

Faculty Lived Experiences on Job Security in Locally Funded Colleges and Universities

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the lived experiences of faculty members concerning job security within locally funded colleges and universities (LFCUs) in Bukidnon, Philippines. It aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how employment security affects faculty and institutional outcomes. This study utilized phenomenological research design. Fifteen volunteer Criminology faculty members participated in this phenomenological study. Data were gathered using interview-guide questions and analyzed using Seidman's method of data analysis. Data analysis revealed six interconnected themes: (1) feelings of job insecurity and financial instability; (2) coping mechanisms; (3) responses to contractual uncertainties; (4) the influence of institutional policies; (5) the importance of professional growth and networks; and (6) the need for enhanced employment guidelines and support. Findings highlight that contract renewals and financial concerns significantly contribute to job insecurity, impacting faculty well-being and institutional morale. The study concluded that addressing these challenges requires institutional reforms to stabilize funding, ensure equitable treatment, and promote faculty well-being. It is recommended that LFCUs implement clear contract policies, enhance communication, and support professional development to foster a more secure and equitable environment.

Keywords: contractual faculty, financial instability, institutional policies, job security, Professional development

INTRODUCTION

Job security remains a central concern in the workplace, especially in the education sector, as it affects employee motivation, institutional engagement, and long-term productivity (Lee et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2020). In higher education, the global shift toward employing non-tenured and contractual faculty—driven by budget constraints and fluctuating enrollments—has resulted in widespread employment precarity, leading to psychological distress, reduced teaching effectiveness, and diminished professional identity (Burgess et al., 2021; Chang & Kim, 2022; Kim et al., 2023).

In publicly funded institutions, particularly in developing countries, job security is closely tied to political and fiscal dynamics. Inconsistent funding and contract renewals undermine institutional stability and faculty morale (Tomanek, 2020; Fernandez & Martinez, 2022). While secure employment fosters job satisfaction and retention (Falatah et al., 2021), many faculty members—especially those in locally funded colleges—face stagnant career growth and lack institutional support (Burgess et al., 2021; Liao et al., 2021).

In the Philippines, locally funded colleges and universities (LFCUs) are especially vulnerable due to their reliance on local government units (LGUs) for funding. Faculty in these institutions often work under job-order arrangements without tenure security or benefits, making them highly susceptible to political shifts and administrative instability (Torres & Alarcon, 2020; Basillote et al., 2021; Santos & Rivera, 2023).

National policies such as RA 10931 have enhanced access to education primarily for state universities, often excluding LFCUs from systemic support (Villanueva & Sanchez, 2019). In provinces like Bukidnon, LFCUs are critical to democratizing education but face severe limitations—short-term contracts, lack of benefits, and minimal research support—which impede faculty development and affect educational quality (Diaz &

Domingo, 2021; Mendoza et al., 2023; Garcia & Flores, 2022). Despite their importance, LFCUs remain under-researched, particularly regarding faculty job security and working conditions (Lopez & Garcia, 2021). Existing studies have largely focused on private or state-funded institutions, neglecting the lived experiences of faculty in LFCUs who operate within political and administrative constraints (Alcantara & Roldan, 2020; Dizon & Ramos, 2023).

These gaps in the literature obscure the impact of employment precarity on faculty well-being, institutional participation, and educational outcomes (Hernandez & Salazar, 2024). This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the lived experiences of faculty in Bukidnon's LFCUs. It seeks to uncover how job insecurity shapes their motivation, institutional loyalty, and contributions to education. The insights gained will inform policies that promote employment stability, professional growth, and institutional equity. Ultimately, the study emphasizes the need for inclusive and sustainable employment practices in LFCUs to enhance faculty welfare and ensure quality education in underserved communities.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of faculty members regarding job security in locally funded colleges and universities (LFCUs). By focusing on both shared and discuss experiences, this methodology facilitates an in-depth understanding of how job security, or the lack thereof, affects faculty members' mental well-being, professional identity, and career trajectories. The interpretive paradigm allows for the extraction of subjective meanings from participants, revealing the underlying factors contributing to their experiences of anxiety, stress, and uncertainty about their employment status.

The participants in this study consist of 15 faculty members, a number typical for phenomenological studies to achieve data saturation. Purposive sampling will be employed to select participants who have first-hand experiences with contractual employment and job security issues in diverse locally funded colleges and universities (LFCUs). Participants will be chosen based on the following inclusion criteria: 1) Faculty currently employed under contractual terms (e.g., Job Order, temporary contracts). And 2) Willingness to share their experiences.

This study followed the Seidman's (1998) three-step process for descriptive phenomenology, specifically designed to explore the lived experiences of participants. This approach enabled the researcher to uncover the essence of job security as experienced by faculty members in locally funded colleges and universities (LFCUs) and to highlight the diverse perspectives that shape their understanding of this issue.

Throughout the entire study process, the welfare of the participants was the researcher's top priority. Participants' opinions, thoughts, and remarks valued and respected throughout the study, fostering an environment where they feel comfortable sharing their experiences. This atmosphere is crucial for capturing the diverse perspectives essential for understanding the nuanced challenges of job security faced by faculty members in locally funded colleges and universities (LFCUs). In compliance with Republic Act No. 10173, also known as the "Data Privacy Act of 2012." By following these guidelines, the researcher ensured the privacy and confidentiality of the qualitative research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section meticulously presents the lived experiences of fifteen volunteer Criminology faculty members. (6 female, ages 24-32; 9 male, ages 25-38) from locally funded colleges and universities (LFCUs) in Bukidnon, Philippines. Their insights reveal six interconnected theme clusters that illuminate the multifaceted complexities surrounding their job security, a particularly salient issue within this educational sector.

The analysis begins by exploring the foundational challenges of the Feeling of Job Insecurity and Financial Instability, before delving into the various strategies faculty employ in Coping with Job Insecurity While Pursuing Career Stability. Subsequently, this section examines the proactive measures undertaken in Responding to the Uncertainties of Contractual Employment through Professional Survival, highlighting the

individual agency within systemic security. The critical influence of institutional frameworks is then analyzed in Shaping Job Security through Institutional Policies and Transparency, underscoring the need for clear guidelines and open communication. Furthermore, the study identifies the significance of Strengthening Professional Growth and Collaborative Networks as vital strategies for navigating their uncertain professional landscape.

Finally, the concluding thematic analysis focuses on Enhancing Employment Guidelines and Transparent Support, synthesizing recommendations for institutional reforms aimed at fostering a more secure and equitable environment. Through these interconnected themes, this chapter section provides a comprehensive understanding of the lived realities and adaptive strategies of faculty members in LFCUs, setting the stage for a nuanced discussion of the implications and potential pathways for positive change.

Feeling of Job Insecurity and Financial Instability

Contractual employment in Local Filipino Colleges and Universities (LFCUs) perpetuates a profound sense of job insecurity and financial instability among faculty members. This theme emerged strongly from the participants' narratives, highlighting how uncertainty in contract renewals and insufficient compensation contribute to ongoing stress, emotional fatigue, and a diminished sense of professional stability. Many educators recounted the emotional toll of not knowing whether their contracts would be renewed each semester, as well as the persistent struggle to meet financial obligations with modest salaries. Based on the studies of Wong (2024) emphasizes that prolonged job insecurity significantly undermines employees' psychological well-being, while Cariño (2022) reveals how systemic underpayment among contractual Filipino college instructors perpetuate cycles of economic hardship. Taken together, these findings highlight how employment security not only affects individual faculty members' mental and financial health but also poses broader implications for teaching quality, institutional morale, and the sustainability of LFCUs.

These are the responses of the participants:

"I felt insecure when contract renewals were delayed, but secure when receiving positive feedback and consistent support." (P1)

"I felt insecure when my contract renewal was uncertain, and there was little communication from the administration." (P2)

"Every time when the contract renewal of my current institution will expire, it feels like a test of my survival. It's exhausting." (P7)

"We are insecure because every semester we end our contract and then another semester must be renewed again. What if they will not renew us?" (P8)

"I felt insecure because the salary of my work plan is not enough to survive the needs of my family." (P11)

"I felt insecure about my salary when it is compared to other institutions." (P13)

"There are a lot of bills to pay and the salary is not enough." (P12)

"So far, based on experience, my job security sometimes triggers me to pursue and apply for another job." (P10)

The findings of this study underscore the urgent need for systemic reform in the employment structures of Local Filipino Colleges and Universities (LFCUs). The chronic job insecurity and financial hardship experienced by contractual faculty not only threaten individual well-being but also compromise institutional effectiveness and academic quality. Drawing on recent research (Wong, 2024; Cariño, 2022; Bernarte, 2020), it becomes evident that sustained exposure to employment precarity leads to burnout, diminished teaching quality, and eventual workforce attrition. To address these multi-layered issues, LFCUs must adopt proactive institutional reforms—including regularization pathways, fair compensation, and faculty support systems.

These reforms should be backed by national policy changes that prioritize educator welfare as a cornerstone of higher education quality and sustainability in the Philippines.

Coping with Job Insecurity While Pursuing Career Stability

Faced with the pervasive uncertainty of contractual employment in Philippine LFCUs, faculty actively employ various coping mechanisms to navigate job insecurity and strive for career stability. This study reveals a complex interplay of psychological responses (Yang & Lee, 2020), pragmatic financial strategies (Yu & Lee, 2022), the pursuit of further qualifications (Jiang et al., 2021), and reliance on individual initiative (Reyes & Santos, 2021). The emotional strain of constant uncertainty intertwines with financial pressures, necessitating careful resource management. While advanced degrees are often sought, they don't guarantee security in a competitive market. Ultimately, individual resilience becomes crucial in the absence of robust institutional support, highlighting the multifaceted ways contractual faculty strive for professional survival within an often-insecure environment.

These are the answers of the participants:

"In terms of security, it leads to increased stress and emotional exhaustion, sometimes affecting both teaching quality and job satisfaction." (P8)

"Secure at the same time, but much more I felt insecure on the part that I am a contractual/Job order employee." (P10)

"I describe my experience as stressful. I think the most important thing is earnings or savings every salary, to be able to support my family." (P14)

"Despite this, I remain motivated because I want to excel in my field and increase my chances of securing a more stable position." (P4)

"While I strive to improve my qualifications by pursuing my master's degree, I still lack confidence in my job security due to the lack of clear employment policies. The lack of transparency in employment policies leaves me unsure about my future stability." (P8)

"Personally, I've strived in my own capacity for the betterment and of my career security." (P15)

This study highlights that faculty members in Philippine LFCUs cope with job insecurity through resilience, financial management, pursuit of qualifications, and individual efforts. Despite these strategies, precarious employment continues to cause emotional distress, burnout, and job dissatisfaction (Yang & Lee, 2020; Cao et al., 2021; Yu & Lee, 2022). Even with higher degrees, many faculty face unstable career paths, exposing the limits of academic advancement in securing stable employment (Jiang et al., 2021; Huang & Wei, 2020). The reliance on self-driven survival strategies reveals systemic flaws, emphasizing the urgent need for transparent employment policies, merit-based promotions, and mental health support to prevent ongoing faculty turnover and weakened educational quality (Reyes & Santos, 2021)

Responding to the Uncertainties of Contractual Employment through Professional Survival

This study reveals that faculty in locally funded colleges and universities (LFCUs), confronted with the instability of semester-based contracts, adopt various strategies to ensure professional survival. These include institutional compliance, over-performance, pursuit of advanced qualifications, and self-driven efforts to navigate systemic limitations. Echoing previous research (e.g., Kezar & Sam, 2020; Oracion, 2021), these responses reflect how faculty actively manage the pressures of contractual employment in a system marked by uncertainty and limited career mobility.

These are the answers of the participants:

"Job security at my institution is uncertain due to semester evaluations, As a result, I find myself constantly

second-guessing my decisions, overworking to ensure positive evaluations, and experiencing a lack of confidence in my long-term career prospects. This environment affects my daily work, motivation, and performance, causing stress and anxiety." (P8)

"The institution has a competitive environment, with a limited number of tenure-track positions and an overabundance of contract-based roles, which creates anxiety among faculty members who are unsure about long-term employment." (P1)

"The climate is unstable, as contractual faculty members are always unsure about renewal. This affects motivation because there is always an underlying fear of job loss." (P2)

"The lack of stability is stressful. The fear of losing my job sometimes affects my overall morale, waiting for how many months with no assurance to be renewed makes me feel like an unvalued teacher. Consequently, I find myself constantly seeking alternative opportunities, diverting my energy from focusing on my current students and forcing me to prioritize self-preservation over long-term pedagogical investment." (P5)

"The semester-based system of contract renewals means my job security is tenuous at best, a situation that is then made significantly worse by the absence of stable, long-term career pathways. The lack of long-term job prospects exacerbates uncertainty." (P14)

"Since we are under by the LGU, we need to perform well and abide with the school rules, otherwise goodbye career." (P3)

"Despite this, I remain motivated because I want to excel in my field and increase my chances of securing a more stable position." (P4)

"While I strive to improve my qualifications by pursuing my master's degree, I still lack confidence in my job security due to the lack of clear employment policies. The lack of transparency in employment policies leaves me unsure about my future stability." (P8)

"Personally, I've strived in my own capacity for the betterment and of my career security." (P15)

This study reveals that contractual employment in locally funded colleges and universities (LFCUs) adversely affects faculty psychological well-being, professional growth, and institutional engagement. Faculty respond to job insecurity through compliance, overperformance, pursuit of advanced degrees, and self-driven career efforts, reflecting global patterns of stress and diminished belonging among precariously employed academics (Kezar & Sam, 2020; Chattopadhyay & Krishna, 2020; Kim & Jung, 2022). While these strategies demonstrate resilience, they also expose systemic deficiencies within LFCUs, where political interference, unstable funding, and unclear policies intensify job insecurity (Rhoades & Maestas, 2021; Oracion, 2021). Without reforms promoting transparent employment practices, stable funding, and faculty support, LFCUs risk continued faculty disengagement, declining education quality, and widening inequities in access to higher education (Tupas & Gonzalez, 2022; Salazar-Clemeña & Almonte-Acosta, 2020).

Shaping Job Security through Institutional Policies and Transparency

Institutional policies and transparency are key to job security in LFCUs. Contractual employment with unclear tenure paths (Galang & Garcia, 2022), unpredictable renewals (CHED Report, 2020), and limited permanent positions despite qualifications (Santos & Aquino, 2021) create precarity. Lack of transparency (Nguyen et al., 2023) and insufficient development support (CHED CMO, 2019) exacerbate this, highlighting how institutional frameworks shape the precarious realities of contractual faculty.

These were revealed in the answers of the participants:

"The institution follows a contract-based employment system, which limits job security. Policies regarding promotion and tenure are not always clear." (P1)

"There are no clear pathways for becoming a permanent faculty member, which affects long-term stability."

(P5)

"Contract renewals often depend on factors beyond performance, such as budget allocations and administrative decisions." (P8)

"I cannot be assured my job security, regardless of the fact that the instructor must have a Master's degree and that is mandatory." (P10)

"Graduate degree holders have first refusal for permanent positions, leaving adjuncts vulnerable." (P14)

"When my contract renewal was delayed without any clear explanation, it highlighted the importance of institutional transparency." (P2)

"Institutional policies and employment practices have a direct impact, significantly shaping the stability and security of employment, especially on contract type and renewal policies." (P6)

"We must have open communication from management to improve job security and create a more motivated work atmosphere." (P14)

"The institution has a lack of support for faculty development because of having no budget on this matter." (P15)

"The strategies used by faculty members to secure their position is to undergo Masteral and maintain their good performance." (P6)

"My strategies as faculty to secure my position or job is that continuing my education in pursuing Master's degree, and because of this, I can assure my position to long last." (P14)

"In this institution, job security can improve by offering clearer pathways to tenure or permanent positions and providing professional development opportunities." (P8)

"I see other faculty focusing on excellence and visibility which seems effective, though outcomes still depend on institutional policies." (P1)

"Some focus on networking and gaining favor with decision-makers, while others pursue further studies to improve qualifications." (P2)

"Yes, I've sought support from colleagues and professional networks, which has provided guidance and reassurance, shaping a more proactive approach to job security." (P1)

Job security in Philippine LFCUs is shaped by institutional policies, transparency, and support systems. Contract-based employment, unclear tenure paths, and limited permanent positions cause widespread security and stress among faculty (Galang & Garcia, 2022; Santos & Aquino, 2021; CHED Report, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2023). Although many pursue higher qualifications to improve stability (Santos & David, 2021), limited regularization opportunities persist (Huang & Wei, 2020; Jiang et al., 2021). Informal strategies like networking offer resilience (Reyes & Silva, 2020), but the study stresses that true job security depends on systemic reforms, including transparent policies and strong faculty development support (Bautista et al., 2023; CHED CMO No. 15, 2019).

Enhancing Employment Guidelines and Transparent Support

Philippine LFCUs urgently need clearer, transparent, merit-based employment guidelines due to faculty anxiety over lacking tenure/advancement policies (Samson & Reyes, 2021), hindering career planning. Open communication (Tolentino & Gamboa, 2020) and more permanent positions are vital for trust and retention. Institutional structures and communication significantly impact job security, requiring clearer policies and increased opportunities for a stable, effective LFCU academic workforce in the Philippines.

These were revealed in the answers of the participants:

"I think the implementation of clearer guidelines regarding tenure, multi-year contracts, and a merit-based evaluation is recommended to improve job security for contractual instructors." (P5)

"Introducing multi-year contracts for high-performing faculty, clearer guidelines for contract renewals, and pathways to tenure for long-serving instructors would improve job security." (P2)

"Wear contract policies, transparent communication and merit-based evaluations could greatly improve faculty job security." (P1)

"Open communication between administration and faculty could help build trust and predictability in job security." (P9)

"Implementing clearer guidelines for tenure, providing more opportunities for permanent positions, and ensuring transparent evaluation criteria for contract renewals would improve job security." (P4)

Clear, transparent, and merit-based employment guidelines are crucial to improving job security in Philippine LFCUs. The lack of standardized tenure policies and opaque contract renewals causes anxiety, disrupts career planning, and weakens faculty engagement (Samson & Reyes, 2021). Open communication between administrators and faculty is essential for building trust and stability (Tolentino & Gamboa, 2020). Without reforms like multi-year contracts, transparent evaluations, and more permanent positions, LFCUs risk high turnover and declining educational quality.

Faculty job security in Philippine LFCUs, particularly in Bukidnon, is shaped more by institutional policies and communication practices than by individual merit. Short-term contracts, financial instability, and limited institutional support cause chronic stress and hinder career growth, despite faculty efforts through education, performance, and networking. This study emphasizes the urgent need for systemic reforms—clearer employment policies, permanent positions, faculty development investment, and transparent communication—to improve faculty well-being, educational quality, and the sustainability of LFCUs.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn: First, individual coping strategies, such as engaging in professional development and maintaining high performance, help faculty members manage job insecurity, but these measures do not address the underlying issues created by the institution's contract-based employment system. Second, the absence of clear tenure policies, inconsistent contract renewal processes, and inadequate compensation contribute to a climate of uncertainty, significantly undermining faculty job security. Third, this insecurity has a detrimental effect on faculty members' professional motivation, financial stability, and overall well-being, hindering their ability to plan for the future and leading to emotional fatigue. Lastly, to foster a more supportive and productive environment, institutions must prioritize reforms, including transparent policies, stable employment mechanisms, and enhanced support structures, with a focus on the well-being and long-term success of their contractual faculty.

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are hereby put forward: First, it is essential to implement clear contract policies by establishing transparent and consistent guidelines for contract renewals, including defined timelines and criteria, to minimize uncertainty among faculty members. Second, introducing multi-year contracts for high-performing faculty will enhance job stability and support better long-term planning. Third, creating clear and attainable pathways to tenure or permanent positions for long-serving and qualified contractual faculty will provide greater career security. Additionally, increasing salaries and benefits for contractual faculty by reviewing and improving their compensation packages will help boost motivation and retention. Furthermore, fostering enhanced communication between administration and faculty is crucial, ensuring regular updates on employment status, policy changes, and evaluation results. To support professional growth, it is necessary to

continue and expand faculty development programs, offering financial or institutional support for advanced studies. Moreover, strengthening mentorship and support networks, including mentorship programs and faculty unions, will provide faculty with guidance and advocacy for their rights and job security. Lastly, expanding the number of Plantilla (permanent) positions will reduce reliance on contractual employment and improve overall job security for faculty members.

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