STRUGGLING FOR SURVIVAL: THE IMPACT OF LOW SALARIES AND HIGH LIVING COSTS ON FACULTY MEMBERS AT ETHIOPIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how low salaries combined with high living expenses affect satisfaction levels and overall well-being and service quality performance of Ethiopian university faculty members. Research data came from surveys and interviews of 200 faculty members. The research shows compensation levels are lower than professionals' contribution to the institution which creates substantial job dissatisfaction among faculty members because of both inadequate wages and high cost of living expenses. The survey participants described economic limitations that create adverse impacts on their instructional efficiency and research output and professional-personal integration. More immediate budget enhancements through salary adjustments, incentive programs and better institutional resources must become a high priority for Ethiopian universities to resolve this situation. Educational planners should develop specific retention approaches to draw and maintain quality faculty who will enhance institutional quality. Improving faculty financial circumstances leads to enhanced education quality alongside better academic results in educational institutions. The document serves as the basis for additional academic research on economic challenges faculty members face within institutions of higher learning.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

University education systems worldwide benefit from effective operation (Assefa, 2023; Balzer, 2020) when faculty members experience financial stability. Low-paying salaries and high living costs negatively impact teaching quality, research output, and institutional values (Babcock, 2024). The interplay between living costs and faculty salaries is a crucial component of educational theories that directly influence the quality of education and the operational efficiency of universities (Houghton et al., 2021). The cultural acceptance of fair compensation as a key factor in attracting qualified personnel is evident globally (Assefa, 2024; Kaddoura & Al, 2023). Educational theories, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, confirm that professionals, including professors, require financial security to enhance their work performance (Maslow, 1943; Zhou et al., 2022). Individuals need to address their economic needs before they can progress toward developmental goals and meaningful student engagement (Ansorger, 2021; Maslow, 1943).

Institutions with below-average pay scales experience numerous adverse outcomes, including decreased job satisfaction and institutional commitment, alongside higher faculty turnover rates (Sintayehu, & Hussien, 2021; Umeh, 2023). Financial pressures hinder faculty members' ability to fully dedicate themselves to teaching and research responsibilities, negatively affecting the learning environment for students (Ahmad et al., 2024). High living expenses perpetuate a cycle of dissatisfaction among employees, exacerbating these challenges (Szromek & Wolniak, 2020). Therefore, educational institutions must base their policies for improving faculty well-being and performance on financial considerations to achieve their objectives (Doğan & Arslan, 2024).

Research from various university contexts indicates that faculty members face negative outcomes when pay rates are low while local living costs remain high (Alemayehu, 2021; Gerashchenko, 2024). Empirical studies show that faculty in understaffed institutions frequently endure significant financial strain, leading to increased turnover and declining job satisfaction

levels (Olowonefa et al., 2022). Investigations within educational institutions confirm that salary discrepancies across different organizations directly impact faculty stress levels, increasing the potential for burnout among teaching staff (Ahmad et al., 2024).

Developing countries encounter escalating challenges that complicate their situations. Numerous studies have identified three primary issues faced by educational institutions in these regions: inadequate salary compensation, minimal institutional support, and limited access to resources (Shaoan et al., 2025). Research indicates that economic difficulties in Nigeria adversely affect employee morale, faculty performance, and overall workplace satisfaction (Haruna & Pongri, 2024). Existing literature highlights the necessity for financial support for higher education educators operating under unstable economic conditions with restricted institutional funding.

In Ethiopia, the combined factors of limited compensation and high living costs present a unique situation that requires thorough research attention (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). The current compensation package for teachers at Ethiopian universities fails to meet welfare standards, as urban cost increases outpace their already constrained salaries (Adamu, 2024). For instance, the gross monthly salary for full professors in Ethiopia is approximately US Dollar 358, which reduces to US Dollar 234 after tax and pension deductions. According to Adamu (2024), this net income is insufficient to cover the rent of a basic two-bedroom apartment in the local area. The significant gap between faculty earnings and essential living costs creates an extreme sense of unfairness. This situation becomes particularly dire when university staff find their salaries inadequate for survival and feel compelled to seek additional work outside their institutions (Adamu, 2024). Consequently, universities face a major crisis as economic pressures adversely affect both faculty recruitment and retention, thereby compromising educational quality (Halabieh et al., 2022).

Educational employees often seek supplementary income through tutoring or consulting due to insufficient funds for basic living expenses (Solomon & Du, 2024). The dual responsibilities of teaching and additional work diminish faculty focus on research and student engagement (Wang et al., 2016). As a result, students receive a lower quality of education because faculty members struggle to balance their professional commitments with financial concerns (Vican et al., 2020). Research addressing the unique challenges faced by Ethiopian university faculty members has been limited thus far (Tareke et al., 2024).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do low salaries impact the job satisfaction and overall well-being of faculty members at Ethiopian universities?
2. What are the effects of high living costs on the professional performance and retention of faculty members in Ethiopian universities?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to fill a gap in the scholarly literature by examining the comprehensive effects of inadequate pay and high living expenses on Ethiopian university faculty. While economic research in higher education is extensive globally, there is a lack of studies addressing the specific issues encountered by Ethiopian instructors. This investigation focuses on this context to enhance understanding of the effects of economic stress on faculty welfare and educational standards in Ethiopia.

The findings of this research will provide valuable insights into institutional change and policy development. This study presents first-hand evidence regarding faculty conditions, enabling stakeholders to recognize the urgent need for salary reforms, improved support systems, and adjustments to living allowances. Ultimately, this research seeks to foster an ethical environment for faculty at Ethiopian universities, thereby enhancing the quality of higher education in the country.

LIMITATIONS

1. Sample Size: The study had a limited sample size which affected the generalizability of the findings to all faculty members across Ethiopian universities.
2. Response Bias: Participants might have provided socially desirable responses or may not have fully disclosed their financial struggles, leading to biased results.
3. Cross-Sectional Design: The study employed a cross-sectional design, which did not capture changes over time or the long-term impacts of low salaries and high living costs.
4. Regional Variations: The study did not account for regional differences in living costs and salaries, which varied significantly across different areas of Ethiopia.

DELIMITATIONS

1. Focus on Faculty Members: The study specifically targeted faculty members at Ethiopian universities, excluding other staff or administrators who also experienced similar challenges.
2. Geographic Scope: The research was designed to focus on the faculty of Ethiopian universities. Faculty in other universities in other countries were not involved.
3. Financial Aspects: The study concentrated on low salaries and high living costs, deliberately excluding other factors that might have affected faculty wellbeing.
4. Time Frame: The research was conducted within a specific time frame, which did not capture seasonal variations in living costs or salaries

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a valuable framework for understanding the combined effects of inadequate pay and high living costs faced by teaching staff in Ethiopian universities (Maslow, 1943; Mingzhi, 2025). This operational framework illustrates that unmet needs create barriers to faculty performance and overall wellness.

Physiological Needs

The hierarchy begins with physiological needs, which encompass essentials like food, shelter, and clothing. Ethiopian faculty members often struggle to meet these basic requirements due to low salaries, leading to significant financial hardship (Maslow, 1943; Smith & Sweet, 2021). This inability to satisfy fundamental needs disrupts their focus on teaching and academic responsibilities (Colclasure et al., 2021).

Safety Needs

Following physiological needs, safety needs are crucial for stability. Ethiopian faculty members face challenges in securing their basic life requirements, which further compounds their financial difficulties (Tessema & Abebe, 2011). This financial strain impacts their ability to concentrate on their teaching roles and academic duties (Adamu, 2024).

Love and Belongingness Needs

The next level involves love and belonging needs, which are essential for social connections. Faculty members' financial struggles hinder their ability to engage fully with colleagues and students, affecting their sense of belonging within the academic community (Adamu, 2024).

Esteem Needs

Esteem needs, which pertain to recognition and self-worth, are also affected by financial constraints. When faculty members cannot afford basic living necessities, their professional esteem may diminish further impacting their academic performance (Maslow, 1943; Mingzhi, 2025).

Self-Actualization Needs

At the pinnacle of Maslow's hierarchy is self-actualization, representing the realization of personal potential (Maslow, 1943; Smith & Sweet, 2021). Financial limitations often restrict faculty members' opportunities for research and professional development (Gonzalez et al., 2019). Without meeting lower-order needs, the pursuit of self-actualization becomes significantly hindered, limiting their engagement with the academic community (Al Maamari, 2025; Maslow, 1943).

This study aims to explore the effects of low wages and high living expenses on the wellbeing and productivity of Ethiopian university faculty members through the lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. It highlights the interconnectedness of basic needs, economic hardship, job satisfaction, and the overall quality of education, extending beyond the limits of mere employment.

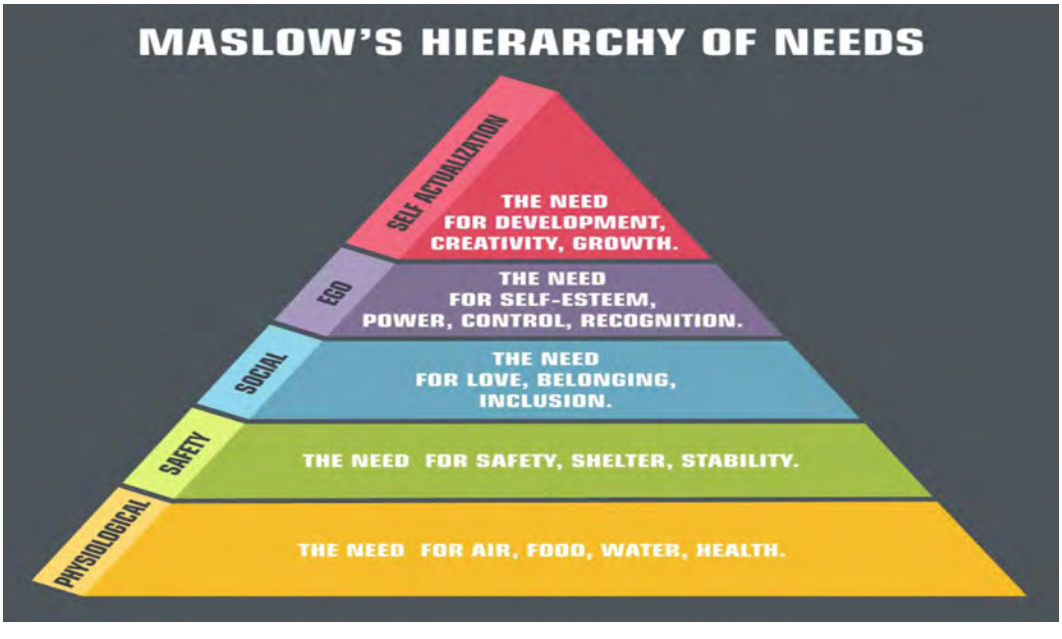

Figure 1: *Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A mixed-methods research design was used to include quantitative and qualitative approaches to conduct a comprehensive assessment about how Ethiopian government university faculty members are affected by their reduced salaries and increased living expenses (Tang, 2025). This research design utilized surveys and interviews as complementary tools that produced complete insight into the problems while collecting statistical patterns together with extensive personal testimonials (Fàbregues & Guetterman, 2025).

Participants

A total of 200 faculty members served as the target participants throughout this research in various government universities across Ethiopia. Research participants represented several areas of study in addition to different levels of seniority and years of teaching experience. The 200 participants were distributed with 60 males and 140 females across five different Ethiopian government universities. Stratified sampling offered a method to obtain diverse faculty member representations for the study. The sampling approach included various academic fields including humanities, science, engineering and social sciences and different national locations because it allows participant inclusion.

Data Collection Methods

Surveys

A structured questionnaire was developed as the primary tool for collecting quantitative data. The questionnaire aimed to gather information on faculty experiences related to salaries, living costs, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. The survey included a mix of closed-ended questions using Likert scale formats to measure perceptions and experiences. Key areas of focus included:

- **Demographic Information:** Questions regarding age, gender, academic rank, years of service, and the specific government university where respondents were employed.
- **Salary Levels and Perceived Adequacy:** Faculty members were asked to report on their current salary and evaluate their sufficiency in meeting their basic needs and maintaining a desired standard of living.
- **Living Costs:** The survey included questions about various living expenses such as housing, transportation, food, healthcare, and any additional costs that impacted their financial situation.
- **Job Satisfaction and Engagement:** Participants were asked to rate their overall job satisfaction, engagement levels, and the perceived impact of financial stress on their teaching and research activities.
- **Intentions to Stay in Current Positions:** Faculty members were queried about their plans to remain in their current positions, considering factors such as salary and living costs.

The surveys were distributed electronically to facilitate ease of access and data collection. Faculty members were invited to participate via email, with follow-up reminders sent to encourage participation. This method ensured a higher response rate and allowed participants to complete the survey at their convenience.

Interviews

In addition to the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a selected subset of faculty members to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perspectives. Approximately 20 faculty members were chosen for interviews based on their survey responses, ensuring a diverse mix of demographics, academic ranks, and experiences. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to share their thoughts and experiences in detail. Key topics explored during the interviews included:

- Personal Experiences with Salary and Living Costs: Faculty members were invited to discuss their financial circumstances and how these impacted their daily lives and professional responsibilities.
- Coping Strategies: Participants shared the strategies they employed to manage financial stress, including any adjustments they made to their lifestyles or teaching practices.
- Impact of Economic Pressures: The interviews explored how low salaries and high living costs affected faculty members' teaching effectiveness, research output, and overall job satisfaction.
- Suggestions for Institutional Support: Faculty members were asked to provide recommendations for how universities could better support them considering the financial challenges they faced.

Interviews were conducted in-person. Each interview was recorded (with consent) to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

The survey data were analyzed using statistical software called SPSS version 25, to calculate descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations. The results were presented in tables to enhance clarity and facilitate interpretation. Descriptive statistics were particularly useful for summarizing the demographic characteristics of the respondents, as well as the overall trends in salary adequacy and living costs.

Qualitative Data

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring themes and patterns related to faculty experiences. This analysis involved several stages, including:

1. **Familiarization:** Researchers read through the transcripts multiple times to become familiar with the content and identify initial ideas.
2. **Coding:** Key phrases and concepts were coded to organize the data into meaningful categories.
3. **Theme Development:** Codes were grouped into broader themes that captured the essence of faculty experiences regarding low salaries and high living costs.
4. **Interpretation:** The themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions, highlighting the nuanced experiences of faculty members and the systemic challenges they faced.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

The study's survey instrument demonstrated both validity and reliability. A 5-point Likert scale was employed to ensure that the items were relevant and accurately reflected the constructs being measured. Validity was established through content validity, which involved a thorough literature review and consultations with subject matter experts. These experts ensured that the items were appropriate for the constructs of "Impact of Low Salaries" and "Effects of High Living Costs." Their feedback led to refinements in item clarity and comprehensiveness. To further validate the instrument, a pilot test was conducted with a representative sample. Participant feedback from this test confirmed consistent interpretation of the items, supporting construct validity. As shown in table 1 below, reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with values exceeding 0.7 specifically 0.79 and 0.84 for all variables indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Overall, this rigorous approach demonstrates that the survey instrument is both valid and reliable for measuring the intended constructs.

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items	Acceptability
Impact of low salaries	0.79	6	Acceptable
Effects of high living costs	0.84	6	Acceptable

Table 1: *The Reliability of the Scales*

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was secured from all participants, ensuring they understood the study's purpose, their rights, and the confidentiality of their responses. Participants were informed that their involvement in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without facing any penalties.

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process by anonymizing participant data and securely storing all collected information. The reporting of results ensured that individual identities were not disclosed, safeguarding the privacy of all participants.

FINDINGS

Impact of Low Salaries on Faculty in Ethiopian Universities

RQ1: How do low salaries impact the job satisfaction and overall well-being of faculty members at Ethiopian universities?

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	Low salaries significantly affect my overall job satisfaction.	200	4.64	0.88
2	I often feel stressed due to my salary not being sufficient to meet my basic living expenses.	200	4.76	0.71
3	My motivation to engage in teaching and research is negatively impacted by my salary level.	200	4.83	0.92
4	I believe that my salary does not reflect my contributions and efforts as a faculty member.	200	4.77	0.82
5	Low salaries diminish my sense of well-being both personally and professionally.	200	4.66	0.87
6	I would consider leaving my position if my salary does not improve in the near future.	200	4.58	0.66
	Overall Average	200	4.7	0.81

Table 2: Impact of Low Salaries on Faculty Job Satisfaction and Well-Being

Impact on Job Satisfaction

Table 2 Item 1 documents that faculty members strongly agree (mean=4.64) that low salary levels notably affect their job satisfaction while demonstrating a standard deviation of 0.88. The high mean value demonstrates that faculty members show strong support for the idea that inadequate pay negatively impacts their job satisfaction. Standard deviation levels remained low because most faculty members consistently expressed their dissatisfaction regarding salary effects on their work satisfaction.

The Hierarchy of Needs Theory by Abraham Maslow states that salary meets fundamental basic needs of individuals for both physiological and safety requirements. People who lack satisfaction in their work experience may be dissatisfied because they lack financial security. Academic personnel with low salaries fail to reach motivational heights and experiences high fulfillment which leads to negative consequences on their performance and well-being. One interview respondent replied,

> *The insufficient pay level creates an ongoing dissatisfaction with my current work. Worrying about financial stability constantly occupies my mind thus preventing me from dedicating sufficient attention to teaching and research duties. Finances become an obstacle that reduces both my work motivation and my enthusiasm. Inadequate compensation makes it challenging to experience professional respect when working as an education professional.*

As heard in the interviewee, financial worries directly affect their job satisfaction levels because money directly impacts motivational levels. The interviewee's sentiments serve as evidence to support Maslow's theory because faculty success in meeting their physiological and safety needs determines their ability to achieve job satisfaction and role fulfillment. The necessity for institutions to revise compensation scales becomes evident because it will boost both job contentment and professional achievement levels.

Financial Stress

The study outcome in Table 2, Item 2 indicates that faculty members experience high levels of stress because their earnings fall short of meeting their essential expenses with a mean score of 4.76 and standard deviation of 0.71. A considerable number of faculty members report experiencing stress from their insufficient compensation according to the high mean value. Data clustering shows a unified opinion because the standard deviation value remains low thus indicating faculty members share similar perspectives about how their income affects their financial situation.

The shortage of sufficient income to cover basic needs disrupts people's physical and security requirements as described by Abraham Maslow's Needs Hierarchy model. Unmet fundamental requirements trigger stress together with anxiety that leads to poor performance and decreased satisfaction at work. This finding establishes that adequate compensation matters because faculty need to concentrate on their work duties instead of managing financial insecurities. One interview respondent replied,

> *The inadequate amount of my salary causes me ongoing stress because it fails to cover my essential living costs. The worrisome thoughts about paying my bills along with everyday essentials make it difficult to focus on my job duties. When stress adds intensity to my life it removes my teaching enthusiasm and steals my energy. My job performance is worth more than what I earn because my pay does not match my commitment at work.*

The qualitative findings suggest that faculty experiences stress because of low pay which substantiates data from the survey about salary-related stress. Stress develops due to neglected physiological needs which prevents people from fully achieving their personal and professional goals according to Maslow's theory. The support of faculty personal and professional development requires proper attention to salary issues within the work environment.

Motivation and Engagement

The ratings collected through Table 2 Item 3 reveal faculty members feel strongly that their teaching and research motivation suffers from their current salary payment level since respondents scored mean of 4.83 with 0.92 standard deviation. A strong agreement exists among faculty members that salary levels substantially determine their teaching and research motivation because the mean score shows a very high value. The overall data shows distinct dissatisfaction patterns because of salary-related issues even though the standard deviation indicates limited response variability.

Research by Abraham Maslow demonstrates that individuals require satisfying their physiological requirements and feeling valued to develop strong motivational levels. Perceived insufficient salaries cause faculty members to experience undervaluation which decreases their professional motivation along with their involvement in their academic work. The revealed importance of sufficient compensation proves how faculty members need financial security to concentrate on their teaching duties as well as research pursuits. One interview respondent replied,

My pay level demotivates me to perform teaching duties and research activities. My colleagues from different disciplines earn high salaries which makes me uncertain about my teaching effectiveness. The awareness of salary restrictions related to my current position makes me experience decreased work enthusiasm.

The findings in this section confirm quantitative results that show teachers feel less motivated because of insufficient pay which demonstrates how insufficient compensation diminishes engagement among faculty members. The sentiment reinforces Maslow's theory because insufficient respect in the workplace results in reduced motivation within professional positions. The success of faculty teaching and research requires organizations to resolve compensation problems that affect their motivation and performance.

Recognition of Contributions

The results in Table 2 Item 4 indicate faculty members strongly agree that their salary does not match their professional contributions because they rate it at 4.77 on a 5-point scale with standard deviation 0.82. A substantial number of faculty members agree that their pay does not correspond to their professional work through a high mean score. Data show that employees register a general level of salary dissatisfaction although their opinions vary slightly in extent.

The Abraham Maslow Hierarchy of Needs Theory suggests that workforce feelings of underappreciation related to compensation lead to failures in meeting their esteem requirements. Evaluation of teaching staff reveals that insufficient compensation for their work leading to feelings of being undervalued and lack of motivation. The study confirms that compensation alignment with workplace contributions stands as a critical factor to boost productivity and job happiness among the faculty members. One interview respondent replied,

The salary I receive fails to match the level of my teaching dedication as well as my research pursuits. Hours upon hours of classroom instruction and research and mentoring activities fail to reflect properly in my insufficient paycheck at the university. The salary disconnection limits my morale as well as my dedication to the institution.

The interviewee believes their compensation fails to match their scholarly value which represents a common concern among teaching staff. According to Maslow's theory the employee's perception aligns with unmet esteem needs preventing both fulfillment and motivation. It is essential to address salary-contribution differences because such resolution builds support for faculty contributions and strengthens total staff satisfaction.

Sense of Well-Being

Provided data in Table 2 Item 5 demonstrates that low salaries cause significant negative effects on both personal and professional well-being of respondents with a mean score of 4.66 and standard deviation at 0.87. Many educators report that insufficient salary levels negatively impact their entire well-being to a significant extent based on the high mean score. A standard deviation of 0.87 indicates faculty members exhibit unified agreement that income levels at work affect their personal and professional life.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory links well-being specifically to the success of achieving physiological along with esteem needs. The perception of low salaries leads school staff members to experience ongoing professional and personal distress that affects their life quality and work performance. Insufficient compensation represents a crucial determinant which affects both workers' general wellness alongside their job contentment levels. One interview respondent replied,

My happiness along with my work satisfaction suffer when earnings remain low. My ongoing financial stress overwhelms me which damages both my mental health and my quality of presence as an educator for my students. The combination of financial concerns prevents me from experiencing happiness in my work.

The quoted statement from the interviewee demonstrates that monetary stress leads to major consequences for both personal health and work performance. The interviewee's view confirms Maslow's theory by showing how unresolved needs weaken both personal wellness and work commitment. The welfare of faculty depends on addressing salary concerns since such attention helps them succeed both professionally and personally.

Job Retention Considerations

The data in Table 2 Item 6 demonstrates faculty members intend to explore employment alternatives because their compensation remains stagnant in the upcoming months with a mean score of 4.58 and standard deviation of 0.66. The high mean score demonstrates widespread faculty member intent to quit their career positions because of inadequate salary. The small standard deviation confirms that faculty members across the board express this concern because their responses are generally aligned.

People who fail to receive adequate financial support according to Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory will actively look for alternatives which offer better security and fulfill their needs. The data highlights the immediate need for institutions to address faculty pay because welfare retention depends on resolving salary problems. One interview respondent remarked,

I would leave my current position unless my salary receives an increase during upcoming months. My life as a teacher continues to bring me joy while the financial struggles become unbearable. I will pursue better career opportunities whenever I locate them since I will not delay my decision.

The interviewee expressed willingness to leave because of salary issues which demonstrate severe negative effects of insufficient payment on faculty retention. The interviewee's statements support Maslow's theory because paying employees adequately remains crucial for building both organizational commitment and employee loyalty. The institution requires immediate attention to salary concerns because satisfied employees bring stability to both faculty retention and organizational success.

Effects of High Living Costs on Faculty in Ethiopian Universities

RQ2: What are the effects of high living costs on the professional performance and retention of faculty members in Ethiopian universities?

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	Increased living costs make it difficult for me to maintain a work-life balance.	200	4.77	0.74
2	I often worry about my financial situation, which distracts me from my professional responsibilities.	200	4.82	0.82
3	High living costs lead me to reduce my involvement in extracurricular academic activities	200	4.69	0.95
4	I feel that the financial burden of living expenses impacts my effectiveness in the classroom.	200	4.81	0.78
5	The rising cost of living affects my ability to collaborate with colleagues on research projects.	200	4.71	0.99
6	If living costs continue to increase, I am likely to look for job opportunities outside my current institution.	200	4.66	0.67
	Overall Average	200	4.74	0.83

Table 3: Effects of High Living Costs on Faculty Performance and Retention

Living Costs Affect Work-Life Balance

The assessment in Table 3 Item 1 obtained a mean score of 4.77 and standard deviation of 0.74 regarding how rising living costs affect work-life balance. Most faculty strongly agree that increasing living expenses interfere with their ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance according to the high mean score. The minimal standard deviation value demonstrates how most participants have a unified viewpoint about this topic.

The attempt to balance professional and private responsibilities under Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory links directly to satisfaction in physiological requirements and esteem needs realization. Increasing living expenses may force faculty members to perform more work while taking on additional tasks that generates stress and leads to burnout. The survey result demonstrates why financial pressures need proper attention to enhance faculty well-being and job satisfaction. One interview respondent stated,

> *Rising costs of living create an obstacle for me to achieve balance between work obligations and personal life. Working extended hours to survive takes up all my available time along with no time for either family or personal activities. The ongoing schedule management tires me completely and negatively impacts my general life satisfaction.*

The interviewee demonstrates how escalating living expenditures destroy professional performance and strain personal life quality. The interview data confirms Maslow's theory because unmet physical requirements lead individuals to experience difficulties in maintaining life balance. The resolution of elevated living expenses must be handled because it builds conditions that permit faculty members to succeed both at work and in life.

Financial Worries Distract from Professional Duties

The finding in Table 3, Item 2, *"I often worry about my financial situation, which distracts me from my professional responsibilities,"* shows a mean score of 4.82 with a standard deviation of 0.82. This high mean indicates a strong consensus among faculty members that financial worries significantly distract them from their work. The standard deviation suggests that responses are relatively consistent, reinforcing the widespread nature of this concern.

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, financial insecurity directly impacts an individual's ability to focus on higher-level needs, such as self-actualization and job performance. When faculty members are preoccupied with financial issues, it can detract from their engagement and effectiveness in teaching and research. This finding underscores the importance of addressing financial concerns to support faculty members' professional responsibilities and overall job satisfaction.

One interview respondent noted,

> *Financial worries interfere with my ability to fulfill my occupational obligations. My attention during lectures and research tasks shifts repeatedly to the worry about handling my bills and expenditures. Work-related tension works against both my occupational performance and my love for educational instruction.*

The interviewee's acknowledgment of the impact of financial worries on their professional focus highlights a significant challenge faced by faculty members. This sentiment is consistent with Maslow's theory, emphasizing that unmet physiological needs can lead to distractions that hinder professional fulfillment. Addressing financial concerns is essential for creating a supportive environment where faculty can fully engage in their responsibilities and thrive in their roles.

High Living Costs Reduce Participation in Extracurricular Activities

The finding in Table 3, Item 3, *"High living costs lead me to reduce my involvement in extracurricular academic activities,"* shows a mean score of 4.69 with a standard deviation of 0.95. This high mean indicates that many faculty members feel compelled to limit their participation in extracurricular academic activities due to the pressures of rising living costs. The standard deviation suggests some variability in responses, but the overall trend points to a significant concern regarding financial constraints.

In the context of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, the stress of high living costs can detract from individuals' ability to engage in activities that fulfill higher-level needs, such as belongingness and esteem. When faculty members prioritize financial stability, they may feel unable to participate in academic activities that enhance collaboration, networking, and professional growth. This finding highlights the importance of addressing financial pressures to encourage broader involvement in academic life.

One interview respondent shared,

> *The high price of living forces me to reduce participation in all academic extracurricular activities. I used to go to workshops and conferences until I started passing on them since it became too costly to participate in them. The high expenses create a sense of separation between me and both my academic colleagues and my academic discipline.*

The interviewee's experience underscores the impact of financial constraints on faculty engagement in academic activities, revealing a sense of loss in professional connection and growth. This sentiment aligns with Maslow's theory, suggesting that unmet financial needs can hinder participation in fulfilling and enriching experiences. Addressing the challenges of high living costs is crucial for fostering an environment that promotes faculty engagement and professional development.

Financial Burden Affects Classroom Effectiveness

The finding in Table 3, Item 4, *"I feel that the financial burden of living expenses impacts my effectiveness in the classroom,"* shows a mean score of 4.81 with a standard deviation of 0.78. This high mean indicates a strong agreement among faculty members that financial pressures significantly affect their teaching effectiveness. The relatively low standard deviation suggests a consistent sentiment across respondents regarding this issue.

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, financial burdens can impede an individual's ability to focus on higher-level needs, such as self-actualization and performance. When faculty members are preoccupied with financial difficulties, it can detract from their ability to fully engage with students and deliver high-quality instruction. This finding underscores the critical need for institutions to support faculty in managing financial burdens to enhance educational outcomes.

One interview respondent remarked,

> *My stressful financial situation with living expenses makes it harder for me to deliver my best teaching performance to my students. My concern about finances creates obstacles that prevent me from offering appropriate care to my students. The distraction in my thinking interferes with my performance as a teacher so I assume it affects my teaching methods.*

The interviewee's acknowledgment of the impact of financial stress on their teaching effectiveness highlights a significant challenge faced by faculty members. This sentiment is consistent with Maslow's theory, indicating that unmet physiological needs can lead to distractions that hinder professional performance. Addressing financial concerns is essential for creating a conducive environment where faculty can focus on their teaching responsibilities and enhance student learning outcomes.

Rising Living Costs Hinder Collaboration on Research Projects

The finding in Table 3, Item 5, *"The rising cost of living affects my ability to collaborate with colleagues on research projects,"* shows a mean score of 4.71 with a standard deviation of 0.99. This high mean indicates that a significant number of faculty members feel that financial pressures related to the rising cost of living hinder their ability to engage in collaborative research. The standard deviation suggests some variability in responses, but the overall trend points to a widespread concern.

In the context of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, the inability to collaborate effectively can be linked to unmet social and esteem needs. When faculty members face financial constraints, they may be less able to participate in collaborative opportunities that require travel, funding for materials, or time away from other paid responsibilities. This finding highlights the necessity of addressing financial challenges to foster a collaborative academic environment.

One interview respondent stated,

> *The increasing living expenses make it harder for me to work jointly with colleagues on academic investigations. The increasing expenses force me to decline various professional engagement opportunities. This situation creates feelings of loneliness which concerns me about professional opportunities and scientific progress.*

The interviewee's experience emphasizes the detrimental impact of financial pressures on collaborative efforts, which are essential for professional growth and innovation. This sentiment aligns with Maslow's theory, illustrating how unmet financial needs can hinder professional engagement and development. Addressing the financial barriers created by the rising cost of living is crucial for promoting collaboration and advancing research within the academic community.

Rising Living Costs May Prompt Job Search Elsewhere

The finding in Table 3, Item 6, "If living costs continue to increase, I am likely to look for job opportunities outside my current institution," shows a mean score of 4.66 with a standard deviation of 0.67. This high mean indicates that many faculty members are considering seeking employment elsewhere if living costs continue to rise. The relatively low standard deviation suggests a consistent concern among respondents regarding this issue.

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, the pressure of rising living costs can lead individuals to reassess their job satisfaction and seek opportunities that better meet their financial needs. When faculty members feel that their current institution cannot support their basic financial requirements, they may feel compelled to explore alternatives that offer better compensation or benefits. This finding underscores the urgency for institutions to address financial concerns to retain talent and stability within their work force.

One interview respondent expressed,

> *The increasing cost of living will make me pursue employment opportunities away from my present institution. I adore my employment together with my coworkers yet financial stability requires my attention. The better job opportunities I discover might force me to leave the current position.*

The interviewee's consideration of leaving due to financial pressures highlights a significant challenge faced by faculty members. This sentiment is consistent with Maslow's theory, suggesting that unmet financial needs can drive individuals to seek more secure and fulfilling employment. Addressing the challenges posed by rising living costs is essential for fostering loyalty and commitment among faculty members, ensuring that they feel valued and supported in their roles.

DISCUSSION

This study highlights the critical impact of financial stress on the health, job satisfaction, and work performance of faculty members at Ethiopian universities. The findings provide a comprehensive understanding of these implications for academic institutions and their teaching staff in Ethiopia.

The average response score of 4.64 indicates that faculty members perceive significant issues regarding their insufficient pay. Gonzales-Macedo et al. (2023) support the notion that faculty satisfaction is directly linked to their evaluations of salary adequacy. Ethiopian faculty report reduced job satisfaction, believing their salaries do not reflect their contributions and responsibilities, exacerbated by the country's economic conditions. The finding of an average score of 4.77 underscores dissatisfaction with wage distributions, aligning with Tesfaye et al. (2021), who note that professors in developing nations, including Ethiopia, often view their earnings as inadequate relative to their professional duties.

Moreover, the data reveal that 4.76 mean value of teaching personnel experience stress due to their salaries being insufficient to cover basic living costs. The rising inflation and escalating living expenses contribute significantly to this financial strain. A mean score of 4.82 indicates that faculty members frequently worry about their financial situations to the extent that it distracts them from their work responsibilities. This aligns with research by Sultana et al. (2024) which demonstrates that financial stress diminishes performance quality and can lead to professional burnout.

The findings also indicate that many educators struggle to maintain a work-life balance due to increasing living costs, reflected in a study result score of 4.77. This aligns with Vavasseur's (2024) financial analysis, which finds that faculty work-life conflict arises as educators allocate personal time to address financial concerns. High living expenses compel faculty to reduce their

involvement in extracurricular academic activities, as shown by a total score of 4.69. Financial limitations deter lecturers from participating in professional development programs, networking activities, and collaborative research, hindering their engagement with the academic community and obstructing their professional growth.

Given these insights, it is imperative for Ethiopian universities to implement proactive solutions aimed at salary adjustments and improvements in the cost of living. The data suggest that enhancing faculty satisfaction, commitment, and performance effectiveness hinges on addressing financial well-being. Institutions should prioritize strategies that improve faculty conditions, recognizing that financial stability supports academic productivity.

In summary, the findings from this research underscore the urgent need for Ethiopian universities to address financial challenges facing faculty members. By implementing these recommendations, institutions can create a more supportive environment that enhances faculty satisfaction and ultimately improves the quality of education delivered to students.

CONCLUSION

This research conducted an all-encompassing study of variables that influence faculty member job satisfaction and well-being together with professional effectiveness at Ethiopian universities. The research data demonstrate the extensive influence of inadequate wages and growing daily expenditures on university teaching staff who require immediate attention from their institutions.

Financial problems show high levels of consensus among faculty, so they become a widespread problem that affects both their workplace satisfaction and mental state as well as their ability to teach and conduct research. Research data prove that faculty compensation fails to match their work value while creating financial pressure to pay bills which requires urgent action.

The research showed that financial pressures create adverse effects on both faculty work-life balance and collaboration which stands as vital for maintaining an active academic organization. Ethiopian education faces a substantial danger to its stability together with educational quality because of faculty turnover potentially created by financial stressors.

University management teams together with policymakers need to establish faculty support and compensation systems due to this recent data. The enhancement of faculty satisfaction and retention requires employments strategies including competitive salary changes and financial help schemes and cost-of-living reduction programs.

By tackling these monetary issues schools will simultaneously improve educator working environments and enhance education standards in Ethiopia. Future research must monitor the lasting effects of financial burdens on academic staff wellbeing together with institutional performance since this data will help Ethiopian universities conserve their best teaching personnel.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

The outcome of this research reveals the essential requirement for educational planning to tackle financial hardships among faculty members so universities can enhance teaching quality and research activities. A thorough assessment of faculty pay systems should occur to verify their competitive standing against living expenses whereas incentive programs must be launched to celebrate faculty achievements in different fields of academia and financial assistance programs need to be established to support faculty financial balance. The successful retention of faculty depends on additional funds allocated for professional development programs and workplace balance support and the development of retention-oriented strategies. Persistent investigations into faculty financial

wellbeing should lead to educational planning efforts because they help develop policies that adapt to academic sector developments. These combined approaches seek to produce better satisfaction and involvement among faculty members who will subsequently enhance educational standards and preserve institutional stability across Ethiopian institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Revising Faculty Compensation Structures

Universities should conduct a comprehensive review of faculty compensation packages to ensure they are competitive with local living costs. This review should include adjustments to salaries and benefits to better reflect the value of faculty contributions.

2. Implementing Financial Assistance Programs

Establish financial assistance programs that provide support for faculty members facing economic challenges. This could include cost-of-living allowances, emergency funds, or low-interest loans to help faculty manage their financial burdens effectively.

3. Enhancing Professional Development Opportunities

Allocate additional funding for professional development programs that support faculty growth. These programs should focus on enhancing teaching skills, research capabilities, and leadership training to foster a more engaged and competent academic staff.

4. Promoting Work-Life Balance Initiatives

Develop and promote initiatives that support work-life balance for faculty members. This could involve flexible work arrangements, mental health resources, and community-building activities that foster collaboration and reduce isolation among faculty.

5. Conducting Ongoing Research on Faculty Wellbeing

Encourage continuous research into the financial wellbeing and job satisfaction of faculty members. This data should inform educational planning and policy development, ensuring that institutions can adapt to the evolving needs of faculty and maintain high educational standards.

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