

Parallel Professions: The Tightrope of Academic Moonlighting

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Abstract

Moonlighting, defined as the pursuit of secondary employment alongside primary academic responsibilities, has emerged as a prevalent phenomenon in higher education globally, shaped by economic pressures, institutional conditions, and evolving labour market dynamics. This review synthesizes empirical and theoretical research to examine the multifaceted implications of moonlighting on academic job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and professional performance. Studies conducted in diverse contexts indicate that moonlighting is driven by factors such as inadequate compensation, blocked promotion, financial necessity, and the pursuit of skill diversification, and these factors are significantly related to variations in job satisfaction among academic staff. Moreover, evidence suggests that job satisfaction inversely correlates with intentions to moonlight.

Keywords: Moonlighting, Academics, Job Satisfaction, Full Moonlighting, Half Moonlighting, Quarter Moonlighting, Blue Moonlighting.

INTRODUCTION

Moonlighting among academics refers to dual job holding, holding a secondary job along with a primary one (Ara & Akbar, 2016). The Primary job among academics usually involves academic lectures, research work, student doubt-clearing sessions, and correcting papers: these are predominantly academic in nature. Whereas, the secondary job may be academic (research work, tutoring, counselling, etc.) or non-academic (business holding, agricultural activities, etc.). The reasons behind moonlighting may vary person to person. Moonlighting is substantially performed due to pecuniary reasons like inadequate pay, insecure contracts that lead to job insecurity, and a stagnant career (Prasad et al., 2024; Wahyuningsih, D. et al., 2025). Apart from these, moonlighting is also performed by academics for career enhancement, enrichment of skills, and pursuing a passion. The above cases of moonlighting can impact an academic both positively and negatively.

The constructive influence of moonlighting among academics can be recognised in surplus pay, diminished anxiety of job loss, and the skill diversity gained through a secondary job. The detrimental impact of moonlighting can be identified in burnout, increased stress levels, low work-life balance, diminished focus on work, and conflict of interest in the organisation (Seema and Sachdeva, 2020; Wahyuningsih, D., et al., 2025). In academic settings, moonlighting is a multifaceted phenomenon: it can enhance financial standing, professional development, and job enrichment for individual academics, but it also poses substantial risks to health, primary job performance, ethical integrity, and work-life balance. The balance of these pros and cons is often shaped by institutional policies, compensation structures,

workload norms, and individual motivations. Mitigating negative effects typically requires thoughtful policy frameworks, transparency requirements, and supportive work environments that align secondary employment with institutional goals and academic well-being.

Types of Moonlighting

Moonlighting among academics manifests in diverse forms, each characterized by varying degrees of overlap with primary institutional responsibilities. These types reflect the multifaceted nature of supplementary professional engagements, ranging from formal consultancies to informal pursuits. Understanding the four typologies of moonlighting is essential (Tiwari, 2020; Sheth and Bhatt, 2024) for analyzing its implications on job satisfaction and work-life balance in higher education.

Full Moonlighting

Full moonlighting among academics denotes a substantial secondary employment commitment that rivals the temporal and cognitive demands of the primary institutional role, often encompassing parallel teaching positions, administrative consultancies, or entrepreneurial ventures requiring 20+ hours weekly. This form typically emerges from acute financial exigencies or career diversification imperatives, yet it precipitates pronounced role conflict, evidenced by diminished research productivity and elevated burnout incidence. Empirical inquiries reveal that full moonlighters exhibit reductions in publication outputs, attributable to fragmented attentional resources and eroded work-life equilibrium. Institutionally, such practices strain departmental workloads, compromising pedagogical continuity. While academics posit ancillary skill acquisition—such as industry acumen enhancing classroom relevance—the predominant literature underscores deleterious ramifications, including ethical breaches via undisclosed affiliations and compromised institutional loyalty. Mitigation necessitates rigorous disclosure mandates and compensatory workload recalibrations to forestall systemic attrition. Ultimately, full moonlighting symbolizes deeper remuneration inadequacies within academia, warranting policy interventions that equate economic viability with scholarly imperatives.

Half Moonlighting

Half moonlighting constitutes moderate supplementary engagements approximating 10-15 hours weekly, such as part-time corporate lecturing, editorial board participations, or grant-writing consultancies that partially overlap with primary duties. This typology balances supplemental income generation—often augmenting salaries—against manageable interference with core obligations like curriculum development and student mentoring. Studies indicate ambivalent outcomes: enhanced professional networks and pedagogical innovation from external exposures, juxtaposed against moderate fatigue elevations and sporadic attendance lapses. Unlike full moonlighting, half moonlighting infrequently triggers institutional sanctions when transparently documented, fostering symbiotic employer-employee dynamics via negotiated approvals. However, undetected instances correlate with subtle erosions in collegial trust and service contributions, particularly in research-intensive milieus where collaborative synergies falter. Gender-disaggregated analyses reveal disproportionate female participation, linked to familial financial pressures, underscoring equity considerations in policy formulation. Strategic half moonlighting thus merits endorsement through formalized guidelines that harness diversification benefits while safeguarding academic primacy, potentially via sabbatical integrations or incentive structures.

Quarter Moonlighting

Quarter moonlighting embodies minimal supplemental activities confined to under 10 hours weekly, typified by occasional workshops, freelance manuscript reviews, or pro bono advisory roles that minimally encroach upon primary commitments. Predominantly voluntary and skill-oriented, this form yields negligible productivity detriments—often boosting job satisfaction via intellectual stimulation and modest financial uplifts, without precipitating burnout or output declines. Literature posits quarter moonlighters as exemplars of judicious opportunism, wherein peripheral engagements refine teaching efficacy and research applicability without role strain. Institutional tolerance prevails for such low-intensity pursuits, especially when aligned with public dissemination mandates or community outreach imperatives. Cross-contextual evidence from developing economies highlights quarter moonlighting's role in bridging salary gaps without ethical quandaries, advocating permissive frameworks that incentivize disclosure over prohibition. This modality thus exemplifies sustainable supplementary practice, meriting scholarly endorsement as a normative adaptation to fiscal realities.

Blue Moonlighting

Blue moonlighting signifies employer-sanctioned secondary employment, explicitly approved during performance appraisals or contractual stipulations, distinguishing it as a regulated variant often limited to expertise-congruent activities like industry consultations or policy advisories. This formalized paradigm mitigates conflict-of-interest hazards, with job satisfaction gains from legitimized diversification and augmented remuneration without covert ethical lapses. Empirical validations demonstrate preserved or enhanced primary outputs, as institutional oversight ensures temporal boundaries—typically capping at 5-8 hours weekly—while leveraging external insights for enriched curricula and grant successes. Critiques highlight administrative burdens, yet aggregate benefits—including institutional prestige via alumni networks—outweigh drawbacks when transparently governed. Policymakers are thus encouraged to institutionalize blue protocols universally, integrating evaluative metrics to optimize mutual gains and preempt unauthorized escalations. Blue moonlighting exemplifies adaptive governance, reconciling economic imperatives with academic integrity.

Review of Literature

Wahyuningsih, D., et al. (2025) examined the work-life balance, job satisfaction, and academics' intention to moonlight. Herzberg's two-factor theory is used to study the job satisfaction of academics in relation to moonlighting. Academics are pressurised to pursue moonlighting due to financial constraints, career discontentment, and lack of recognition being the key drivers. It suggests that universities offer career progression pathways, competitive remuneration, and facilitative institutional frameworks for work-life equilibrium. Institutions must cultivate avenues for career enhancement, surplus income, and stability of tenure for the betterment of academics.

Mkuni, M. & Murisi, R. (2025) have examined synthesizing various studies on moonlighting and job satisfaction, highlighting the complexity of secondary employment among academics, arguing that moonlighting is driven by economic pressure, institutional conditions, and professional autonomy. This analysis suggests that moonlighting's effects on job satisfaction are multidimensional, with potential benefits (e.g., income supplementation) and drawbacks (e.g., role conflict) that vary by context. Such scholarship emphasizes that institutional policies and academic work conditions critically shape how moonlighting relates to satisfaction and primary job performance.

Ufomba et al. (2025) investigate moonlighting's effects on academic performance in five South-East Nigerian state universities, using Spearman's correlation on data from 312 surveyed staff. Results indicate robust positive associations: part-time teaching with student classroom results ($r=0.836$, $p<0.001$) and research evaluation with career progression ($r=0.864$, $p<0.001$), driven by financial support and skill enhancement, though attention fragmentation poses risks. Anchored in expectancy theory, the paper advocates enhanced pay, research funding, and balanced regulations to maximize gains and minimize drawbacks, repositioning moonlighting as a strength.

Menghani (2024) utilizes factor analysis of responses from teachers in Mumbai's unaided colleges to understand moonlighting drivers, identifying key demographics: academics predominantly aged 30-49, and the major population earning below Rs. 50,000 monthly. Dominant motivators encompass supplementary income network broadening, especially among seniors, skill enhancement, and economic stability, alongside juniors' emphasis on lifestyle improvements and seniors' entrepreneurial ambitions. These are connected to dissatisfaction, highlighting retention challenges under financial strain.

Sheth and Bhatt (2024) conducted a detailed examination of moonlighting incidents among academics in higher education institutions in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, India. They identified pecuniary reasons—predominantly paucity of income and unbearable financial burdens— as the major catalyst for academics pursuing moonlighting activities apart from their primary academic job. Moonlighting exacted discernible consequences on core academic responsibilities, frequently compromising instructional efficacy and scholarly output, while concurrently undermining personal well-being and integrative work-life dynamics. There is a pertinent requirement for holistic policy frameworks attuned to the multifaceted nature of moonlighting in academia. Such measures must reconcile institutional imperatives with faculty exigencies to enhance performance and welfare optimally.

Prasad, K. D. V., et al. (2024) say that cross-disciplinary studies within higher education contexts suggest that job satisfaction moderates the relationship between organizational commitment and intentions to moonlight, implying that satisfied academics are less likely to engage in secondary employment. This complements evidence that satisfaction influences not just current roles, but decisions about additional work, with implications for institutional policy and retention strategies.

Sai Manogna & Swamy (2024) synthesized moonlighting drivers among Indian professionals, foregrounding job satisfaction alongside financial exigencies and experiential diversity. Academics, facing stagnant stipends, leverage secondary engagements for fulfillment, with 60% reporting sustained satisfaction despite HR apprehensions. Moderate positive linkages affirm moonlighting's role in holistic employment appraisal, potentially via skill accrual and autonomy. The exposition cautions against overgeneralization, noting cultural moderators in South Asian academia where familial imperatives amplify economic thrusts. Policy corollaries urge supportive ecosystems permitting vetted external roles to harness ancillary gains.

Priya (2023) scrutinized job satisfaction's mediating sway on moonlighting intentions among IT-analogous professionals, extensible to academics. Low satisfaction vis-à-vis pay and growth catalyzes intentions, moderated by organizational commitment. The model posits moonlighting as disengagement symptomology, eroding primary loyalty sans financial buffers. Academic extrapolations highlight parallel vulnerabilities in tenure-insecure faculty, where satisfaction deficits precipitate external diversions. Interventions hinge on fulfillment-centric reforms—pay equity, developmental rotations—to staunch intention flows, preserving institutional human capital.

Adelugba, I. A., (2020), in the comparative study of academic staff and medical practitioners in Southwest

Nigeria, documents moonlighting's cumulative effects on job satisfaction, commitment, and retention. The mixed-methods research highlights that moonlighting frequently accompanies poor primary job performance, absenteeism, and fatigue, ultimately affecting academics' satisfaction and engagement. It emphasizes that, alongside economic drivers, institutional support and regulatory frameworks influence how secondary employment intersects with academics' satisfaction and dedication to their core roles.

Amini-Philips, C. (2019) says lecturers' moonlighting activities in Nigerian universities highlight both positive gains, such as monetary income and knowledge sharing, and negative consequences like heavier workload that can reduce wellbeing and job satisfaction. These dual consequences emphasize that moonlighting's impact on academics is multifaceted; while it can enrich experience and financial stability, excessive secondary work may stress lecturers and erode satisfaction with their principal roles.

Ara, K., & Akbar, A. (2016) have systematically synthesised the relation between moonlighting among academics and job satisfaction. The academics included were Assistant Professors, Associate Professors, and Professors of various universities in Punjab, Pakistan. The data taken from 533 academics on the impact of moonlighting on four aspects of job satisfaction- additional income, blocked promotion, skill diversity, and job autonomy reveals a significant impact of moonlighting on the job satisfaction of academics.

Al-Omari (2008) illuminated autonomy's salience in Jordanian faculty retention, where equitable rewards and negotiated workloads engender satisfaction surges. Moonlighting substitutes for absent freedoms, affording professional latitude. Supportive supervision fosters ownership, mitigating secondary drifts. Policy mandates open autonomy climates to sustain motivation sans external palliatives.

Objective

1. To systematically synthesize empirical evidence from 2005 to 2025 on the relationship between moonlighting practices among academics and their job satisfaction levels.

Research Methodology

This review adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to examine moonlighting's impact on academics' job satisfaction, targeting peer-reviewed articles published between 2005 and 2025. Inclusion criteria encompassed empirical studies focusing on academic professionals (e.g., university teachers, lecturers), explicitly linking moonlighting—defined per Ara (2016) as secondary income-generating activities—to validated job satisfaction constructs. Sources were identified through academic databases such as ERIC, Semantic Scholar, and Google Scholar using keywords including "moonlighting, academics, job satisfaction," "faculty, secondary employment, satisfaction," and "university teachers moonlighting impact," yielding the core studies after screening for relevance and methodological rigor.

Conclusion

In summary, the review of moonlighting practices among academics reveals a complex interplay of financial pressures, skill enhancement opportunities, and institutional challenges that shape job satisfaction and performance across teaching, research, and service domains. While moonlighting often addresses economic deficiencies and fosters professional diversification, it frequently leads to temporal overload, psychological exhaustion, and diminished primary job commitment, thereby undermining academic productivity and institutional efficacy. Moonlighting emerges not as an inherent detriment but as a symptom of systematic inadequacies in higher education remuneration and support structures, with

evidence indicating varied impacts contingent on regulatory oversight and individual resilience. Institutions must prioritize transparent policies that balance punitive measures with incentives for workload management to harness potential benefits in the domain of higher education while ensuring good quality of lectures and organisational commitments.

Future Directions

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to disentangle causal pathways between moonlighting, job satisfaction variables (such as work-life balance and security), and measurable outcomes like publication rates, integrating cross-cultural perspectives from emerging economies. Policymakers are urged to develop adaptive frameworks that promote ethical moonlighting guidelines, ensuring sustained academic excellence amid evolving labor dynamics.

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