Voices of Faculty: An In-depth Exploration of the Factors Influencing Job Satisfaction in Academic Environments

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Abstract— *This research delved into the multifaceted landscape of job satisfaction among faculty members in academic environments, emphasizing its multidimensional nature influenced by transformational leadership, work environment, work benefits, and competitive salary. Grounded in an interpretivist philosophical stance, employing a narrative inquiry research design, and conducted using focus group discussion, the study used a qualitative approach, focusing on the firsthand experiences of 10 college faculty members. Using thematic analysis, four key themes emerged influencing job satisfaction: Transformational Leadership, Work Environment, Work Benefits, and Competitive Salary. The findings emphasized effective leadership, positive work relationships, salary grades, and supportive work schedules in shaping job satisfaction. Work benefits, including professional development opportunities and educational assistance, also significantly impacted satisfaction. The study emphasized the need for proactive measures by academic institutions to cultivate transformative leadership, structured pay grade systems, favorable benefits, and positive work cultures. Prioritizing these factors was recommended to enhance overall job satisfaction among faculty members, contributing to a more stimulating and supportive academic environment.*

Keywords— *Academic environment, job satisfaction, voices of faculty.*

I.   Introduction

In the intricate tapestry of academia, the contentment and fulfilment of faculty members formed the vital threads that wove the fabric of educational excellence. The factors influencing job satisfaction in academic environments were as diverse as the disciplines. From the complexities of workload and administrative support to the refinement of work-life balance and professional growth, these factors shaped the experiences of those who were the heart and soul of higher education institutions.

The intersection of faculty job satisfaction and the broader global agenda lay a profound relevance to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The United Nations' SDGs aspired to create a sustainable and equitable world by 2030, with quality education being a linchpin for their achievement. A growing body of research underscored the pivotal role of faculty members in pursuing SDG 4, 'Quality Education.' Their job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment were the cornerstones upon which the quality of education rested, echoing the sentiments of studies examining the influence of faculty engagement on educational quality.

In academic settings, the job satisfaction of faculty members was a critical aspect that significantly influenced their performance and the overall quality of education. A study by Stankovska et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of job satisfaction in higher education, highlighting its role in fostering a positive and productive work environment for faculty members (Turkoglu et al., 2017; Agbozo et al., 2017). Job satisfaction was not merely a personal fulfilment metric; it served as a foundational element that contributed to the overall success of academic institutions. Park and Johnson (2019) conducted a comprehensive examination of faculty engagement in educational quality, emphasizing the correlation between job satisfaction and the commitment of faculty members. The study revealed that satisfied faculty members were more likely to be engaged in their teaching, research, and service roles, ultimately enhancing the academic experience for students (Demir, 2020)

Furthermore, the work of Lee et al. (2017) delved into the connection between job satisfaction and faculty retention. The study provided insights into how satisfied faculty members were more likely to stay in their positions, reducing turnover rates in academic institutions. This contributed to institutional stability and ensured the continuity of mentorship and expertise (Toropova et al., 2021). Moreover, the research conducted by Wang et al. (2020) highlighted the significance of faculty job satisfaction in academic leadership. Satisfied faculty members were likelier to participate actively in leadership roles within their academic departments, fostering a collaborative and innovative institutional culture.

Understanding the factors influencing job satisfaction in academic environments was imperative for instituting targeted improvements. The study by Dhamija, Gupta, and Bag (2019) provided an insightful analysis of various factors affecting faculty job satisfaction, including workload, professional development opportunities, and institutional support. Acknowledging these factors was essential for academic leaders to implement effective strategies that addressed faculty members' unique needs and concerns.

However, a conspicuous gap remained in the research landscape despite the inherent importance of faculty job

satisfaction in shaping academic environments and its implications for achieving SDGs. Quantitative investigations have offered valuable insights, but they often needed to catch up with capturing the details and personal narratives that breathed life into the concept of job satisfaction. There existed an uncharted territory in the qualitative realm, where the unique stories and voices of faculty members could illuminate the intricacies of their experiences.

Philosophical Stance

This research was grounded in an interpretivist philosophical stance, aligning with the principles of understanding and interpreting the complex and subjective nature of human experiences. Adopting the interpretivist perspective was essential for exploring the multifaceted dimensions of job satisfaction among faculty members in academic environments. This philosophical stance acknowledged the dynamic interplay of individual perceptions, values, and meanings within the context of the academic setting.

Interpretivism, as articulated by Denzin and Lincoln (2018), emphasized the importance of exploring the unique perspectives of individuals and understanding the social constructions that shaped their experiences. In the context of faculty job satisfaction, embracing an interpretivist approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the diverse factors influencing satisfaction, recognizing that these factors were socially constructed and context-dependent. The interpretivist philosophical stance was aligned with the qualitative research design employed in this study, specifically the narrative inquiry research model. This model, as described by Clandinin and Connolly (2000), focused on unraveling individuals' stories and lived experiences. It was well-suited for exploring the intricate narratives of faculty members, capturing the distinct and subjective meanings associated with their job satisfaction.

Additionally, the interpretivist perspective acknowledged the role of the researcher as an active participant in the research process, recognizing the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the participants. This aligned with the collaborative nature of narrative inquiry, where the researcher engaged in a dialogue with participants to comprehend and interpret their stories authentically. Thus, the interpretivist philosophical stance was foundational to this research, allowing for a detailed exploration of the factors influencing job satisfaction among faculty members. By embracing this perspective, the study aimed to uncover the subjective meanings and contextual intricacies associated with job satisfaction in academic environments, contributing to a richer understanding of this complex phenomenon.

This research embarks on a journey to address this critical gap. This research aims to unravel the multifaceted factors influencing job satisfaction among faculty members in academic environments. To do so, we seek answers to the following pivotal questions:

1. What are the key factors influencing job satisfaction among faculty members in academic environments, and how do these factors contribute to the overall quality of education and progress toward Sustainable Development Goals?
2. How do faculty members' diverse roles and responsibilities, encompassing teaching, research, and service, impact their job satisfaction?
3. What are the unique contextual factors within different academic settings influence faculty job satisfaction, and how do these factors intersect with individual experiences?
4. In what ways does faculty job satisfaction contribute to the overall quality of education and the progress toward Sustainable Development Goals?

This study delved into the complex aspects of faculty job satisfaction. It acknowledged that faculty members were educators and architects of a sustainable future, and their well-being held the key to achieving societal and educational excellence. By addressing the void in qualitative research, we aimed to provide a platform for the unheard narratives of faculty members, creating a vibrant depiction of the factors that influenced their job satisfaction.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study employed a narrative inquiry research design to profoundly investigate the firsthand experiences and perspectives of faculty members, with the overall goal of thoroughly exploring the elements shaping job satisfaction within academic environments. The primary focus of this narrative inquiry was to uncover the factors influencing job satisfaction in academia. Utilizing the narrative inquiry research model, a qualitative approach tailored for exploring life stories (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000), this study aligned with the Harison et al. (2020) perspective, emphasizing the significance of individuals' narrated stories and the intertwined lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). The study's objective was to delve into teachers' narratives, explicitly exploring the factors influencing their job satisfaction, all viewed through the unique lens of their individual stories. Therefore, the research design adopted for this study was narrative.

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for this study. Purposive sampling is a nonrandom technique of selecting individuals with particular characteristics and those available and willing to provide information based on experience (Etikan et al., 2016). The chosen participants of this study were college faculty at a private college institution in the Northern Part of Cebu, Philippines. A total of 10 educators took part in the study. All participants held degrees in secondary education. The professional background of these educators spanned from 3 to 35 years, indicating diverse timelines and experiences. The selection process aimed to encompass diverse backgrounds, disciplines, and institutional contexts to ensure a holistic exploration of job satisfaction among faculty members.

A semi-structured focus group interview questionnaire was used to collect data. This methodology provides the flexibility to elicit comprehensive and authentic narratives from faculty members regarding the factors influencing their job satisfaction. A semi-structured focus group interview involves a flexible yet guided conversation where the researcher follows a predefined set of open-ended questions, allowing

participants to share their perspectives more openly (AKYILDIZ & Ahmed, 2021). Semi-structured interviews were a type of interview where there was a specific set of questions. However, additional probes may come in the form of follow-up questions that should have been included in the list of original questions (Cristobal & Cristobal, 2017). The interview questions were meticulously crafted based on a thorough literature review to capture the multifaceted dimensions of faculty job satisfaction.

Before initiating the interview, the researcher meticulously followed a substantial ethical protocol to safeguard participants' rights and confidentiality. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institution before extending personal invitations to participants, emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation and the value of their insights. Before the interview, participants received a written informed consent form detailing the study's purpose, procedures, and potential benefits, reiterating their right to withdraw without repercussions. The researcher assured participants that anonymity and confidentiality would be strictly upheld. Explicit consent for audio recording was obtained before the interview, preserving accurate information for analysis. After data collection, all information, including printed transcripts and audio recordings, was securely stored, with electronic data protected by passwords to prevent unauthorized access. The researcher's steadfast commitment to research ethics and participant protection enhanced the study's credibility and integrity, exemplifying ethical and responsible research practices.

The collected data underwent transcription, organization, and detailed thematic analysis, employing the well-established qualitative analytic method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This iterative procedure included identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns and themes within the data through an inductive approach. By repeatedly examining the qualitative data, noteworthy themes were anticipated to surface, offering valuable insights into the job satisfaction of faculty members in the academic environment. Thematic analysis was expected to be an effective and comprehensive method, fostering a specific understanding of the faculty's perspectives and enhancing the richness of the research findings.

In this research, adherence to Guba and Lincoln's (1989) trustworthiness criteria was paramount, incorporating the dimensions of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as outlined by Anney (2014). To establish credibility, member checking, a method involving the verification of interview transcriptions by research informants, was employed, ensuring a focused understanding of their responses. The researcher shared findings with participants, allowing them to confirm the precision and authenticity of their experiences as presented in the study. This bolstered the trustworthiness of the research outcomes. Meanwhile, a purposive sampling technique was utilized to select participants from the faculty of a particular private college institution in northern Cebu, Philippines, specifically. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be

applied or generalized to other contexts or populations. In purposive sampling, the researcher deliberately selects participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Dependability was achieved through the detailed documentation of data collection and analysis procedures, ensuring the collection of responses necessary to address the study's objectives. Finally, confirmability was maintained by emphasizing reflexivity throughout the data collection and analysis processes, mitigating researcher bias and ensuring impartiality in accurately reflecting participant responses.

This research prioritized ethical considerations, placing paramount emphasis on participant well-being. The researcher sought ethical approval from the Ethical Review Committee affiliated with the researcher's institution. A thorough evaluation of potential harms and benefits was undertaken to safeguard the safety and welfare of participants throughout the research journey. The foundational principle of informed consent was rigorously upheld, ensuring participants fully understood their involvement in the study. Thorough measures were implemented to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participant identities and their data, thereby preserving their rights and dignity throughout the research.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research focused on exploring the factors that influence the job satisfaction of 10 faculty members within a private college institution in the northern part of Cebu. Employing qualitative research methods, the study aimed to uncover the roles of faculty members, identify the primary factors influencing job satisfaction, and determine the contributions of job satisfaction to the overall educational quality within the institution. Noteworthy findings revealed that the faculty members placed considerable significance on having a positive working environment, effective transformational leadership, and competitive salary and benefits. Recognizing these factors emerged as crucial for enhancing faculty retention within the institution.

Figure 1. Themes and Sub-themes of the Study

After thoroughly examining the interview transcripts of ten college faculty members, the researcher identified four key themes that significantly contribute to job satisfaction in the academic environment, as shown in Figure 1. These insights,

extracted from the faculty members' responses, provide valuable perspectives on what influences job satisfaction. In the following sections, this study will explore these four main themes from the transcripts to better grasp the factors shaping job satisfaction in the academic environment.

The first-person narratives of 10 participants described job satisfaction factors in the academic environment. These interviewees' narratives were selected as evidence of a specific theme or subtheme because they offered the most incredible detail about the factors influencing job satisfaction.

Theme 1: Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is characterized by leaders' ability to inspire and motivate followers, encouraging them to surpass their interests for the collective good, as articulated by Bass and Riggio (2006). From the responses of the 10 participants, two sub-themes were derived: Effective Leadership and Professional Background Alignment. These factors contribute to the institution's overall success, aligning with its primary goal of providing high-quality education.

Effective leadership is the ability to guide and inspire individuals toward achieving shared goals, as Northouse (2021) outlined. When discussing factors contributing to job satisfaction, most participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9) expressed that effective leadership is crucial, motivating them to remain committed to their roles. They emphasized the significance of a leader's capacity to provide guidance, recognizing its potential to inspire them to surpass expectations. However, they acknowledged the considerable effort in this process and highlighted the importance of mutual coordination among team members for success. This is evident when they explained:

"Well, from my experience, effective leadership in an academic setting plays a big role in job satisfaction. If...when leaders are supportive and genuinely interested in the well-being of the faculty, it creates a positive work environment. It's not just about the policies and rules but also about understanding the unique challenges we (faculty members) face" (P1).

"...when leaders foster open communication and value the input of each of the faculty member, it creates a sense of belonging and appreciation. This, in turn, contributes to job satisfaction because you feel like your efforts are recognized and that you are a part of a group working towards that specific goal...the goal of the department and the school in general" (P8).

Professional Background Alignment refers to the congruence or match between an individual's educational and experiential background and the requirements of a particular professional role or position. The participants also conveyed the importance of leaders having a meeting of minds by aligning their educational and experiential backgrounds, ensuring a mutual understanding of the perspectives and experiences of the faculty members. As they stated:

"...it's like finding your groove – when your educational background matches your position. When your skills and expertise are recognized and utilized effectively, it creates a positive impact to your faculty members. When the leader is

an expert in that field because of the rich educational background and experience, the faculty also will feel motivated to give their full potential. I think this should be hand-in-hand with effective leadership" (P4).

The subthemes of Transformational Leadership discussed above strongly indicate a significant influence on job satisfaction. By emphasizing the transformative influence that leaders can have within an organization and the importance of recognizing and appreciating this impact, academic institution members are likely to find greater satisfaction in their roles. These findings align with a meta-analysis study by Kasalak et al. (2022) that found a positive and moderate overall effect on the relationship between leadership in higher education institutions and academic staff's job satisfaction. Another study by Horoub and Zargar (2022) emphasized the importance of empowering leadership in increasing the job satisfaction of academic staff in Palestinian universities, highlighting the implications of leader-member exchange and trust in the leader. Furthermore, a study on leadership style and job satisfaction in higher education institutions by Алондериене and Majauskaitė (2016) revealed a significant positive impact of leadership style on job satisfaction. Overall, this consistently demonstrates the significant influence of effective leadership, including professional background alignment, on the job satisfaction of college faculty in higher education institutions.

Theme 2: Work Environment

Work Environment is the organizational culture and interpersonal dynamics (Aryani & Widodo, 2020). This theme encompasses what work environment works for them and how this plays a vital role in the participants' job satisfaction. This theme is organized into two subthemes: Work Schedules and Relationships among faculty members.

Work Schedule is a predetermined arrangement of hours and days during which an individual is expected to fulfill job responsibilities and tasks (Sana, 2022). Reflecting on their work schedules before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic, all the participants agreed that they found greater satisfaction with their current schedules than those in the pre-pandemic period. This was evident when they said:

"Work schedules before were so hectic. Uhhhh...we have to be at the school 8AM to 5PM. Others have night schedules. This is from Monday to Saturday with only Sunday as our day off. Now, we get to enjoy two days off as the schedules are changed..." (P3).

Participants also shared that they now enjoy increased availability for family and personal activities, attributing this to having ample time for lesson preparation. This enhanced time management contributes to their effectiveness in their roles and amplifies job satisfaction.

"...because we have enough time to prepare for our classes, I now have more time for my family and for myself. I can go to places now without even feeling guilty going outside" (P6).

Relationship among faculty members refers to the intricate network of connections, interactions, and collaborations among faculty members within an educational institution, influencing the overall work environment and organizational

dynamics (Parker, 2022). The participants emphasized the significance of positive relationships among faculty members, asserting that they play a pivotal role in the job satisfaction of each individual in a particular organization. They pointed this out when they said:

"Having strong relationship, strong bond with your colleagues is one of the factors influencing job satisfaction. This, uhhh, give the sense of camaraderie as we will not hesitate to ask for help or guidance and they will also be always willing to help" (P5).

The participants also conveyed that fostering strong connections would transform their work experience into something akin to a familial atmosphere, making it feel less like work and more like a close-knit community.

"...we can have fun even with our busy schedules because we would treat each other like family" (P1)

The discussed subthemes related to the work environment strongly suggest a considerable impact on job satisfaction. By highlighting the positive effects of work schedules fostering positive relationships with colleagues and the importance of acknowledging and valuing these impacts, faculty members are likely to experience increased satisfaction in their respective roles. Research studies have consistently shown that work environment and relationships among faculty members are significant factors that impact job satisfaction in academic environments. A study by Kačāne et al. (2019) highlighted the high level of satisfaction among university teachers with their working conditions, emphasizing the importance of conducting similar studies periodically to detect any decrease in satisfaction. Additionally, Kasalak et al. (2022) revealed that appropriate leadership styles in higher education institutions can increase academic staff's job satisfaction. Hence, this research found that work environment is a crucial factor that impacts job satisfaction in academic environments, and institutions should prioritize creating a positive work environment and fostering positive relationships among faculty members to enhance job satisfaction.

Theme 3: Work Benefits

This theme emphasized the importance of having favorable work benefits. Work Benefits are the supplementary advantages and privileges offered by an employer to employees beyond their regular salary, aiming to enhance overall compensation and job satisfaction (Onuorah & Okeke, 2023). There were two ramifications to this theme. One, it highlighted the importance of having assistance for professional development. The participants noted that:

"Having the initiatives of the institution to support for professional growth I think increased the job satisfaction of the employees. For example, here, all of the employees here are 100% free tuition when if they will study Masteral. And if you want to study outside the school, in the universities that are far away, you will be given 100% assistance. That, I think is very good for increasing job satisfaction" (P10).

Two, this theme highlighted the importance of educational support for the direct family of the employees. This was evident when they said:

"For me, who have stayed here in this institution for more

than 30 years, I think the program of the school wherein I get to send my sons and daughters to school…I have 5 children and all of them have finished their studies – from elementary to college… free tuition…100%. This is the main factor why I am satisfied with my job. This is one factor why faculty here in our school will stay for more years" (P9).

The emphasis on favorable work benefits, including support for professional growth and educational assistance for employees and their families, emerged as one of the significant factors influencing job satisfaction in academic environments. This emphasized the significant impact of such valuable benefits, contributing to individual professional development and fostering a sense of long-term commitment and satisfaction among faculty members. This aligns with the study of Kačāne et al. (2019) that faculty members in higher education institutions experienced high levels of job satisfaction when their work environment was supportive and conducive to their professional growth. Another study by Dimova et al. (2019) revealed high satisfaction among university teachers with their working conditions, emphasizing the importance of a supportive work environment in fostering job satisfaction. Thus, work benefits such as support for professional growth and educational support for the direct family members of employees play a crucial role in job satisfaction in academic environments. Institutions should prioritize creating a supportive work environment and providing opportunities for professional development to enhance job satisfaction among faculty members.

Theme 4: Competitive Salary

Competitive salary refers to a compensation package that aligns with or exceeds industry standards to attract and retain qualified employees (Onuorah & Okeke, 2023). The participants emphasized the significance of a competitive salary, emphasizing its crucial role in influencing an individual's decision to accept or decline a job offer. This theme contains only one subtheme: Salary Grade.

A salary grade is a systematic classification that determines the level of compensation for a specific job role within an organization based on factors such as responsibilities, qualifications, and experience. The participants highlighted that adhering to the salary grade system contributes to job satisfaction as this will drive faculty members to grab opportunities for personal and professional growth. This was noted when they said:

"Our salary here does not follow salary grade system. I understand that we are a private institution so I understand that we do not follow. But I think this can also be a factor for job satisfaction because younger employees especially those who have less than 5 years of experience, they would look for a greener pasture. Why greener? Because the salary is higher. One factor really is the salary" (P2).

"...for example, me, I am a breadwinner in my family. I have siblings that I have to send to high school and college. Even if I wanted to stay, if the salary will not be enough to sustain for my needs, I will find another job that is higher than my current salary" (P7).

Competitive salary is a crucial factor in job satisfaction in

the academic environment. The participants emphasized the critical role of a competitive salary in influencing faculty members' job satisfaction. This emphasized the multifaceted relationship between salary grades and faculty members' career decisions, indicating compensation's crucial role in retaining and attracting qualified individuals within the academic environment. This aligns with a study conducted by Mabaso and Dlamini (2017) that showed a positive and significant effect of compensation on job satisfaction among academic staff, emphasizing the importance of improving compensation strategies to boost employee satisfaction.

Afaq et al. (2022) highlighted that while pay and rewards are positively related to job satisfaction of academic staff, the majority of factors influencing job satisfaction are not solely based on compensation, indicating that work environment, job security, and other non-monetary factors also play a significant role. Additionally, Shin and Jung (2013) found that academics' job satisfaction is influenced by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, including work conditions, job stress, recognition, and inner rewards, suggesting that competitive salary is just one factor contributing to job satisfaction. Therefore, while a competitive salary is significant, it is not the sole determinant of job satisfaction among faculty members in higher education institutions. Other factors, such as work environment, job security, and recognition, also significantly influence job satisfaction (Kačāne et al., 2019).

IV. CONCLUSION

This research highlighted key factors influencing job satisfaction – transformational leadership, work environment, benefits, and salary. These factors substantially impact job satisfaction as they increase employee retention rates. Educational institutions are advised to take proactive steps to develop transformative leadership, create organized pay grade systems, and promote happy work cultures in light of these significant factors. Furthermore, prioritizing full work benefits—like chances for professional growth and academic support—can help faculty members feel more satisfied with their jobs. When taken as a whole, these strategic initiatives could foster an academic atmosphere that is more stimulating and encouraging, protecting the well-being of faculty members in higher education institutions.

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