A Systematic Review of the Relationship Between School Performance and Employee Job Satisfaction: Evidence from China's Educational Context

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Abstract: This systematic review examines the empirical relationship between school performance and employee job satisfaction, focusing on studies conducted in China and internationally. Using a structured methodology, 39 peer-reviewed journal articles, policy papers, and empirical reports published between 2000 and 2024 were selected based on predefined inclusion criteria. Key dimensions of school performance namely, leadership, curriculum quality, resource management, and stakeholder engagement, were synthesized alongside job satisfaction components including job security, work climate, job roles, and community attachment. The review reveals a consistent positive correlation between effective leadership, resource allocation, and teacher satisfaction. However, disparities in urban-rural settings, performance pressures, and weak integration of professional development initiatives are recurring challenges. The findings highlight the bidirectional influence between institutional performance and employee satisfaction, emphasizing the need for holistic policy interventions. Future research is encouraged to explore localized contexts, and to employ mixed-method approaches for deeper insights.

Keywords: school performance, job satisfaction, educational leadership, human resource development, systematic review

Introduction

Education systems worldwide are constantly striving to improve both school performance and employee job satisfaction, recognizing these as critical factors in the overall success of educational institutions [4]. School performance encompasses various dimensions, including leadership effectiveness, the quality of basic education services, resource management, and the learning environment [26]. These factors together contribute to student academic success and school operations. At the same time, employee job satisfaction of teachers and other staff at schools is a critical determinant that helps maintain a motivated workforce that can meet the requirements of modern education systems [25] [27].

Educational research over the years has focused attention on the interrelation of school performance and job satisfaction [5] [47]. There exists a significant relationship between such successful schools, which often include highly effective leadership, appropriate usage of resources, and active engagement with the community, providing an employee-friendly environment in the school [11]. Conversely, satisfied employees, especially teachers, are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of commitment, innovation, and teaching efficacy, thereby enhancing the overall performance of the school [3] [4].

However, despite these interconnections, schools around the world still struggle to achieve both high performance and employee satisfaction at the same time. The main points in research are that increased administrative burdens, lack of professional development opportunities, and support systems all have a negative impact on teacher satisfaction, thus impacting school performance [2] [27]. In China, rapid urbanization and changing social demands have increased the pressure on schools to meet high standards of academic achievement while promoting the welfare of their staff [47].

The relationship between school performance and employee job satisfaction is fundamental to the success of educational institutions. While many studies confirm the individual importance of these constructs, a comprehensive synthesis that maps how they influence one another, especially within the evolving educational landscape of China, remains limited.

The purpose of this systematic review is to identify the intricate connection between employee job satisfaction and school performance in the context of Chinese schools. In particular, it aims to determine what are the most critical factors influencing both high school performance and employee satisfaction, and how such factors relate to one another in the context of China's distinct educational and political environment. The goals of this review are to: 1) evaluate the empirical literature that associates school performance measures (e.g., leadership competency, resource management, and student achievement) with employee job satisfaction, 2) analyze the difficulties that teachers experience in attaining job satisfaction in high-performing schools, and 3) make suggestions to policy makers and educational leaders on how to improve school performance and job satisfaction. Through the integration of current research, this review seeks to add to the understanding of the interactive dynamics between these two essential elements of the education system.

Methodology

This review used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework to provide methodological stringency, clarity, and transparency in the review process. PRISMA provides a systematic report structure for systematic reviews and meta-analyses that is useful in synthesizing the heterogeneous empirical literature from educational and organizational studies. Adhering to this procedure, the research utilized a four-step review process: identification, screening, eligibility testing, and inclusion, see figure 1. This systematic process enabled researchers to track, record, and defend every choice in selecting applicable literature.

Figure 1: *PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Study*
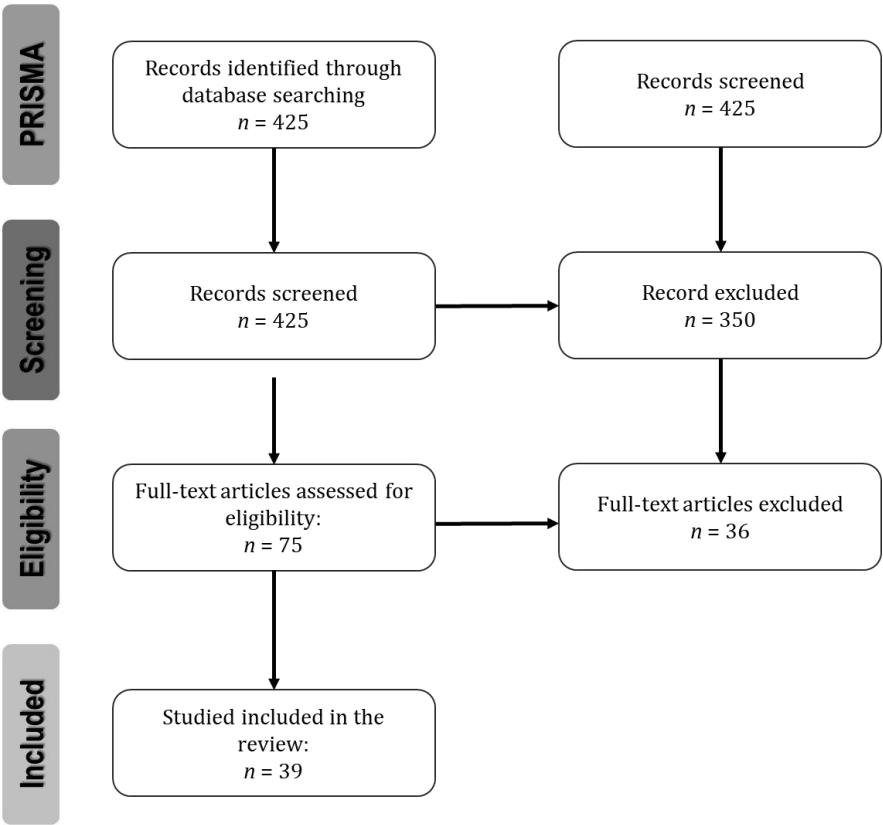
An exhaustive search strategy was utilized in a number of academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), and Google Scholar. These websites were chosen due to their large coverage of international and Chinese education research. The search employed a combination of keywords and Boolean operators like "school performance" AND "teacher job satisfaction," "educational leadership," "China schools," and "employee motivation in education." To ensure consistency and relevance, the review used publications made between 2000 and 2024. Backward and forward citation tracking was undertaken manually to access potentially missed but significant studies. The process of data extraction was systematic and rigorous in its approach towards making the included studies reliable and relevant. Following the identification of eligible studies through four stages of identification, screening, testing of eligibility, and inclusion, data were systematically extracted utilizing a pre-decided data extraction form. This structure was created to elicit important information like the research purpose of the study, the study design, sample size, instruments of measurement, outcomes, and setting where the study was undertaken. Specific focus was paid to those studies undertaken in Chinese schools and also to those investigating school performance and worker job satisfaction within China's singular socio-cultural and policy-influenced education system. Also, the studies' quality was judged in terms of methodological rigor, such as clarity of study design, sampling procedure, and data analysis methods. The data extracted were subsequently coded into themes to enable thematic analysis so that findings could be synthesized extensively across studies. This careful methodology towards extracting data ensured that only good-quality, pertinent studies had a bearing on the general conclusions of the review, and with minimal bias, improved the validity of the synthesis process.

The inclusion criteria stipulated those studies needed to be empirical, published in peer-reviewed articles or government reports, and specifically address school-level achievement or teacher and staff job satisfaction. Articles that were theoretically driven, single-mindedly student-focused, or concerned with higher education institutions were excluded. After determining potential articles, duplicates were eliminated, and abstracts were screened for applicability. Full copies of shortlisted studies were subsequently assessed and screened for methodological rigor and thematic relevance. Essential data were extracted from each study, covering study aims, design, sample size, outcomes, and applicability to the Chinese educational environment. A sound and open methodology guaranteed that merely top-quality, pertinent research was included in the synthesis to create a reliable foundation for making conclusions and determining future areas of research.

Results and Discussion

3.1 School Performance

3.1.1. School Leadership, Management, and Operations

School performance is a notion that goes beyond the academic result of students to embrace so many dimensions of effectiveness from an institutional perspective. A school's leadership is basically its backbone because it impacts so many aspects of the functionality of a school. It has been argued that any school's performance depends a great deal on the ability and style of its principal [11]. In addition, within the Chinese context, the implementation of transformational leadership styles by school principals generates a climate of trust, motivation, and innovation-which are very crucial to enhance the results of schools [31]. Moreover, practices of leadership that make the teachers, students, and parents work collaboratively bring a sense of cohesion and support in learning, therefore leading to improved overall performance.

Curriculum quality is another significant factor in school performance, especially when it comes to designing and implementing an effective curriculum that caters to the diverse needs of students. A well-designed curriculum will help to provide a framework for teaching that will lead to academic achievement, critical thinking, and emotional development. Good curricula are contemporary in educational practices, encourage student engagement, and are flexible enough to adapt to the changing needs of students [19]. Additionally, schools which frequently review their curricula and align them with world and local standards are the best to meet the changing requirements of students [16]. In this case where educational standards rapidly grow, schools must repeatedly check and enhance the relevant and rigorous curricula provided for students to prepare for the challenges ahead.

Resource management, in terms of both physical infrastructure and human capital, is very fundamental to ensuring high levels of school performance. The proper use of resources ensures that schools are capable of meeting the academic needs of students and the operational needs of staff. Schools in rapidly developing urban areas face challenges such as increasing student populations and changes in technological demands [46]. The effective allocation of resources is especially important in reducing inequalities between urban and rural schools. With sufficient resources, schools can implement innovative teaching methods, provide extracurricular opportunities, and ensure that students receive the support they need to succeed academically and socially [30]. This supports the argument that strategic resource management is essential for bridging gaps in educational quality and promoting equity in learning opportunities.

3.1.2. Basic Education Services

These will represent basic education services at the basis of any learning institution, meaning teaching of quality and access to material for students' acquisition, therefore a basis on which such service could stand. More importantly, for consistency, these should be qualitative and, thereby, consistent with student requirements. In China, government policies have focused on equitable access to education services to narrow performance gaps across regions. Nevertheless, there exist urban-rural disparities whereby urbanized are relatively well-endowed and have better infrastructure compared to the rural ones [10]. For example, teachers in urban schools are generally more trained and equipped with modern facilities and technological aids to aid in learning outcomes. There is a need to eliminate such disparities to enhance general school performance and equal chances for students in all geographical areas.

Schools need to focus on targeted interventions, such as teacher training, curriculum updates, and resource optimization, in order to improve the delivery of basic education services. Studies by Wang et al. (2024) indicate that schools that adopt a systematic approach to professional development and integrate innovative teaching strategies are likely to better improve student outcomes. Further, technology and community partnerships can be leveraged to further enhance the delivery of education services. Such strategies are relevant for fast-urbanizing regions where schools have to embrace a changing demand for schooling with a continued focus on equity and inclusivity.

3.1.3. Learning Environment

The learning environment is described as the physical, social, and psychological conditions that have an impact on the ability of students to learn effectively. A good learning environment is marked by safety, cleanliness, and readiness of classrooms and friendly, respectful interactions between teachers and students. A well-maintained and inclusive learning spaces significantly contributes to students' academic outcomes and emotional well-being [39]. Moreover, the learning environment is formed by the availability of resources for technology, learning materials, and trained educators.

In an evolving education system in China, the learning environment has become increasingly more important, especially in "new normal" post pandemic times. To improve virtual and in person learning environments, schools of Guangdong Province and similar urban areas are increasingly adopting technologically based strategies [48]. These innovations include smart classrooms, digital platforms, and hybrid models of teaching that are more flexible and accessible to the students. These are more relevant to solving the disparity in the conditions of learning between urban and rural schools where the gap is still seen in access to technology and other resources [18].

3.1.4. Human Resource Management and Development

As teachers and staff are the personnel involved in delivering educational objectives, the people behind the performance rely quite heavily on the management of school human resources. That being said, through human resource management practices, there comes recruitment, professional development, performance evaluation, and employees' motivation toward optimization as well. As suggested recently, continuous professional development contributes to instructional quality considerably. good training programs not only enhance teachers' pedagogical skills but also boost their confidence that subsequently improves student outcomes [16]. Additionally, performance appraisal systems providing constructive feedback and recognizing teachers' contributions help foster an excellence and accountability culture.

The adoption of human resource management strategies that emphasize staff welfare and career development is the key to enhancing both teacher satisfaction and school outcomes. For instance, schools that have adopted policies that are supportive, such as mentorship programs and stress management, experience more retention and better performance of teachers [45]. Moreover, investments in career development opportunities, such as advanced certifications and leadership training, will assist schools in building a motivated and skilled workforce. This is especially crucial in areas like Guangdong Province where schools compete for the highest qualified educators. In so doing, aligning human resource management practices with the needs of staff and the goals of the institution will enable schools to create a sustainable framework for long-term success.

3.1.5. Parent's Involvement and Community Partnership

Parent involvement and community partnerships are essential in attaining high school performance. Such partnerships give schools supplementary resources, shared responsibility for student success, and a conducive environment for learning. Schools that actively engage parents in activities such as parent-teacher conferences, school events, and home-based learning initiatives see improvements in student behavior, attendance, and academic performance. The most recent studies show that community partnerships enhance these benefits because they provide schools with external expertise and resources that can further enrich the students' educational experience.

Parental involvement and community engagement have emerged as critical components of school performance in the Chinese context, especially in urban areas. Cities with urbanized regions like Guangdong have started to form parent advisory committees and participate in local organizations to fill resource gaps and provide better care to students [33]. These initiatives have not only improved academic outcomes but also strengthened the relationship between schools and their surrounding communities.

The advantages of community partnerships go beyond resource sharing to include improving school reputation and promoting social cohesion. Schools that have strong working relationships with local businesses, cultural organizations, and local government agencies receive additional funding for their school, mentorship programs, and extracurricular activities, enhancing the development of students. The mutual relationships also enhance a collective responsibility of stakeholders in improving access to quality education [34]. By prioritizing parent involvement and community collaboration, schools can create a robust support system that addresses both academic and non-academic needs, ensuring sustained performance and growth.

3.2 Employees' Job Satisfaction

Employee job satisfaction represents the degree to which employees report feelings of fulfillment, motivation, and contentment with their jobs. It is a multi-faceted concept that also incorporates emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to different aspects of their job [1]. Current research emphasizes its significance for influencing employee performance, productivity, and general well-being at work. Job satisfaction can be defined as the match of worker's expectations with the actual condition of work life, a crucial predictor of organizational effectiveness and retention at work [25].

Job satisfaction can be said to be an element of two kinds: intrinsic and extrinsic factors of what would make a worker feel achieved at work. Intrinsic factors include opportunities for professional growth, autonomy in work, and meaningfulness of work, all of which play a very important role to foster motivation and engagement of the employees. Extrinsic factors including salary, job security, the work environment, and interpersonal relationships play a very important role in determining employees' perceptions of their job [1]. Teacher job satisfaction is particularly important for the education sector because it directly determines the effectiveness of teaching, commitment in teaching, and student performance. Teachers who are highly satisfied with their jobs tend to be enthusiastic, creative, and dedicated to instructional practices. In contrast, dissatisfaction leads to burnout, absenteeism, and turnover that interrupts the continuity of educational programs.

3.2.1. Security

Job security is the sense of stability and assurance that an employee derives from his role in the organization, contributing significantly to overall job satisfaction and performance in the workplace. Employees perceive their jobs as stable; they are likely to actively engage in their tasks, show higher motivation, and demonstrate long-term commitment toward the organization. Conversely, job insecurity has been associated with contract instability, restructuring of organizations, or external pressure and causes stress, demotivation, and poor job performance.

Public school teachers in China are generally better secured about their jobs compared to those in private schools. However, the ongoing reforms in education, such as measures of accountability and performance evaluation, have brought uncertainty, especially among educators in urban centers. This has increased pressure on teachers to meet changing standards of teaching, sometimes at the cost of job stability. To overcome the problems, there is a need for offering long-term contracts, transparent performance appraisal systems, and recognition of educators' contributions in order to instill security and fulfill the job satisfaction of these teachers [12].

3.2.2. Work Environment

The work environment is a key determinant in job satisfaction, particularly for teachers. A positive work environment will have good facilities, support from leaders, collaborative relationships, and adequate resources. All these factors contribute to the general job satisfaction and effectiveness of a teacher. Such an environment minimizes job-related stress while increasing teacher motivation, hence improving performance and job retention [27]. Additionally, if the teachers are given appropriate tools and supportive leadership, they can easily perform their roles with greater efficiency, which improves their positive attitude towards the profession.

The Chinese scenario has an immense variation in the working environment of schools in cities and rural areas, and this varies the level of satisfaction of teachers. Schools in urban areas generally have better resources, including newer facilities and more professional development opportunities, compared to rural schools [18]. With greater expectations from parents and policymakers for teachers in urban regions, a more favorable work environment is also much more critical. Some of the significant strategies for keeping teachers in high-pressure environments motivated and productive include ensuring proper infrastructures, administrative support, and peer collaboration.

3.2.3. Job Responsibilities

The nature and scope of job responsibilities are significant determinants of teachers' job satisfaction. Teachers often face the burden of many roles, including instructional, administrative, and extracurricular activities, which are usually stressful and affect their work-life balance and overall job satisfaction. In the context of such rapid change in the country's educational landscape, teachers become increasingly burdened with increasing responsibilities, especially in towns where the demand for their students' high academic performance becomes very high. Teachers are expected to not only meet very stringent academic targets but also to use innovative techniques and to be involved in continuous professional development, all of which contribute towards an escalating workload [39]. Despite their ability to add to the development of professionalism, when there is a lack of equalization with sufficient support, this can lead to significant pressure and job dissatisfaction. Such aspects are important for understanding why educational institutions need job expectations in tandem with corresponding support systems.

In China's approach to addressing job responsibility issues, similar understandings should be used: first on cultural and policy contexts defining teacher expectations. The current literature also supports that schools must better manage their workload to satisfy the needs of teachers to enhance job satisfaction [13]. Furthermore, a job responsibility definition that matches the teachers' abilities will contribute to higher job satisfaction and improved educational results. School systems can improve teachers' retention and even promote more sustainable and effective education services by providing a foundation that helps teachers be supported and thus make them happy to teach in school [36].

3.2.4. Community Attachments/Linkages

Teachers' connection to the community and their bonding with the immediate surroundings influences job satisfaction. A strong relationship of the school with parents, local organizations, and community stakeholders leads to a collaborative environment at schools, hence helping to boost job satisfaction. Community engagement in school affairs does not only distribute the workload on equal grounds but also help teachers relieve stress. Through this connection, teachers, therefore, feel belonging to the school and to work as committed professionals in general, enhancing their general welfare at the workplace.

Community and parental engagement is increasingly prioritized in China's urban schools, most especially in response to reforms in policy that emphasize holistic education [2]. In cities, teachers commonly enjoy strong parental support coupled with active community partnerships. These have been known to shape their job satisfaction and effectiveness as professionals. These connections make teachers feel more appreciated and supported because the burden of responsibility for student success is shared, which lessens their workload and emotionally and logistically reinforces their efforts. Additionally, schools that actively engage parents and community members tend to foster a more inclusive environment aligned with teachers' goals and enhance their motivation.

To build these linkages, educational institutions must actively build and sustain communication channels with parents and community stakeholders. Research indicates that frequent parent-teacher interactions, community-led school improvement initiatives, and collective responsibility in decision-making boost both teacher effectiveness and school outcomes (Liu et al., 2021). Such environments foster a sense of accountability and shared responsibility among members, thus improving teacher effectiveness and retention. Additionally, such partnerships free teachers' time from extra burdens placed on them, enabling the teachers to concentrate more on matters of instructional quality and further professional development.

3.3. Relationship Between School Performance and Employee Job Satisfaction

The association between school performance and employee job satisfaction is a well-explored topic in educational research. School performance is a measure of the overall success of schools in achieving their academic and operational objectives, whereas job satisfaction is a reflection of teachers' satisfaction with their job, work environment, and organizational context [25]. These two dimensions are by themselves intertwined; an effective school is usually characterized by an appropriate working environment, which positively affects job satisfaction. Likewise, satisfied employees work harder and are more motivated, thereby increasing their commitment toward a better performance in schools [3].

Many researchers agree on the mutual interaction of these two dimensions of the effect of school performance and job satisfaction. Teachers who work in high-performing schools are more likely to enjoy higher job satisfaction because they have better leadership, resource utilization, and good working conditions [27]. Conversely, teacher dissatisfaction is likely to have a negative impact on instructional quality, student results, and school efficiency overall. In China, where increased performance pressure from educational reforms weighs heavily on schools, teacher satisfaction is an important factor to balance performance demands [34].

A demonstration that schools where both performance and job satisfaction increase together must mean that the leadership is very well aligned with management practice along with teacher well-being. A study carried out by Leithwood and Jantzi in 2006 revealed that schools experienced better academic outcomes along with increases in teacher job satisfaction by effective leadership along with substantial support systems. Such results in schools came from increased communication, professional development opportunity recognition, and teacher contributions within those schools. As

applied in schools in Finland, through focus on teacher autonomy, decision making, and continuous professional development, both job and school satisfaction improved simultaneously [1].

Empirical studies have been conducted in China to examine the impact of leadership on school performance and teacher satisfaction. Research has found school leaders in urban centers, if they emphasize resource allocation, professional development, and teacher recognition, will have a considerably positive influence on school performance and employee satisfaction [30]. Consistent with these findings is international research in Canada and in the United States that suggest the practices of leadership immediately impact the morale, level of engagement, and subsequent school success of teachers [5]. Case studies and research findings add further support for the encouragement of performance-oriented and satisfying environments. As an example, a study comparing Shanghai schools with rural provincial schools established that those that had excellent leadership, community involvement, and equitable allocation of resources achieved superior performance in terms of satisfactory outcomes of high performance [2]. These findings underscore the need for balanced strategies that focus on not only academic achievements but also the well-being of teachers.

3.4 Gaps in the Literature and Future Research Perspectives

While much research has been conducted regarding school performance and employee job satisfaction, very few examine these two variables in relation to each other in specific cities and urban areas. The existing literature mainly focuses on general trends at the national or provincial level, which may miss the localized dynamics and school-specific conditions. This gap is a call for a focused investigation into how school performance and employee job satisfaction interact in this particular context, where schools face increasing pressures to meet academic standards while maintaining teacher well-being.

The second major gap is seen in the integration of performance indicators and job satisfaction components with existing studies. Most analyses tend to investigate school performance and job satisfaction as a standalone construct without delving into the connection between these two concepts in detail. For example, studies involving school performance typically revolve around leadership, operations, and resource management without examining how such factors influence the overall satisfaction of teachers. On the contrary, job satisfaction research usually focuses on working conditions, job security, and professional development, with little attention given to how these factors play a role in the success of the school as an institution. An integrated analysis of performance indicators and satisfaction components is necessary to develop an understanding of their relationship in a holistic manner.

Secondly, there is an urgent need for localized studies within the Chinese educational context. While international research has contributed significant knowledge about school performance and job satisfaction, findings based in the West or other parts of Asia may not necessarily apply to China. Given that the cultural, economic, and educational contexts in which Chinese schools are established and function are unique, cultural, economic, and education-specific factors may mediate school performance and job satisfaction perceptions and experiences. For instance, localized studies that account for these cultural and contextual considerations are necessary to deliver more relevant and actionable findings to policymakers and educators in China.

The resolution of these research gaps will significantly contribute to the overall understanding of school performance and job satisfaction in urban areas and similar educational settings. The current study aims to bridge existing knowledge gaps by exploring localized dynamics, integrating key performance indicators with job satisfaction components, and situating the study within the Chinese cultural context. The findings will help in developing targeted strategies that ensure a balanced and sustainable approach to educational success and outcomes as well as employee well-being.

Conclusions

This systematic review emphasizes the close relationship between employee job satisfaction and school performance in the Chinese educational context. Effective leadership, effective resource management, good community relations, and a positive learning climate are the essential factors that work together to lead to school success. Likewise, job satisfaction spurred by job security, clear job roles, workplace climate, and community attachment increases teacher motivation, retention, and teaching quality.

However, there are other gaps identified, including the lack of localized studies of rapidly growing cities, underdeveloped frameworks connecting performance and satisfaction, and the demand for more longitudinal and mixed-method research. All these points out the importance of taking a holistic and contextual attitude towards educational policy and school management. Future research should advance over integrating well-being in employee in school performance measurements, thus looking after the students and looking after the teachers.

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