SECTION MANAGEMENT, MARKETING, ECONOMIC INFORMATICS AND CYBERNETICS

ROMANIAN AND KENYAN BUSINESS GRADUATES: EXPLORING THE LINK BETWEEN WORK ENGAGEMENT, REWARDS, AND JOB SATISFACTION

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Abstract: *Developing longer-lasting relationships with graduates, also known as alumni, benefits individuals and universities, enhances organizational performance, and contributes to regional and national renewal. Examining job satisfaction among business graduates from two emerging economies, Romania and Kenya, is an important topic for both countries, as alumni report relatively lower satisfaction compared to their peers from developed economies when receiving equivalent financial and non-financial work rewards. This study therefore aims to highlight the impact of work engagement and rewards on job satisfaction among two groups of business graduates, one from Romania and the other from Kenya. Drawing on social exchange theory complemented by social information processing theory, the authors conducted an exploratory quantitative study involving business graduates from both countries. Data were collected through an online questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS 24.0 software. The results reveal that work engagement is the main predictor of job satisfaction in both groups. Specifically, regression analysis indicates that for Romanian graduates, only one subdimension (vigor) has a significant effect, while for Kenyan graduates, two subdimensions (vigor and dedication) exert a significant and positive influence, whereas the third (absorption) has a negative effect. Unexpectedly, the dimensions of work rewards (financial, recognition and socializing, and promotion and development) exert only a limited and statistically insignificant influence on job search behavior in both groups. Accordingly, this study provides new insights for universities and managers on effectively engaging with alumni and harnessing their potential to enrich business education as well as the local, regional, and national entrepreneurial ecosystem.*

Keywords: *university graduates; Romania; Kenya; work engagement; work rewards; job satisfaction.*

JEL Classification: *A23; M20*

1. Introduction

Job satisfaction, which arises when people feel happy at work because they manage to fulfill their material and psychological needs through their job, is one of the themes that is garnering increasing interest (Sypniewska, 2014; Judge et al., 2020; Wonah et al., 2025). A significant body of literature has shown that organizations that take employee satisfaction seriously improve the work environment and strengthen their position in their field (e.g., Judge et al., 2020; Daneshmandi et al., 2023). This aspect is also proper for universities, which have long recognized that graduates satisfied with their jobs enhance the reputation of their alma mater, attract students, and strengthen employer relationships, factors that, in turn, influence rankings, accreditation, and funding (e.g., Gustafsson et al., 2018).

In the digital transformation era, job satisfaction among university graduates has gained deeper attraction among researchers, with a recent trend suggesting that alumni surveys be replaced with web search-based analyses (Alemi and Maddox, 2024). However, most studies on graduate job satisfaction overwhelmingly focus on developed markets, while only a few, both in scope and scale, consider emerging markets, such as Mwizerwa et al. (2017) for East Africa and Mitrea (2024) for Romania. Studying job satisfaction among graduates is crucial in emerging markets such as Romania in Europe and Kenya in Africa. Young employees dissatisfied with their workplace often leave their home countries and migrate to more developed nations that offer greater work rewards, potentially at the same level of work engagement. Consequently, our study aims to explore the relationship between work engagement, rewards, and job satisfaction to identify strategies for improving graduates' workplace satisfaction. This aim has positive implications for individuals, universities as institutions that educate specialists, organizations with increasing demands for satisfied experts and professionals, and, ultimately, the economies of both countries, which can thrive only through young, engaged, and fulfilled employees who view work as a significant part of life.

To achieve this goal, we set out to answer the following two research questions:

RQ1: Which specific work rewards—financial compensation, recognition, and social interactions, as well as opportunities for promotion and professional development—are most strongly associated with job satisfaction among business graduates? Furthermore, what are the key similarities and differences between graduates from Romania and Kenya regarding the perceived impact of these rewards on job satisfaction?

RQ2: To what extent does the employee's positive psychological state—characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (i.e., work engagement)—correlate with job satisfaction? What are the distinctions and commonalities between Romanian and Kenyan graduates regarding their work engagement components and their relationship to job satisfaction?

The authors conducted an empirical study using a survey methodology to address these research questions, using a questionnaire as the primary research instrument. This questionnaire was administered to graduates of the Faculty of Economic Sciences at the University of Oradea, Romania, and the Business School at Strathmore University, Nairobi, Kenya.

By integrating economic and cultural perspectives from two countries, Romania and Kenya, this study contributes to the consolidation and diversification of existing research on graduates' job satisfaction in diverse cultural contexts, highlighting the importance of dimensions associated with work engagement and reward systems.

2. Theoretical and Contextual Framework

The contemporary economy is strongly influenced by digitalization and globalization, which reshape the labor market and transform both job structures and competency requirements (Wang, Yan and Yang, 2025). The introduction of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and automation reduces human involvement in repetitive tasks while increasing expectations regarding analytical and creative capabilities (Cristache et al., 2025; Botezat et al., 2025). These transformations require highly educated individuals to adapt continuously to complex, dynamic work environments.

2.1. Cross-National Context

Labor market analyses in Romania show that demographic decline, migration, and technological change intensify pressure on employees and employers alike (Concordia, KPMG and INCE, 2019). Skill requirements evolve rapidly, prompting the need for workforce retraining. Persistent regional disparities and the rise of remote work further complicate labor market dynamics. Romanian specialists, particularly in technical and professional domains, face increased demands for adaptability and efficiency, factors that significantly affect job satisfaction. By 2030, Romania is projected to require more than 600,000 individuals to fill highly skilled positions, including IT professionals, engineers, legal experts, and health specialists. This demand arises in the broader context of Romania having one of the largest groups of mobile workers within the European Union, many of whom are highly educated (EURES, European Employment Services).

In Kenya, demographic trends create a different but equally challenging context. A large share of the population is under 35, and hundreds of thousands of young people enter the labor market annually (KIPPRA, 2024). However, only a small proportion secure stable employment (Danish Trade Union Development Agency, 2024). Despite government initiatives aimed at improving graduate employability, job opportunities remain far below demand. Moreover, employers frequently report that recent graduates are insufficiently prepared for workplace expectations (Njeru, 2025).

These gaps highlight the critical need for skills development programs. Studies emphasize that structured learning opportunities and career development initiatives improve engagement and performance across sectors (Muchibi et al., 2022; Njoroge et al., 2021). Consequently, universities play a central role in better preparing graduates for rapidly shifting labor markets by integrating employability-focused learning experiences.

Understanding how work engagement and rewards influence job satisfaction is essential in both national contexts. Such insights help organizations and universities design strategies to attract, motivate, and retain valuable employees. This is particularly important as societies increasingly expect universities to contribute not only to education but also to innovation, business creation, and broader economic development.

2.2. Global Importance of Work Rewards, Engagement, and Job Satisfaction

Work rewards, whether financial (salaries, commissions, bonuses) or non-financial (recognition, promotion, development), serve economic, social, and psychological functions in the workplace (Pkite and Ng'eno, 2023) and represent an important expectation among young employees (Botezat, Fotea and Fotea, 2023). According to the Social Exchange Theory, employees assess whether rewards match their effort; when they perceive fairness (Ahmad et al., 2023), motivation and job satisfaction increase (Judge et al., 2020).

Recent literature (e.g., Cooper-Thomas and Morrison, 2018) emphasizes that digital transformation reshapes organizational complexity and employee behavior. Workplace exchanges generate expectations of reciprocity: employees anticipate fair rewards, while organizations expect positive attitudes, described through work engagement (WE) (Schaufeli, 2012). Engagement is reflected in vigor, dedication, and absorption and is supported by personal resources such as optimism (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007) and personality traits like openness and conscientiousness (Schaufeli, 2016). Situational factors also matter, including a supportive work climate (Schaufeli, 2016) and transformational leadership (Shkoler and Tziner, 2020). Graduates' work engagement contributes to performance (Rotich, 2020; Njoroge et al., 2021) and positively affects job satisfaction (Nemțeanu and Dabija, 2020).

Job satisfaction trends in Romania have evolved alongside increased workplace flexibility and changing economic conditions (Davidescu et al., 2020; Botezat, Fotea and Fotea, 2023). PwC's 2023 survey shows that many employees plan to change jobs due to concerns about development and work conditions. In Kenya, a Brighter Monday report (2021) indicated that while most employees view job satisfaction as essential for productivity, fewer than half are satisfied with their roles. Job satisfaction is shaped by fair compensation, promotion opportunities, skill development, autonomy, meaningful work, and supportive relationships (Nemțeanu and Dabija, 2020).

Based on social processing theory (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978), employees interpret their environment through interactions and expectations. Dissatisfaction arises when anticipated career growth or meaningful work does not align with experience. Negative interactions or limited advancement opportunities can reduce performance and affect universities, as dissatisfied alumni may harm institutional reputation and weaken collaboration with employers. Understanding the relationship between rewards, engagement, and satisfaction among alumni in Romania and Kenya can guide strategies for strengthening graduate outcomes, employer partnerships, and university reputation.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Samples

To answer our research questions, we conducted an exploratory study between March and May 2025 involving 125 graduates, divided into two groups. Group 1 comprises 62 graduates from the Faculty of Economic Sciences at the University of Oradea. Group 2 comprises 63 graduates from the Business School at Strathmore University in Nairobi, Kenya. In both groups, most respondents belong to Generation Z, comprising those born between 1995 and 2010. In Group 1, they represent 64% of the total, while in Group 2, they account for 66%. Regarding gender distribution, Romanian respondents are predominantly female (67%), whereas the Kenyan respondents have a more balanced distribution, with a slight male majority (51%) compared to females (49%). Regarding work experience, in both groups, those with more than five years of experience hold the largest share, forming the majority in Romania (52%), 9% higher than their Kenyan counterparts (43%). Regarding job numbers, Romanian graduates tend to have more jobs than their Kenyan counterparts, with 33% having had between 4 and 6 jobs, three times higher than the 11% reported among Kenyan graduates. As expected, the average number of family members is higher among Kenyan graduates, with 34% reporting more than four family members, compared to just 4% among Romanian respondents. Regarding job market standing, a key difference is the higher percentage of freelancers and entrepreneurs among Romanian respondents, which is twice as high as that of Kenyan respondents.

3.2. Variables and their Operationalization

The research employed survey technique, using an online questionnaire as the primary tool. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section focused on socio-demographic data, while the second included questions related to the three dimensions investigated: work rewards, work engagement, and job satisfaction. Graduates from two faculties in Romania and Kenya were invited to evaluate these dimensions using a five-point Likert scale.
The operationalization of the dimensions investigated was carried out as follows:

- Work rewards: 12 items measuring the importance respondents attribute to financial rewards, recognition and socializing, and promotion and development opportunities (Falola et al., 2014; Botezat, Fotea, and Fotea, 2023).
- Work engagement: 17 items measuring the extent to which respondents agree with statements describing the positive state at the workplace, characterized by energy, absorption, and dedication (Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova, 2006).
- Job satisfaction: 10 items measuring the extent to which the current or most recent job provided satisfaction across key job facets, such as work-life balance, pay and benefits, environment, recognition, and autonomy (Davidescu et al., 2020; Rotich, 2020; Nemțeanu and Dabija, 2020; Obonyo and Felistus, 2021).

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Table 1 presents the results of the descriptive statistical analysis (minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation) for the scores obtained by the two groups of participants regarding work rewards, work engagement, and job satisfaction.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the measures of Job Satisfaction (JS), Work engagement (WE), and Work rewards (WR)

	Group 1: UO-FSE (N=62)				**Group 2: SU-SBS (N=63)**			
Variable/ dimensions	**Min.**	**Max.**	**Mean**	**Standard deviation**	**Min.**	**Max.**	**Mean**	**Standard deviation**
Job Satisfaction (JS)	1.00	5.00	3.8651	.91671	1.50	4.71	3.3819	.79063
Work engagement (WE)	1.47	5.00	3.6779	.73142	2.00	4.94	3.4267	.67152
WE - *Vigor (WE – VI)*	1.33	5.00	3.6481	.76617	1.67	5.00	3.3677	.70020
WE - *Absorption (WE –* AB*)*	1.50	5.00	3.5635	.72366	1.67	4.83	3.3228	.75839
WE - *Dedication (WE – De)*	1.00	5.00	3.8508	.94286	1.80	5.00	3.6222	.78462
Work rewards (WR)	1.25	4.92	3.8228	.73560	2.25	5.00	3.9802	.52868
WR – *Financial (WR – Fi)*	1.20	5.00	3.9937	.86358	2.20	5.00	4.2730	.57843
WR - *Recognition and socializing (WR – RS)*	1.00	4.80	3.4254	.83973	1.40	5.00	3.4349	.77754
WR - *Promotion and development (WR – PD)*	1.00	5.00	4.3889	.83010	2.00	5.00	4.6111	.66262

Source: own research

Overall, our findings indicate that job satisfaction and rewards, as well as work engagement, among both Romanian and Kenyan graduates, are at a moderate to high level, with a more pronounced tendency toward differentiation among Romanian respondents. As expected, the highest mean score in both groups (3.82 for Romanian graduates and 3.98 for Kenyan graduates) was recorded for the variable Work Rewards (WR). At the dimension level, the most highly valued was WR – Promotion & Development, with mean scores of 4.39 and 4.61, respectively, while the least valued was WR – Recognition & Socializing, with approximately equal means across the two groups (≈ 3.43). The standard deviation values (0.73 and 0.53) show that respondents' perceptions of work rewards exhibit moderate variability, which is lower in the Kenyan group. Regarding Work Engagement (WE), the lowest mean in both groups was obtained for WE – Absorption (3.56 and 3.53, respectively). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that WE—Absorption is the only component for which the standard deviation is higher among Kenyan respondents than among Romanian respondents, suggesting greater variability: some graduates being highly absorbed in their work activities, while others less so.

4.2. Inferential statistics results

To assess the normality of the data distribution, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied. In our case, the normality of the distribution of composite variables was evaluated separately for the two groups (Group 1: UO-FSE and Group 2: SU-SBS). As the data analysis revealed, some variables showed significant deviations from normality ($p < .05$). In such situations, nonparametric tests were considered alongside parametric analyses. Consequently, to identify the bivariate relationships among the main variables examined in this study (i.e., JS, WE, and WR), Spearman's correlation coefficient was employed.

Spearman's correlation analysis revealed a significant association between JS and WE for both UO-FSE graduates ($\rho = .571$, $p < .01$) and SU-SBS graduates ($\rho = .586$, $p < .01$). On the other hand, no statistically significant relationships were identified in either group between JS and WR or between WE and WR. Due to the non-normal distribution of data, Mann–Whitney U tests were used to examine whether significant differences existed between the two groups. The results indicated significant differences for job satisfaction ($p = 0.001$), overall work engagement ($p = 0.030$), WE – Vigor ($p = 0.022$), and WE – Dedication ($p = 0.047$). The WE-Absorption dimension (part of the Work Engagement scale) and the Work Rewards scale (with its subscales Financial, Recognition, and Promotion) did not show statistically significant differences.

Since the aim was to determine whether the study participants perceived the dimensions/components of the variables WE and WR differently, a Repeated Measures ANOVA was employed. The results obtained are summarized in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2: Repeated-Measures ANOVA Results for Work Engagement Dimensions

Group	**Work Engagement Dimension**	**Mean / Std. Deviation**	**Repeated-Measures ANOVA Results**	**Pairwise Comparisons (Bonferroni)**
Group 1: UO-FSE (N = 62)	Vigor (VI)	3.65 (0.77)	Main Effect of Dimension: F(2, 124) = 7.68, *p* = .001, η²p = .110 Mauchly's Test: W = .911, *p* = .058 (Sphericity assumed)	Dedication > Vigor (MD = 0.20, SE = 0.07, *p* = .009) Dedication > Absorption (MD = 0.29, SE = 0.09, *p* = .004) Vigor vs. Absorption (MD = 0.09, SE = 0.07, *p* = .774)
	Absorption (AB)	3.56 (0.72)		
	Dedication (DE)	3.85 (0.94)		
Group 2: SU-SBS (N = 63)	Vigor (VI)	3.37 (0.70)	Main Effect of Dimension: F(2, 124) = 10.15, *p* <	Dedication > Vigor (MD =0.25, SE = 0.08, *p* = .005) Dedication >
	Absorption (AB)	3.32 (0.76)		

Group	Work Engagement Dimension	Mean / Std. Deviation	Repeated-Measures ANOVA Results	Pairwise Comparisons (Bonferroni)
	Dedication (DE)	3.62 (0.78)	.001, η²p = .141 Mauchly's Test: W = .953, *p* = .228 (Sphericity assumed)	Absorption (MD = 0.30, SE = 0.07, *p* < .001) Vigor vs. Absorption (MD = 0.04, SE = 0.06, *p* = 1.000)

Note: MD = Mean Difference; SE = Standard Error; η²p = Partial Eta Squared.
Source: own research

Table 3: Repeated-Measures ANOVA Results for Work Rewards Dimensions

Group	Work Rewards Dimension	Mean / Std. Deviation	Repeated-Measures ANOVA Results	Pairwise Comparisons (Bonferroni)
Group 1: UO-FSE (N = 62)	Financial (Fi)	3.99 (0.86)	Main Effect of WR_dim: F(2, 124) = 48.31, *p* < .001, η²p = .438 Mauchly's Test: W = .959, *p* = .279 (Sphericity assumed)	Promotion & Development > Financial (MD = 0.40, *p* = .001) Promotion & Development > Recognition & Socializing (MD = 0.96, *p* < .001) Financial > Recognition & Socializing (MD = 0.57, *p* < .001)
	Recognition & Socializing (RS)	3.43 (0.84)		
	Promotion & Development (PD)	4.39 (0.83)		
Group 2: SU-SBS (N = 63)	Financial (Fi)	4.27 (0.58)	Main Effect of WR_dim: F(1.81, 112.41) = 81.34, *p* < .001, η²p = .567 Mauchly's Test: W = .897, *p* = .036 (Greenhouse-Geisser correction)	Promotion & Development > Financial (MD = 0.34, *p* < .001) Promotion & Development > RS (MD = 1.18, *p* < .001) Financial > Recognition & Socializing (MD = 0.84, *p* < .001)
	Recognition & Socializing (RS)	3.43 (0.78)		
	Promotion & Development (PD)	4.61 (0.66)		

Note: MD = Mean Difference; SE = Standard Error; η²p = Partial Eta Squared.
Source: own research

As shown by the data presented in Table 2, the results indicate significant differences in WE across its dimensions for both groups ($F(2, 124) = 7.68$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2p = .110$ for Group 1: UO-FSE, and $F(2, 124) = 10.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .141$ for Group 2: SU-SBS). Pairwise comparisons using the Bonferroni correction revealed that Dedication scores were significantly higher than both Vigor and Absorption ($p < .01$), while no significant difference was observed between Vigor and Absorption ($p > .05$).
Regarding WR, as shown in the results presented in Table 2, significant differences were identified among the three reward dimensions for both institutions — $F(2, 124) = 48.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .438$ for Group 1: UO-FSE, and $F(1.81, 112.41) = 81.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .567$ for Group 2: SU-SBS. Pairwise comparisons indicated that Promotion and Development was rated significantly higher than both Financial and Recognition & Socializing rewards ($p < .001$), while Financial rewards also scored significantly higher than Recognition & Socializing ($p < .001$). These findings suggest that individuals from both groups place the greatest emphasis on professional advancement opportunities, followed by financial incentives and, to a lesser extent, social or recognition-related rewards, with significant differences observed among all three types of WR.
Next, Pearson correlations were examined between the dependent variable (Job Satisfaction, JS) and the independent variables (Work Engagement, WE, and Work Rewards, WR). The predictors considered were the subdimensions of the two constructs: Work Engagement and Work Rewards. The analysis aimed to verify the existence of linear relationships among the variables, a necessary condition for applying multiple linear regression. Tables 4 and 5 present the Pearson correlations separately for the two groups.

Table 4: Pearson correlations between study variables for Group 1: UO-FSE

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Job satisfaction (JS)	—						
2. WE – Vigor (WE – VI)	**.543**** (.000)	—					
3. WE – Absorption (WE – AB)	**.373**** (.003)	**.689**** (.000)	—				
4. WE – Dedication (WE – DE)	**.493**** (.000)	**.834**** (.000)	**.702**** (.000)	—			
5. WR – Financial (WR – Fi)	−.007 (.955)	−.175 (.170)	−.001 (.993)	−.143 (.263)	—		
6. WR – Recognition & Socializing (WR – RS)	.230 (.072)	.172 (.178)	**.342**** (.006)	.206 (.105)	**.664**** (.000)	—	
7. WR – Promotion & Development (WR – PD)	.100 (.441)	−.084 (.515)	−.098 (.446)	−.079 (.537)	**.530**** (.000)	**.518**** (.000)	—

Note: Pearson correlation coefficients (r) are displayed in the first row, with significant correlations in bold. Two-tailed p-values are shown in parentheses.
** $p < .01$

Source: own research

Table 5: Pearson correlations between study variables for Group 2: SU-SBS

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Job Satisfaction (JS)	—						
2. WE – Vigor (WE – VI)	**.603**** (.000)	—					
3. WE – Absorption (WE – AB)	**.364**** (.003)	**.762**** (.000)	—				
4. WE – Dedication (WE – DE)	**.550**** (.000)	**.665**** (.000)	**.715**** (.000)	—			
5. WR – Financial (WR – Fi)	−.023 (.855)	.022 (.867)	.171 (.180)	.221 (.082)	—		
6. WR – Recognition & Socializing (WR – RS)	.070 (.588)	.101 (.429)	.081 (.529)	.047 (.712)	**.333**** (.008)	—	
7. WR – Promotion & Development (WR – PD)	−.024 (.851)	.032 (.802)	.085 (.506)	.101 (.433)	**.505**** (.000)	**.355**** (.004)	—

Note: Pearson correlation coefficients (r) are displayed in the first row, with significant correlations in bold. Two-tailed p-values are shown in parentheses.
** $p < .01$
Source: own research

Based on the results presented in Tables 4 and 5, it can be observed that both groups show positive (moderate to strong) correlations between JS and the three components of the WE construct (with values ranging from r = .373, p = .003 to r = .543, p = .000 for Group 1: UO-FSE, and from r = .364, p = .003 to r = .603, p = .000 for Group 2: SU-SBS). This conclusion represents an essential condition for proceeding with the multiple linear regression analysis. In contrast, no statistically significant associations were found between JS and any of the components related to the WR construct, although a marginal trend (p = .072) was observed for the Recognition & Socializing dimension in Group 1: UO-FSE.
Since the simple linear regression analysis indicated a potential risk of multicollinearity due to strong correlations among certain predictors—particularly between the subdimensions of WE—the potential issue of multicollinearity was examined prior to conducting the multiple linear regression analysis by checking the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance indicators. The VIF values for all subdimensions of Work Engagement and Work Rewards were below 5 (ranging from 1.627 to 3.349 for Group 1: UO-FSE and from 1.219 to 2.985 for Group 2: SU-SBS), while the Tolerance values were greater than 0.20 for all predictors. Therefore, since no multicollinearity problems were detected, all predictors were simultaneously included in the regression models. After verifying multicollinearity, the multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to

which the subdimensions of WE (Vigor, Absorption, Dedication) and WR (Financial, Recognition & Socializing, Promotion & Development) explain the variance in the dependent variable JS. The main results are summarized in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6: Multiple Linear Regression Results for the Group 1: UO-FSE

Predictors	B	SE B	β	t	Sig.	Zero-order	Partial	Part
(Constant)	.878	.888	—	.988	.327	—	—	—
WE – Vigor	.577	.260	.448	2.216	.031*	.543	.286	.245
WE – Absorption	–.135	.227	–.107	–.594	.555	.373	–.080	–.066
WE – Dedication	.177	.206	.173	.862	.393	.493	.115	.095
WR – Financial	–.060	.175	–.057	–.344	.733	–.007	–.046	–.038
WR – Recognition and socializing	.145	.194	.134	.751	.456	.230	.101	.083
WR – Promotion and development	.091	.155	.082	.584	.562	.100	.078	.064

*p<0,05
Source: own research

Dependent variable: Job Satisfaction
$R = .573$; $R^2 = .329$; Adjusted $R^2 = .255$; $F(6, 55) = 4.486$, $p = .001$; Std. Error = .79107; Durbin–Watson = 1.865

Table 7: Multiple Linear Regression Results for the Group 2: SU-SBS

Predictors	B	SE B	β	t	Sig.	Zero-order	Partial	Part
Constant	1.231	0.730	—	1.686	0.097	—	—	—
WE – Vigor	0.701	0.181	0.621	3.871	0.000**	0.603	0.459	0.374
WE – Absorption	-0.445	0.174	-0.426	-2.554	0.013*	0.364	-0.323	-0.247
WE – Dedication	0.461	0.148	0.457	3.108	0.003*	0.550	0.384	0.300
WR – Financial	-0.085	0.164	-0.062	-0.519	0.606	-0.023	-0.069	-0.050
WR – Recognition and Socializing	0.056	0.108	0.055	0.515	0.608	0.070	0.069	0.050
WR – Promotion and Development	-0.050	0.137	-0.042	-0.365	0.716	-0.024	-0.049	-0.035

*p<0,05; **p<0,01
Source: own research

Dependent variable: Job Satisfaction
$R = .691$; $R^2 = .477$; Adjusted $R^2 = .421$; $F(6, 56) = 8.518$, $p < .001$; Std. Error = .60153; Durbin–Watson = 1.773
As shown in the tables above, the regression models for both groups are statistically significant (for Group 1: UO-FSE, $F(6, 55) = 4.486$, $p = .001$, $R^2 = .329$; Adjusted $R^2 = .255$, explaining about 25.5% of the variance in Job Satisfaction; for Group 2: SU-SBS, $F(6, 56) = 8.518$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .477$; Adjusted $R^2 = .421$, explaining about 42.1% of the variance in Job Satisfaction). For both models, the Durbin–Watson

coefficient falls within the acceptable range (1.5–2.5), with values of 1.865 for Group 1: UO-FSE and 1.773 for Group 2: SU-SBS, confirming the independence of residuals.
For Group 1: UO-FSE, Vigor (β = .448, p = .031) emerged as a positive and significant predictor of Job Satisfaction, while the other predictors (WE – Absorption, WE – Dedication, WR – Financial, WR – Recognition & Socializing, WR – Promotion & Development) did not show significant associations. For Group 2: SU-SBS, Vigor (β = .621, $p < .001$) and Dedication (β = .457, p = .003) were identified as positive and significant predictors, whereas Absorption (β = –.426, p = .013) had a negative and significant effect on Job Satisfaction.
Analysis of the semi-partial correlation coefficients indicates that for Group 1: UO-FSE, Vigor is the strongest predictor of Job Satisfaction, accounting for approximately 6% of the total variance on its own (rpart = .245; rpart^2 = .06). For Group 2: SU-SBS, the semi-partial coefficients show that Vigor (rpart = .374; rpart^2 = .139) explains about 14.0% of the variance, Dedication (rpart = .300; rpart^2 = .09) explains 9.0%, and Absorption (rpart = –.247; rpart^2 = .061) accounts for 6.1% when each is considered individually.

5. Conclusions

This study examined how components of work rewards (WR) (financial compensation; recognition and social interactions; opportunities for promotion and development) and work engagement (WE) (vigor, dedication, absorption) impact job satisfaction (JS), using two graduate groups: one from the Faculty of Economic Sciences at the University of Oradea, Romania (Group 1: UO-FSE) and one from the Business School at Strathmore University in Nairobi, Kenya (Group 2: SU-SBS).
The regression results indicate that WE is the main predictor of JS in both groups. For Group 1, only vigor shows a significant effect. For Group 2, both vigor and dedication have a positive influence, while absorption has a negative effect. These findings align with studies showing the positive role of vigor and dedication in predicting JS (Sypniewska et al., 2023). The negative absorption effect among Kenyan graduates may relate to research suggesting that high absorption can evolve into workaholism, associated with adverse long-term outcomes (Di Stefano and Gaudiino, 2018; Sypniewska et al., 2023). This interpretation remains a hypothesis requiring further investigation. Differences between the two groups—specifically that both vigor and dedication are significant among Kenyan graduates—may be partly explained by Mazzetti et al. (2023). Their meta-analysis emphasized that collectivist cultural environments, such as Kenya, demonstrate a stronger association between feedback and engagement compared to individualistic environments, such as Romania tend to become after EU accession. However, other studies conducted within African collectivist contexts have reported a weak yet statistically significant negative correlation between work engagement and job satisfaction (Wonah et al., 2025). This relationship has been interpreted as suggesting that WE may, under certain conditions, diminish JS, potentially due to factors such as work intensification, which parallels the absorption dimension and, at its extreme, resembles workaholism.

Additionally, WR dimensions show only limited and statistically insignificant influence on JS in both groups, contrasting with meta-analytic trends (Cao, Arshad and Liu, 2025, p. 48). This is unexpected, especially given the cultural differences between samples. One explanation could be that in contexts such as Romania and Kenya, rewards matter less than intrinsic elements like workplace atmosphere or job stability (Sypniewska, 2014, p. 67), reducing the predictive power of WR. WR may attract employees initially or boost short-term motivation but do not necessarily generate lasting satisfaction. More research is needed to substantiate these assumptions.

This study has limitations: a relatively small sample and exclusive reliance on self-reported data. Additionally, socio-demographic variables such as tenure, salary, and organizational position were not included in our present analysis. Future studies should use more representative samples, including broader variables, and employ more advanced designs and analytical tools. Despite limitations, the study enhances understanding of JS among graduates by revealing substantial cross-cultural similarities and only modest differences. The findings support the idea that intrinsic factors are key drivers of JS, with the vigor dimension of WE emerging as a particularly salient predictor.

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