Model 1: Dependent variable (JS)	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients			Collinearity statistics	
	B	Std error	B	T	Sig	Tol	VIF
Independent variable (QWL Factor 1: Social integration and constitutionalism)	0.126	0.073	0.119	1.730	0.085	0.388	2.579
Independent variable (QWL Factor 2: Social relevance)	0.214	0.069	0.196	3.114	0.002*	0.463	2.158
Independent variable (QWL Factor 3: Adequate and fair compensation)	0.208	0.053	0.225	3.954	0.000*	0.566	1.766
Independent variable (QWL Factor 4: Development of human capacities)	0.278	0.090	0.219	3.102	0.002*	0.367	2.721
Independent variable (QWL Factor 5: Growth and security)	0.059	0.071	0.054	0.823	0.411	0.422	2.372
Independent variable (QWL Factor 6: The total life space)	0.120	0.053	0.126	2.278	0.023*	0.594	1.683
Independent variable (QWL Factor 7: Safe and healthy environment)	-0.141	0.056	-0.136	-2.496	0.013*	0.615	1.627
R ² = 0.466; Adjusted R ² = 0.453. **Significant at p<0.05 JS = Job Satisfaction; QWL = Quality of Work Life							
Model 2: Dependent variable (HAP)	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std error	B	T	Sig	Tol	VIF
Independent variable (JS)	0.378	0.054	0.376	6.998	0.000*	1.000	1.000
R ² = 0.141; Adjusted R ² = 0.138. **Significant at p<0.05 HAP = Happiness; JS = Job satisfaction							

Discussion of Results

Contradictory to the finding of this study, Koshy (2020) reports a significant positive association between various QWL factors, such as social integration within the organisation, constitutionalism and job satisfaction. Kumar,

Prakash and Verma (2021: 8) also emphasize that, as part of social integration, employees tend to experience higher job satisfaction when they maintain positive relationships with their colleagues. However, the present study revealed that QWL factor 1 (social integration and constitutionalism) did not significantly predict job satisfaction among academics at the university. This divergence may be attributed to the nature of academic work, where some individuals prefer to work in isolation and may therefore struggle with forming social networks or engaging meaningfully with colleagues. Social integration by its nature, relies on collaborative efforts to foster a supportive environment—such as through teamwork, mentorship and opportunities for employee engagement. In addition, dissatisfaction may arise when employees feel that their constitutional rights—such as the right to be consulted or to access certain benefits—are not adequately acknowledged or upheld within the organisation.

QWL factors 2 (social relevance), 3 (adequate and fair compensation), 4 (development of human capacities), 6 (the total life space) and 7 (safe and healthy environment) positively and significantly predicted job satisfaction. A number of studies confirmed that QWL correlates with job satisfaction (Kermansaravi, Navidian, Rigi and Yaghoubinia, 2015; Jahanbani, Mohammadi, Noori Noruzi and Bahrami 2018; Dhamija, Gupta and Bag 2019; Srivastava, Misra and Madan 2019). Consequently, QWL is essential for academics to experience job satisfaction at a higher education institution. Bamidele, Isaac, Festus and Ben-Caleb (2019) concur that QWL is vital for the job satisfaction of academics. This finding is consistent with the study of Dhamija *et al.* (2019) that reported a strong relationship between QWL and job satisfaction. Furthermore, Natalia, Pratama and Astuti (2020) also affirm a positive and significant relationship between QWL and job satisfaction. This study further demonstrates that high QWL benefits both employees and organisations, leading to increased job satisfaction. Therefore, a high QWL contributes to satisfied employees.

Job satisfaction positively and significantly predicted happiness in the current study. Othman *et al.* (2018) affirm that job satisfaction and happiness are positively related. Karabati, Ensari and Fiorentino (2017) argue that job satisfaction influences subjective well-being, asserting that employees who are content with their work report higher subjective happiness and life satisfaction (Karabati *et al.*, 2017). Thevanes and Jathurika (2021) concur that a relationship exists between job satisfaction and happiness. Likewise, Danaei, Momeni and Alikhani (2019) report a significant positive relationship between job satisfaction and happiness. The outcomes of this study underline the pivotal role of job satisfaction and happiness in improving the QWL among academic staff in African universities. This corresponds with findings that customised training and development programs significantly boost academic job satisfaction, loyalty, and retention (Mampuru, Mokoena and Isabirye, 2024). Dlamini and Dlamini (2024: 6) in their narrative review, revealed that these elements contribute to high levels of stress and burnout among South African university staff, therefore, highlighting how persistent challenges, including heavy workloads, inadequate resources, and poor work-life balance, continue to impede academic staff well-being. Moreover, the interplay between job satisfaction and employee performance is evident in the context of private universities in Mogadishu, where Mohamed *et al.* (2024) found that positive employer-employee relationships significantly enhance job satisfaction and, in turn, employee performance.

In the Kenyan context, the significance of work-life balance practices in public universities is acknowledged, since these practices positively influence employee performance and satisfaction (Agunda, Were and Mboya, 2024: 22). Espinosa (2024: 484) concur that “productivity is bound to rise when the quality of life at work is stable”. Furthermore, Ruzungunde, Sanhokwe, and Chinyamurindi (2024) identify person-organisation fit and decent work conditions as critical determinants of job satisfaction in the South African manufacturing sector, insights that are transferable to the academic context. Therefore, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse by emphasizing that enhancing QWL is not merely a human resource strategy but a necessary reform to sustain institutional performance and academic excellence.

Conclusion

The present study found positive associations between QWL, job satisfaction and happiness. An improved QWL increases academic job satisfaction, which, in turn, enhances academics' happiness. Based on these findings, universities should develop a clear understanding of QWL and implement changes that foster effective work environments for academic staff. Such efforts are likely to positively influence their job satisfaction. Furthermore, academic support services for continuous professional development should be prioritised, as they may assist universities in further developing their academic staff in their respective professional fields, which, in turn, may stimulate job satisfaction and happiness of academics. Universities are therefore encouraged to adopt interventions that enhance QWL and job satisfaction to support the overall well-being and happiness of academic

staff. The study was conducted at a single university of technology in South Africa; therefore, the results cannot be generalised to other universities. A cross-sectional research design was applied. Hence, a longitudinal research design may indicate changes in QWL, job satisfaction and happiness over a longer period. A quantitative research approach was used. Consequently, adopting a mixed methods research approach in future research could yield more comprehensive insights. Data were collected through a survey, which may have introduced response bias. In addition, the current study did not account for the effect of biographical characteristics. Future research that includes these variables could offer a comparative perspective on how perceptions of QWL, job satisfaction and happiness differ among academic staff.

Declarations

Interdisciplinary Scope: The interdisciplinarity is established through the associations between QWL, job satisfaction and happiness anchored in a positivist paradigm, indicating the importance of subjective well-being for academics in the higher education environment.

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation (Loko and van Zyl); literature review (Loko, van Zyl, and Chinomona); methodology (Loko); analysis (statistician deceased); investigation (Loko); drafting and preparation (Loko, van Zyl, and Chinomona); review and editing (Loko, van Zyl, and Chinomona). The published version of the article has been approved by the authors.

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