


EDUCATION AND JOB SATISFACTION IN U.S. CONTACT CENTERS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Received: Jun, 05th 2024 Accepted: Aug, 05th 2024</p>	<p>Objective: The objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between the level of education completed after high school graduation and the level of job satisfaction among U.S. contact center employees.</p>
<p>Keywords: Education; Job Satisfaction; Contact Centers; Herzberg's Two Factor Theory.</p>	<p>Theoretical Framework: In this topic, the main concepts and theories that underpin the research are presented. Herzberg's Two Factor Theory stands out, providing a solid basis for understanding the context of the investigation.</p>
	<p>Method: The methodology adopted for this research comprises a quantitative correlational approach. Participants include U.S. contact center employees. Data collection was carried out through questionnaires distributed to contact center employees.</p> <p>Results and Discussion: The results obtained revealed that the level of education completed after high school graduation does not significantly impact the level of job satisfaction for U.S. contact center employees. In the discussion section, these results are contextualized in light of Herzberg's Two Factor Theory, highlighting that education completion cannot be utilized as a motivator factor in this context. Possible discrepancies and limitations of the study are also considered in this section.</p> <p>Research Implications: The practical and theoretical implications of this research are discussed, providing insights into how the results can be applied or influence practices in the field of business and education. These implications could encompass human resources, management, and post-high-school education.</p> <p>Originality/Value: This study contributes to the literature by offering a practical contribution to contact center professionals and educational institutions. The relevance and value of this research are evidenced by its potential to impact contact center hiring processes and assessing the value of post-high-school education for contact center employees.</p> <p>Doi: https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2024.v9i9.4897</p>

EDUCAÇÃO E SATISFAÇÃO NO TRABALHO NOS CENTROS DE CONTATO DOS EUA

RESUMO

Objetivo: O objetivo deste estudo é investigar a relação entre o nível de escolaridade concluído após a conclusão do ensino médio e o nível de satisfação no trabalho entre os funcionários de centros de contato dos EUA.

Estrutura Teórica: Neste tópico, são apresentados os principais conceitos e teorias que sustentam a pesquisa. Destaca-se a Teoria dos Dois Fatores de Herzberg, que fornece uma base sólida para a compreensão do contexto da pesquisa.

Método: A metodologia adotada para esta pesquisa compreende uma abordagem quantitativa correlacional. Os participantes incluem funcionários de centros de contato dos EUA. A coleta de dados foi realizada por meio de questionários distribuídos aos funcionários dos centros de contato.

Resultados e Discussão: Os resultados obtidos revelaram que o nível de instrução concluído após a conclusão do ensino médio não afeta significativamente o nível de satisfação no trabalho dos funcionários das centrais de

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atendimento dos EUA. Na seção de discussão, esses resultados são contextualizados à luz da Teoria dos Dois Fatores de Herzberg, destacando que a conclusão do ensino médio não pode ser utilizada como fator motivador nesse contexto. As possíveis discrepâncias e limitações do estudo também são consideradas nessa seção.

Implicações da Pesquisa: As implicações práticas e teóricas desta pesquisa são discutidas, fornecendo insights sobre como os resultados podem ser aplicados ou influenciar as práticas no campo dos negócios e da educação. Essas implicações podem abranger recursos humanos, administração e educação pós-ensino médio.

Originalidade/Valor: Este estudo contribui para a literatura ao oferecer uma contribuição prática aos profissionais de contact center e às instituições educacionais. A relevância e o valor desta pesquisa são evidenciados por seu potencial para impactar os processos de contratação de contact centers e avaliar o valor da educação pós-ensino médio para os funcionários de contact centers.

Palavras-chave: Educação, Satisfação no Trabalho, Centros de Contato, Teoria dos Dois Fatores de Herzberg.

EDUCACIÓN Y SATISFACCIÓN LABORAL EN LOS CENTROS DE CONTACTO DE EE.UU.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: El objetivo de este estudio es investigar la relación entre el nivel de educación completado después de la graduación de la escuela secundaria y el nivel de satisfacción laboral entre los empleados de los centros de contacto de EE.UU.

Marco Teórico: En este tema se presentan los principales conceptos y teorías que sustentan la investigación. Destaca la Teoría de los Dos Factores de Herzberg, que proporciona una base sólida para comprender el contexto de la investigación.

Método: La metodología adoptada para esta investigación comprende un enfoque cuantitativo correlacional. Los participantes son empleados de centros de contacto de Estados Unidos. La recogida de datos se llevó a cabo mediante cuestionarios distribuidos a los empleados de los centros de contacto.

Resultados y Discusión: Los resultados obtenidos revelan que el nivel de estudios completados después de la educación secundaria no influye significativamente en el nivel de satisfacción laboral de los empleados de centros de contacto de Estados Unidos. En la sección de discusión, estos resultados se contextualizan a la luz de la Teoría de los Dos Factores de Herzberg, destacando que la finalización de los estudios no puede utilizarse como factor motivador en este contexto. En esta sección también se consideran las posibles discrepancias y limitaciones del estudio.

Implicaciones de la Investigación: Se discuten las implicaciones prácticas y teóricas de esta investigación, proporcionando una visión de cómo los resultados pueden aplicarse o influir en las prácticas en el campo de la empresa y la educación. Estas implicaciones podrían abarcar los recursos humanos, la gestión y la educación post-secundaria.

Originalidad/Valor: Este estudio contribuye a la literatura ofreciendo una aportación práctica a los profesionales de los centros de contacto y a las instituciones educativas. La relevancia y el valor de esta investigación se ponen de manifiesto por su potencial para influir en los procesos de contratación de los centros de contacto y en la evaluación del valor de la educación post-secundaria para los empleados de los centros de contacto.

Palabras clave: Educación, Satisfacción Laboral, Centros de Contacto, Teoría de los dos Factores de Herzberg.

1 INTRODUCTION

Organizations rely on stable contact center environments to handle customer concerns. These concerns are handled by contact center employees or agents that communicate through voice or text channels (Plaza et al., 2022). In 2023, there were 2.86 million contact center employees in the United States (Statista, 2024). In a rapidly increasing industry, the question of how to keep these employees satisfied in their demanding positions becomes paramount.

The contact center industry has continued to grow to support contact center needs and expand communication channels based on technology. There is a higher degree of importance

placed on customer services due to the expansion of telecommunication channels that can be used. These include SMS, email, and social media along with the original call type of communication. Call centers experience higher than average rates of attrition due to the taxing job expectations and lack of incentives. Contact center employees experience higher levels of burnout because they must adhere to rigid requirements and suppress negative emotions caused by unhappy customers (Fernando, et al., 2020). Employee selection and job satisfaction are critical to contact center efficiency to withstand the increasing organization demands.

Job satisfaction is conceptualized as how employees feel about their job and its different aspects. Job satisfaction is measured as the extent that employees like (are satisfied) or dislike (dissatisfied) their jobs (Esen et al., 2021). An employee's satisfaction leads to them staying with a job and being more productive when they are motivated or leaving the position for other opportunities. Job satisfaction has been examined through many lenses due to its importance on business productivity. Herzberg et al. (1959), found that measuring job satisfaction through motivator and hygiene factors can explain the reasons why employees are motivated. These needs included benefits provided by work which make up motivator factors for employees and hygiene factors that, when increased, have a negative impact on job satisfaction. However, the level of education completed has not been measured as a motivator variable for contact center employees in the United States.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 CONTACT CENTERS

Contact center employees, also called customer service representatives, work with customers to resolve complaints, process orders, and provide information about an organization's products and services. This can be done through multiple communication channels such as email, chat, and phone. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2022, 2.9 million people reported as customer service representatives.

Typically, customer service representatives are not required to have a college degree to perform job expectations (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). However, previous research has shown that education level can affect employee perceptions in call centers. CSR's that completed an undergraduate degree reported higher levels of importance on employees' perception of skills and performance development opportunities compared to CSRs with high

school level completion in Turkey (Keskin et al., 2021). Although these measures of importance impact job satisfaction, a predictive value between education and job satisfaction in U.S. call centers has still not been identified.

Contact centers experience higher levels of attrition due to the nature of the position. Bandyopadhyay and Jadhav (2021) identified five of the most common reasons that employees leave their positions within the first two years of hire: satisfaction level, salary level, work recognition, gender, and challenging work. Job satisfaction, through the lens of Herzberg's Two Factor Theory, is created by increasing motivator factors and decreasing hygiene factors. Motivator factors such as increased development opportunities and training have been shown to affect job satisfaction in call centers (Keskin et al., 2021).

As previously mentioned, hygiene factors can lead to job dissatisfaction in the workplace. One of these hygiene factors is an employees' salary. In a Serbian study, energy-sector employees with higher education and higher levels of conscientiousness have shown a decrease in pay which was not present for the sub-sample of employees without higher education (Knezivic et al., 2019). Hygiene factors such as collaboration and teamwork and working conditions have been shown to have an inverse relationship with job satisfaction in call centers (Keskin et al., 2021). While these studies have shown correlations between motivator factors, hygiene factors, and job satisfaction, it has not been determined if the level of education can act as a motivator factor for U.S. contact center employees.

Many of the obstacles that are felt in contact centers are because of the frequency of customer complaints and lack of support. In a study conducted with 156 Namibian call center employees, burnout was a common effect due to the high pressure of working in a contact center and lack of individualism (Fernando et al., 2020). The linear regression model shows that job demand was significantly negatively correlated to burnout ($r = -1.79$; $p = 0.028$). Decreasing factors and increasing motivator factors was an emphasis in this correlational research between job demands in a contact center and burnout with psychological capital as a moderator. This was particularly seen in the results which demonstrated that an increase in the opportunity for growth or an increase in job security--motivator factors—will decrease the level of burnout.

Similarly, Proenca and Rodrigues (2021) examined the motivator factor of empowerment and its effect on job satisfaction with 267 call center employees in Portugal. There was a positive correlation found for both structural empowerment and psychological empowerment on the call center employee's job satisfaction when using the validated questionnaires. Although they were

able to reach these conclusions with their contact center sample, they did state that additional research should be conducted between contact center employees and job satisfaction.

2.2 JOB SATISFACTION

One of the most similar studies that has been conducted examining job satisfaction and demographic variables would be Yildirim-Kurtulus & Yuksel-Sahin's research in 2021. In their research with 4310 psychological counselors working in Turkey, they found that the demographic variable of gender did not affect job satisfaction. Unlike gender, education did have a significant effect on job satisfaction for this sample. Additionally, job satisfaction did have a significant correlation with the education received being perceived as adequate. This correlation would be influenced by the industry and perceived standards which is why it would be necessary to examine in a contact center setting.

As previously stated, both structural empowerment and psychological empowerment have shown a positive correlation with job satisfaction for HR employees (Sharma & Sharma, 2021). In addition, this has also been shown specifically for contact center employees (Proenca & Rodrigues, 2021). When contact center employees have access to information through their organization, receive adequate training, and feel that the company is investing in their development, it fosters positive attitudes at work and increases job satisfaction. These practices compound to Herzberg's two factors of motivator factors and hygiene factors reinforcing the validity of this theory.

2.3 EDUCATION

The value of education has been studied extensively in previous research. Education in this context measures the degree of education completed after high school graduation. A statistically significant difference has been shown for contact center employees' perception of skills and performance development opportunities being more important for employees with Undergraduate degree levels compared to High School degree levels (Keskin et al., 2021). Additionally, studies have shown that professional counselors that view their education as adequate also experience higher job satisfaction (Yildirim-Kurtulus & Yuksel-Sahin, 2021). Similarly, studies have also shown that those with tertiary education were more motivated among mental health workers which the researcher stated was because motivation comes with

the opportunity to improve and be successful (Sowunmi, 2022). However, higher levels of education completion have not shown a direct correlation to job satisfaction. In fact, the opposite has been examined because while higher levels of education result in more career resources, they also result in more stress (Solomon et al., 2022).

When examining the correlation between job satisfaction and personality trait, education was shown to have a significant moderator relationship with Serbian energy-sector employees (Knezivic et al., 2019). This was conducted using questionnaires based on Spector's (1997) validated instrument which was distributed to 116 respondents out of 11880 employees. Specifically, the correlation coefficient found between the variables of extroversion and the supervision facet of job satisfaction were significantly different from zero ($r = 0.292^*$, $p = .032$) which was not shown with employees with a higher education degree ($r = 0.119$, $p = .355$). However, these results have yet to be shown in U.S. contact center settings.

2.4 HERZBERG'S TWO FACTOR THEORY

Herzberg et al. (1959) theory of motivation, also known as Herzberg's hygiene theory, is relevant to this study because it identifies motivational factors that influence job satisfaction. It does this through its hygiene factors and motivation factors. The variable of job satisfaction will be measured in this study using the validated instrument, Spector's (1997) Job Satisfaction Scale.

The hygiene factors that are reviewed in Herzberg's theory are extrinsic factors, such as supervisor quality and salary (Herzberg et al., 1959). The motivation factors represent the intrinsic factors such as recognition and achievement in a work environment. Job satisfaction can be represented by four conditions:

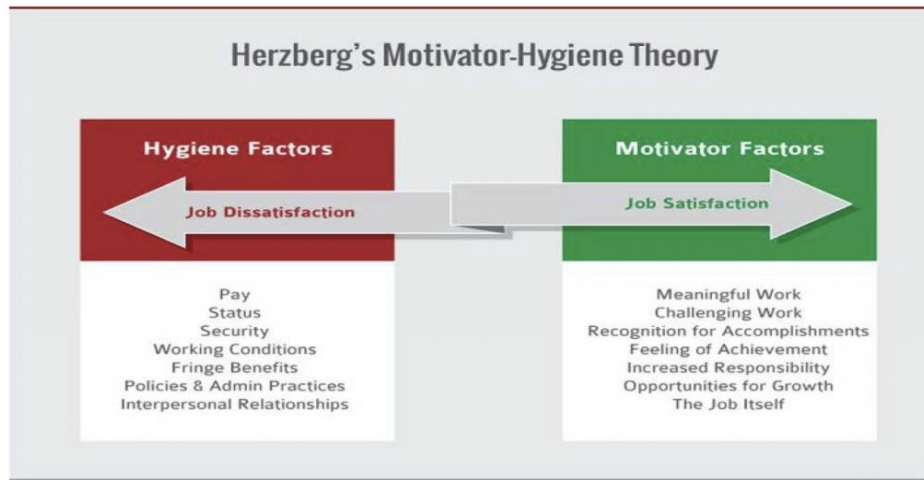
- not dissatisfied-motivated;
- not dissatisfied-low motivation;
- dissatisfied-motivated;
- dissatisfied-low motivation.

Herzberg et al. original publication (1959) examined worker motivation and employee performance. They interviewed 200 industrial workers in Pittsburg and asked the sample to recollect and describe job experiences where they felt simultaneously happy and unhappy (Herzberg et al., 1959). The results were that employee's attitudes influenced contextual factors as reasons for job dissatisfaction. This led to the conclusion that intrinsic factors were associated with higher satisfaction and motivation. However, there was an

inverse relationship when employees experienced low morale because they also experienced a higher intention to separate from the workplace.

Figure 1

Herzberg's Two Factor Theory



Source: Adapted from KURT, S. Motivators and Hygiene Factors. Education Library, 2022.

3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this quantitative correlational-predictive study was to determine if and to what extent the level of education predicts the level of job satisfaction among U.S. contact center employees. A quantitative methodology has a researcher use a deductive research approach, which starts with a theory, and then conducts a study to answer the research question. The theory being tested is Herzberg's Two Factor Theory. Using a quantitative methodology in the proposed research allows the researcher to measure the study's variables—level of education and level of job satisfaction—and then draw inferences from the data collecting.

The study population was represented by all contact center employees in the United States. The target population is full-time employees ranging from 18 to 75 who work for contact centers in the United States. One of the requirements to being considered in the study was to confirm that at least 75% of the employee's day was spent in communication with customers. However, the communication could take place on any channel such as phone, chat, or email. The total study sample was (89) male and female contact center employees in the United States which exceeded the required 68 participants. A convenience sampling technique was used with the online study participants from Qualtrics.

The participants in this study were given a five question survey identifying demographics such as age, gender, and level of education completed after high school. Following this demographic questionnaire, Spector’s (1997) Job Satisfaction Scale was utilized to measure the employee’s job satisfaction level. The 36-item questionnaire was distributed and a composite score was received for every sample participant which represented their overall job satisfaction.

Spector’s Job Satisfaction Scale (JSS) has been translated and validated to different countries and employee types (Castaneda-Hidalgo et al., 2009; Magnavita et al., 2009; Ramos et al., 2022). According to Web of Science, Spector is one of the most cited authors among organizational behavior scholars. The JSS has been cited in an average of 19 publications per year since 1985 which provides evidence of construct validity and reliability. Additionally, the overall Cronbach alpha value was ($\alpha = 0.91$) (Spector, 1997; Van Saane, et al., 2003). Barnett (2017) found an overall Cronbach alpha value of ($\alpha = 0.90$). It is common practice to consider an alpha reaching the value of 0.70 as a sufficient measure of reliability or internal consistency of an instrument (Taber, 2018). The JSS was one of seven job satisfaction instruments out of 29 instruments to be considered reliable and accurate in Van Saane et al.’s (2003) research. As a result, Spector’s JSS is credible and therefore can be applicable in this study.

Table 1

Distribution of sample participants according to categorical variables

Percentage	Frequencies	Class	Taxonomic Variables
6.7%	6	<=20	Age
18.0%	16	21-30	
29.2%	26	31-40	
22.5%	20	41-50	
16.9%	15	51-60	
5.6%	5	61-70	
1.1%	1	>=71	
46.1%	41	Male	Gender
53.9%	48	Female	Highest Degree Completion
30.3%	27	High School Diploma	
22.5%	20	Associate Degree	
28.1%	25	Bachelor’s Degree	
13.5%	12	Graduate Degree	
5.6%	5	Doctoral or Professional Degree	
100%	89	Total	

It is clear from the figure above:

- a) 6.7% of the sample members were 20 or under the age of 20, 18% were between 21 and 30 years, 29.2% of the sample members were between 31 and 40 years, 22.5% were

between 41 and 50 years, 16.9% were between 51 and 60 years, 5.6% were between 61 and 70 years, and 1.1% were 71 years or older;

- b) 46.1% of the sample members were male, while the percentage of females was 53.9%;
- c) 30.3% of the sample's highest degree completed was a high school diploma, 22.5% are an associate degree, 28.1% was a bachelor's degree, 13.5% was a graduate degree, and 5.6% was a doctoral or professional degree.

The purpose of the research was to explore the relationship between years of education completed after high school graduation and job satisfaction among contact center employees in the United States.

RQ1: To what extent, if any, does level of education predict level of job satisfaction?

H1₀: Level of education does not significantly predict level of job satisfaction.

H1_a: Level of education significantly predicts level of job satisfaction.

Looking specifically at the relationship between EDU and JSS, the result is slightly positive but not statistically significant ($p = .171$); therefore, the null hypothesis (H1₀) is not rejected. The regression model was $p = .171$, $F(1, 87) = 1.90$, and an R^2 value of .21, indicating the model explains 21% of the variance in predicting job satisfaction. Because the model is not statistically significant, this means that education does not significantly predict job satisfaction in U.S. contact center employees for this specific sample of contact center employees. For the first research question, the null hypothesis was not rejected concluding there is not a statistically significant predictive relationship existing between education and job satisfaction in U.S. contact center employees.

Table 2

RQ1 Regression Coefficients

	Coefficient	Std Error	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	150.39	5.54	27.13	<.001	139.37	161.41
EDU	-1.53	1.11	-1.38	0.171	-3.73	0.67

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The conclusion of this study highlights that while previous literature has shown a significant correlation between education and job satisfaction, it does not necessarily transfer to U.S. contact center employees. Proenca and Rodrigues (2021) examined the motivator factor of empowerment and its effect on job satisfaction with 267 call center employees in Portugal. There was a positive correlation found for both structural empowerment and psychological

empowerment on the call center employee's job satisfaction when using the validated questionnaires. Although empowerment was found to be a significant motivator factor, education completion did not consistently act as a motivator factor. This opens the opportunity for future research to determine whether education completion positively correlates with empowerment, and if not, to explore why. Yildirim-Kurtulus and Yuskelf-Sahin (2021) found that job satisfaction had a positive correlation with counselors with a master's degree rather than those with bachelor and PhD degrees. Similarly to this study, Solomon et al. (2022) did not find a direct correlation between education completion and job satisfaction when including all industries and job types. More research is needed to identify which industries are affected by the level of education completed and indicators as to why they are affected.

Job satisfaction, through the lens of Herzberg's Two Factor Theory, is created by increasing motivator factors and decreasing hygiene factors. Motivator factors such as increased development opportunities and training have been shown to affect job satisfaction in call centers (Keskin et al., 2021). Contact center employees that completed an undergraduate degree reported higher levels of importance on employees' perception of skills and performance development opportunities compared to contact center employees with high school level completion in Turkey (Keskin et al., 2021). Hygiene factors such as collaboration and teamwork and working conditions have been shown to have an inverse relationship with job satisfaction in call centers (Keskin et al., 2021). Similarly, in a Serbian study, energy-sector employees with higher education and higher levels of conscientiousness have shown a decrease in pay which was not present for the sub-sample of employees without higher education (Knezivic et al., 2019).

The study results did not substantiate the beneficial aspects of education completion as seen as a motivator factor. The study results failed to present a statistically significant predictive relationship ($p = .171$) between level of education completed and level of job satisfaction in a U.S. contact center context. By answering RQ1, the study results invalidated education completion as a motivator factor in Herzberg's Two Factor Theory in the relationship with job satisfaction. However, more research needs to be conducted to identify if the level of education completed after high school can be utilized as a motivator factor depending on industry, location, or other demographics.

Although the study did not provide statistically significant evidence to demonstrate that the level of education predicted the level of job satisfaction, that does not mean that the study lacks practical utility. Based on the results, employers of call centers may want to remove focus

from level of education completed after high school in regards to the potential employee's job satisfaction. It would be more beneficial to focus on other experiences outside of this variable.

Additionally, the study provides ample opportunity for future studies to examine a more in-depth understanding as to why the level of education did not predict job satisfaction or why the individual personality traits did not impact that relationship for contact center employees in the United States. Part of the value of education revolves around the concept of more opportunities and satisfaction in industry. However, that value is not shown to have the same promised benefits for U.S. contact center employees. The results of this study were contrary to the findings of various others that demonstrate that education completion can be seen as a motivator variable; therefore, that an increase in this motivator variable would result in an increase of job satisfaction. Therein lies an opportunity for scholars to benefit from this study by examining why its findings revealed that the level of education does not significantly predict the level of job satisfaction.

5 CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to investigate the predictive relationship between the level of education completed after high school and job satisfaction among U.S. contact center employees. Contrary to prior literature suggesting a significant correlation between education and job satisfaction, the findings did not reveal a statistically significant predictive effect ($p = .171$). This aligns with studies like those by Solomon et al. (2022), which also found no direct correlation between educational attainment and job satisfaction.

While motivator factors such as empowerment have been positively linked to job satisfaction in contexts like Portuguese call centers (Proenca & Rodrigues, 2021), and development opportunities have shown similar effects in Turkish call centers (Keskin et al., 2021), education completion did not consistently emerge as a motivator factor across studies. For instance, Yildirim-Kurtulus and Yuskelf-Sahin (2021) observed higher job satisfaction among counselors with master's degrees compared to those with bachelor's or PhDs, suggesting nuanced dynamics at play.

Applying Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which posits that job satisfaction arises from enhancing motivator factors and mitigating hygiene factors, the lack of a significant relationship between education level and job satisfaction in this study suggests that education may not function uniformly as a motivator across different contexts. This opens avenues for future

research to delve deeper into the underlying reasons for this disconnect, potentially exploring individual personality traits, organizational culture, or industry-specific factors that might mediate this relationship.

In essence, while the study did not affirm education level as a predictor of job satisfaction among U.S. contact center employees, it contributes to the broader discourse by highlighting the complexity of factors influencing job satisfaction and underscores the need for more nuanced, context-specific investigations in this domain.

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