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Rewards, Workload, and Competence in Relation to Job Satisfaction Among Train Drivers

1st Fatasya Rizki Fauziah
Management Study Program
Universitas Pancasakti Tegal
Tegal, Indonesia
fatasyarizki9@gmail.com

2nd Mahben Jalil
Management Study Program
Universitas Pancasakti Tegal
Tegal, Indonesia
mahbenjalil@upstegal.ac.id

3rd Deddy Prihadi
Digital Business Study Program
Universitas Pancasakti Tegal
Tegal, Indonesia
deddyprihadi@upstegal.ac.id

Abstract

Job satisfaction among train drivers is a critical issue in human resource management (HRM) for public transportation, because the profession demands high responsibility, operational precision, and strict safety compliance. This study analyzes the effects of reward, workload, and employee competence on the job satisfaction of train drivers at PT Kereta Api Indonesia (Persero) Daop IV Semarang. A quantitative approach was applied to a sample of 100 train drivers selected through proportional random sampling. Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed with multiple linear regression in IBM SPSS 25. The results show that reward and employee competence have a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction, whereas workload has no significant effect. Together, the three variables explain 80.1% of the variation in job satisfaction (adjusted R²). The findings offer practical implications for transportation management in designing policies that strengthen reward systems and competence development. They also align with national efforts to improve job quality in the transportation sector and with global HRM trends that treat employee well-being as a foundation of safe and sustainable work environments, particularly for high-risk occupations such as train driving.

Keywords: *reward; workload; employee competence; job satisfaction; train drivers*

I. INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction in human resource management (HRM) plays an important role in organizational stability, employee productivity, and service quality (Luthans et al., 2015). Globally, institutions such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank emphasize employee well-being as part of sustainable development strategies in the public sector, including transportation. Workers in this sector often face high pressure, heavy responsibilities, and strict demands for safety and operational punctuality (World Bank Group, 2022). In Indonesia, the transportation

sector, and the railway in particular, serves as the backbone of public mobility. PT KAI (Persero), as the main operator, faces complex challenges in ensuring the welfare of its employees, especially in crucial positions such as train drivers.

An internal survey at PT KAI (Persero) Daop IV Semarang identified three main problems affecting train drivers' job satisfaction. First, 65% of train drivers felt that the rewards and incentives they receive are not commensurate with the workload they carry every day, which indicates an imbalance between the effort they expend and the compensation they receive. Second, 58% reported physical and mental fatigue caused by excessive workload in their daily operational duties, which suggests that workload has not been managed optimally to preserve the balance between work and employee health. Third, 54% stated that the available training and competence development programs are not adequate to improve their work capabilities, a signal that the company needs to invest in human resource development more strategically and sustainably. Together, these problems underline the importance of management attention to rewards, workload, and competence development in improving train drivers' job satisfaction comprehensively.

Reward, workload, and competence strongly influence the job satisfaction of train drivers at PT KAI (Persero) Daop IV Semarang. Fair and competitive rewards, such as salary, bonuses, and allowances, can raise morale and loyalty, and appropriate incentives help sustain drivers' motivation and commitment to the company. Conversely, an excessive workload and an uneven distribution of tasks can cause stress and fatigue, which lowers morale and may also compromise operational safety in the field. Employee competence, which encompasses technical skills and experience, is likewise an important determinant of job satisfaction, because good competence enables drivers to contribute fully to operational targets. In view of the importance of these three factors, this study focuses on the effects of reward, workload, and competence on the job satisfaction of train drivers at PT KAI (Persero) Daop IV Semarang.

Job satisfaction reflects an employee's positive emotional attitude toward the job, formed from the perception that the job fulfills expectations and values considered important (Robbins & Judge, 2018). Beyond financial compensation, job satisfaction encompasses a sense of belonging, work morale, and discipline (Hasibuan, 2016), as well as achievements that match individual expectations, thereby fostering a harmonious relationship between employees and the company (Luthans et al., 2015). Reward is an organization's appreciation of employees for their contributions and covers both financial and non-financial compensation (Handoko, 2016). Rewards aim to encourage professionalism and optimal performance (Kadarisman, 2017) and serve as reciprocation for work performed in accordance with the responsibilities of a position (Prasetyo et al., 2024).

Workload is the set of tasks assigned to an employee within a certain time limit, taking individual capacity and ability into account (Koesomowidjojo, 2017). It refers to the overall volume and level of difficulty of the tasks that an individual or a team must complete within a given period (Hermawan, 2024), and it includes duration, difficulty, and job demands that may be perceived as exceeding one's capability if not managed properly (Budiasa, 2021). Competence is an individual's capacity to perform tasks professionally, formed from a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personal values acquired through experience and learning (Sutrisno, 2016). It reflects the overall ability inherent in a person to complete work effectively and efficiently according to the demands of the position (Widiastuti, 2023).

Previous studies have examined determinants of job satisfaction such as reward, workload, and employee competence in various sectors. Febrianti et al. (2023) reported that workload has a negative effect on job satisfaction because high pressure reduces comfort at work. Suhartini and Pebrianti (2023) found that employee competence has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction because good skills and abilities foster self-confidence, and Siregar et al. (2023) showed that a reward system plays a significant role in raising job satisfaction because appropriate recognition encourages work motivation. Nevertheless, these studies have limitations that should be noted for further research. Some focused only on industries that differ from railway transportation, and their approaches did not combine reward, workload, and competence in a single simultaneous analytical framework. Their findings are also inconsistent: Febrianti et al. (2023) found a negative effect of workload, whereas Alfaruqhi et al. (2023) concluded that talent management and workload have a simultaneous effect.

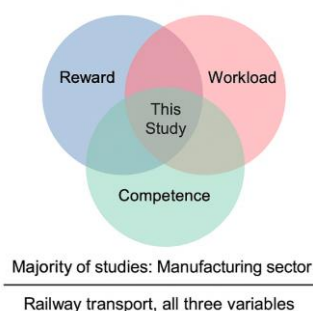


Fig. 1. **Mapping of the research gap in previous studies**

Source: Authors' own work (2025)

These differences point to a gap in the literature, particularly regarding the railway industry context and the role of train drivers as workers with high responsibility. Although many studies have examined job satisfaction, three gaps remain. First, in terms of context, most studies were conducted in the manufacturing sector, whereas the railway industry has unique characteristics that have rarely been explored. Second, in terms of variable integration, previous studies tended to focus on one or two variables, such as reward or workload, without integrating all three (reward, workload, and competence) simultaneously. Third, in terms of methodology, some studies used small samples or less robust analytical methods, so their results cannot be generalized.

This study is motivated by three considerations. Practically, its results can serve as a basis for the management of PT KAI (Persero) Daop IV Semarang in formulating more effective policies to improve train drivers' job satisfaction. Theoretically, it enriches the literature by integrating the three main variables (reward, workload, and competence) in the railway industry context. In terms of novelty, it explores the dynamics of job satisfaction among train drivers, a group of workers with a crucial role who have received little attention in previous research. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the effects of reward, workload, and competence on the job satisfaction of train drivers at PT KAI (Persero) Daop IV Semarang, both partially and simultaneously. The results are expected to provide a basis for strategic recommendations to improve the quality of human resources in railway transportation. Table I summarizes the previous studies used as references.

TABLE I. PREVIOUS STUDIES

No.	Authors and Year	Title	Analysis Tool	Similarities	Differences
1.	Simamora & Sukati (2024)	The Effect of Work Discipline, Work Motivation, and Workload on Employee Job Satisfaction at PT Schneider Electric Manufacturing Batam	Multiple linear regression	Shared independent variable (workload) and dependent variable (job satisfaction).	Additional independent variables (work discipline and work motivation); research object is PT Schneider Electric Manufacturing Batam.
2.	Suhartini & Pebrianti (2023)	The Effect of Competence, Work Performance, and Career Development on Employee Job Satisfaction	Multiple linear regression	Shared independent variable (competence) and dependent variable (job satisfaction).	Additional independent variables (work performance and career development); research object is the Cikedal Sub-district Office, Pandeglang Regency.
3.	Siregar et al. (2023)	Does Reward System Effect Employee Job Satisfaction: Evidence from Public Sector	SEM (Structural Equation Modeling)	Shared independent variable (reward system) and dependent variable (job satisfaction).	Different research object: the Agriculture Office of Labuhanbatu Regency.
4.	Febrianti et al. (2023)	The Effect of Workload and Compensation on Job Satisfaction at PT MACF Bima City	Multiple linear regression	Shared independent variable (workload) and dependent variable (job satisfaction); compensation is an additional independent variable.	Different research object: PT MACF Bima City.
5.	Alfaruqi et al. (2023)	The Effect of Talent Management and Workload on Employee Job Satisfaction	Multiple linear regression	Shared independent variable (workload) and dependent variable (job satisfaction).	Additional independent variable (talent management); research object is the DJPB Office of Riau Province.
6.	Harmen et al. (2020)	The Workload and Organizational Commitment to Job Satisfaction	Multiple regression	Shared independent variable (workload) and dependent variable (job satisfaction).	Additional independent variable (organizational commitment); research object is PT Perkebunan Nusantara III (Persero) Medan.

Source: Authors' own work (2025)

II. METHOD

A. Research Design, Population, and Sample

This study applied a quantitative approach to train drivers of PT KAI (Persero) Daop IV Semarang in 2025. The population comprised all train drivers working in the Operations Unit, totaling 258 drivers (62 from the Tegal Train Crew and 196 from the SMC Train Crew). Proportional random sampling was used because it suits the context of the phenomenon studied, which yielded a sample of 100 train drivers (30 from the Tegal Train Crew and 70 from the SMC Train Crew). The sample size was determined with the Slovin formula:

$$n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$$

where $N = 258$ (population size) and $e = 0.1$ (10% margin of error). The calculation is as follows:

$$n = 258 / (1 + 258(0.1)^2) = 258 / (1 + 2.58) = 258 / 3.58 = 72.067, \text{ rounded to } n = 100$$

B. Data Collection

The data were obtained through a primary questionnaire distributed directly to respondents. The instrument used a 1–5 Likert scale to measure the research variables, and the questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability to ensure its dependability. The instrument consisted of 10 items per variable. All items had an r -count greater than the r -table value (0.361; $N = 30$), and Cronbach's alpha exceeded 0.6, so the instrument was declared valid and reliable (Table II).

TABLE II. SUMMARY OF VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY TEST RESULTS

Variable	No. of Items	Min. r-count	r-table (N=30, $\alpha=0.05$)	Valid	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliable	Original Scale Source
Reward	10	0.596	0.361	Yes	0.897	Yes	Hasibuan (2016)
Workload	10	0.600	0.361	Yes	0.895	Yes	Mangkunegara (2017)
Employee Competence	10	0.633	0.361	Yes	0.899	Yes	Spencer & Spencer (2008)
Job Satisfaction	10	0.556	0.361	Yes	0.897	Yes	Luthans et al. (2015)

Source: Authors' own work (2025)

C. Variables and Indicators

Job satisfaction (Y), the dependent variable, was measured with the indicators of Robbins and Judge (2018): the work itself, pay, promotion, supervision, and co-workers. The independent variables were measured as follows. Reward (X₁) used the indicators of Karami et al. (2013): financial reward, inherent reward, and non-financial reward. Workload (X₂) used the indicators of Putra (2013): targets to be achieved, working conditions, use of working time, and job standards. Employee competence (X₃) used the indicators of Moeheriono (2014): task skills, task management skills, contingency management skills, job role environment skills, and transfer skills.

D. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with IBM SPSS 25. Multiple linear regression was chosen because the research model aims to test the direct effects of several independent variables on one dependent variable. This model improves prediction accuracy compared with simple linear regression, allows the analysis of complex relationships among variables, and permits simultaneous hypothesis testing of the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Because the model contains no moderating or mediating variables, this approach is considered appropriate and efficient, in line with Hildawati (2024), who notes that linear regression is suitable for its simplicity and for modeling functional relationships among variables assumed to be linear. Multiple linear regression is also more practical and efficient than SEM or PLS because the sample size is moderate and the analysis does not require latent relationships among constructs; Ghozali (2018) likewise notes that linear regression is effective for testing direct effects among explicitly measured variables. This choice also follows approaches commonly used in earlier studies of train drivers' job satisfaction. The analysis proceeded through (1) classical assumption tests, (2) multiple linear regression to test the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable, (3) the t-test for partial hypotheses, (4) the F-test for the simultaneous hypothesis, and (5) the coefficient of determination (R²) to measure the contribution of the independent variables. The regression model (Ghozali, 2018) is:

$$Y = a + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + e$$

where Y = job satisfaction, α = constant, β = regression coefficient, X₁ = reward, X₂ = workload, X₃ = employee competence, and e = error term.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

Before the regression analysis, the instrument was tested for validity and reliability. All items had r-count values above 0.361 with significance below 0.05, and Cronbach's alpha values were above 0.6, indicating that the instrument was valid and reliable.

1) Descriptive statistics

Descriptive analysis was performed to give an initial picture of the data distribution for reward, workload, employee competence, and job satisfaction (Table III).

TABLE III. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Job Satisfaction	100	20	50	41.57	7.238
Reward	100	10	50	37.54	9.638
Workload	100	27	50	41.27	6.105
Employee Competence	100	28	50	42.32	5.791
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Source: SPSS 25 output processed by the authors (2025)

Employee competence has the highest mean (42.32), followed by job satisfaction (41.57) and workload (41.27), with relatively low standard deviations (5.791 to 7.238). Reward has the widest range of values (10–50) and the highest standard deviation (9.638), which indicates greater data variation than the other variables. Overall, respondents tended to give high ratings to employee competence, while reward showed a wider dispersion of scores. The bar chart of the means (Fig. 2) shows that the train drivers at PT KAI Daop IV Semarang rate their own competence fairly high, followed by job satisfaction and workload, which are relatively balanced. Reward has the lowest mean (37.54), suggesting that recognition and incentives are perceived as less than optimal compared with the other aspects.



Fig. 2. **Mean scores of the research variables**
Source: SPSS 25 output processed by the authors (2025)

2) Multiple linear regression analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to test the effects of reward, workload, and employee competence on job satisfaction (Table IV).

TABLE IV. MULTIPLE LINEAR REGRESSION RESULTS (INCLUDING COLLINEARITY STATISTICS)

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.008	3.002		0.336	0.738		
Reward	0.451	0.064	0.498	7.077	< 0.001	0.406	2.463
Workload	0.058	0.046	0.058	1.282	0.203	0.969	1.032
Employee Competence	0.463	0.072	0.451	6.459	< 0.001	0.413	2.421

Dependent variable: Job Satisfaction. Source: SPSS 25 output processed by the authors (2025)

The regression equation is:

$$Y = 1.008 + 0.451X_1 + 0.058X_2 + 0.463X_3 + e$$

Reward and employee competence have a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction (Sig. < 0.001 < 0.05), whereas workload has no significant effect (Sig. = 0.203 > 0.05). The path diagram in Fig. 3 illustrates the direction and strength of the effect of each independent variable on job satisfaction. Reward ($\beta = 0.451$; $p < 0.001$) and employee competence ($\beta = 0.463$; $p < 0.001$) exert positive and significant effects, whereas workload ($\beta = 0.058$; $p = 0.203$) has a weak and insignificant effect. This visualization confirms that reward and competence are the dominant factors influencing the job satisfaction of train drivers.

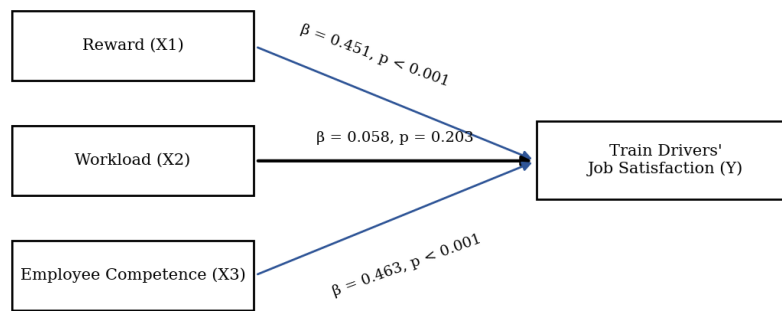


Fig. 3. Path diagram of the effects on job satisfaction

Source: Authors' own work (2025)

3) Classical assumption tests

The initial Kolmogorov–Smirnov test indicated that the residuals were not normally distributed (asymptotic significance = 0.002; Table V). However, when the test was repeated with the Monte Carlo method, the significance value was 0.124, which exceeds 0.05, so the data are considered normally distributed.

TABLE V. ONE-SAMPLE KOLMOGOROV–SMIRNOV NORMALITY TEST (UNSTANDARDIZED RESIDUAL)

N	100	Test statistic	0.117
Normal parameters: mean (a, b)	0.0000000	Asymp. sig. (2-tailed)	0.002 (c)
Normal parameters: std. deviation	3.40066257	Monte Carlo sig. (2-tailed)	0.124 (d)
Most extreme differences: absolute	0.117	99% confidence interval, lower bound	0.115
Most extreme differences: positive / negative	0.117 / -0.083	99% confidence interval, upper bound	0.132

(a) Test distribution is normal. (b) Calculated from data. (c) Lilliefors significance correction. (d) Based on 10,000 sampled tables with starting seed 2000000. Source: SPSS 25 output processed by the authors (2025)

For multicollinearity (Table IV), the tolerance values are 0.406 for reward, 0.969 for workload, and 0.413 for employee competence, all well above 0.10, and the VIF values are 2.463, 1.032, and 2.421, respectively, all below 10. Hence, there is no multicollinearity among the independent variables in this regression model. For heteroscedasticity, the scatterplot (Fig. 4) shows points scattered randomly around zero, indicating that there is no heteroscedasticity.

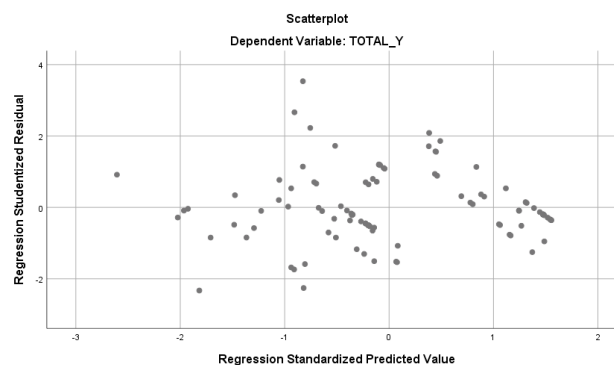


Fig. 4. Heteroscedasticity test (scatterplot)

Source: SPSS 25 output processed by the authors (2025)

4) Hypothesis testing

In the partial t-test (Table IV), an effect is considered significant when the significance value is below 0.05. Reward has a regression coefficient of 0.451 with a significance of < 0.001 (< 0.05), so reward has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction. Workload has a coefficient of 0.058 with a significance of 0.203 (> 0.05), so it has no significant effect on job satisfaction. Employee competence has a coefficient of 0.463 with a significance of < 0.001 (< 0.05), so it has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction.

In the simultaneous F-test (Table VI), the F-count is 133.617 with a significance of < 0.001 . The F-count exceeds the F-table value (2.70; $df = k - 1$; $n - k = 3$; 96) and the significance is below 0.05, so reward, workload, and employee competence together have a significant effect on the job satisfaction of train drivers at PT KAI Daop IV Semarang.

TABLE VI. SIMULTANEOUS TEST (F-TEST, ANOVA)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	4780.519	3	1593.506	133.617	< 0.001
Residual	1144.886	96	11.926		
Total	5925.405	99			

Dependent variable: Job Satisfaction. Predictors: (Constant), Employee Competence, Workload, Reward. Source: SPSS 25 output processed by the authors (2025)

5) Coefficient of determination

Table VII shows $R^2 = 0.807$ and an adjusted R^2 of 0.801. Reward, workload, and employee competence therefore jointly explain 80.1% of the variation in the job satisfaction of train drivers (adjusted R^2), which indicates a strong joint influence.

TABLE VII. COEFFICIENT OF DETERMINATION (MODEL SUMMARY)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.898	0.807	0.801	3.453389

Predictors: (Constant), Employee Competence, Workload, Reward. Source: SPSS 25 output processed by the authors (2025)

B. Discussion

1) Effect of reward on job satisfaction

Reward has a positive and significant effect on the job satisfaction of train drivers at PT KAI Daop IV Semarang, so the first hypothesis is accepted. This finding is in line with Siregar et al. (2023), who stated that an effective reward system can increase motivation and the feeling of being valued by the company. The rewards provided include material aspects, such as competitive salaries, bonuses, and allowances, and non-material aspects, such as recognition of performance and career development opportunities. Both forms build a positive perception of the organization. The implication is that the company should formulate fair and transparent compensation policies and strengthen performance-based reward systems. PT KAI and similar transportation companies could apply incentives based on realistic work targets or monthly award programs to increase work motivation and loyalty.

2) Effect of workload on job satisfaction

In contrast to the other two variables, workload has no significant effect on job satisfaction, so the second hypothesis is rejected. Although train drivers have tight working hours and heavy responsibilities, this result can be explained by efficient internal management: a structured shift system, fair schedule rotation, and proportional task distribution probably reduce the negative effects of workload. This is consistent with Harmen et al. (2020), who found that the effect of workload can be mitigated when the company has a supportive management system. The implication is that PT KAI needs to keep monitoring and evaluating its scheduling and workload distribution so that they remain at an optimal level. Although workload currently does not undermine satisfaction, neglecting workload dynamics in the future could lead to lower satisfaction or burnout.

3) Effect of employee competence on job satisfaction

Competence has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction, which supports the third hypothesis. Competent employees feel more confident in completing tasks, handle challenges better, and show high work effectiveness. This finding agrees with Suhartini and Pebrianti (2023), who stated that mastery of skills and knowledge increases self-confidence and satisfaction with work results. The implication is that PT KAI should strengthen continuous technical training and career development programs for train drivers. Investment in training improves not only individual performance but also operational safety and the overall performance of the company.

4) Simultaneous effect of reward, workload, and competence on job satisfaction

Simultaneously, the three independent variables (reward, workload, and competence) are significantly related to job satisfaction and account for 80.7% of its variation ($R^2 = 0.807$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.801$). This supports the fourth hypothesis that the three variables are interrelated and jointly shape the level of job satisfaction experienced by employees. A motivating reward system, efficient workload management, and a high level of competence together create positive synergy in the work environment. Although workload is not significant on its own, its effect becomes evident when it is combined with reward and competence. The implication is that PT KAI should adopt a holistic approach to HR management, as suggested by Alfaruqhi et al. (2023): reward strategies, workload management, and competence development should be integrated in a balanced and sustainable way. This will create a healthy and productive work environment that supports long-term job satisfaction.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the effects of reward, workload, and competence on the job satisfaction of train drivers at PT KAI Daop IV Semarang. Using multiple linear regression, the analysis shows that reward and competence have a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction, whereas workload has no significant effect. Simultaneously, the three variables make a large contribution to explaining the variation in train drivers' job satisfaction. The key message of this study is that the management of PT KAI should prioritize strengthening the reward system and improving competence through continuous training, since these two aspects were shown to have a direct effect on job satisfaction. A supportive work environment, sustained by fair rewards and competent human resources, will create more stable and productive operational performance, especially in public transportation such as the railway, which relies on human reliability in its operations.

This study has limitations. Its scope is limited to Daop IV Semarang, so the results cannot yet be generalized to all PT KAI operational regions. In addition, the cross-sectional data restrict the analysis to a single point in time and do not capture long-term dynamics or changes in job satisfaction. Future studies are advised to (1) expand the geographic coverage to several PT KAI operational regions to obtain a more representative picture, (2) use a longitudinal approach to capture changes in job satisfaction over time in greater depth, and (3) add external variables, such as organizational culture, leadership style, or managerial support, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence job satisfaction.

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