



Exploring The Effect of Economic Recession on Employment Rights and Protections in The Public Sector

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the effect of economic recessions on job security and employment rights of public sector employees, with specific focus on government schools in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. Economic recessions triggered by events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, financial crises, inflation, and banking sector instability have disrupted labour markets globally. While public sector employment is often perceived as relatively secure, recurring economic shocks raise concerns about the extent to which job security and employment rights are preserved during downturns. Empirical evidence on these dynamics within the Ghanaian public sector remains limited. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. Data was collected using questionnaires administered to public sector employees and interview guides used with human resource managers. Quantitative data was analysed using IBM SPSS, while qualitative data was analysed thematically. The findings indicate that public sector employees have been affected by economic recessionary conditions, including the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, government debt exchange programmes, bank collapses, and personal financial instability. These conditions resulted in changes in salaries and benefits, reduced job stability, and downsizing. However, statistical analysis revealed a very weak and insignificant relationship between economic recession and job security and employment rights ($r = 0.042$, $p = 0.466$). Employees adopted coping strategies such as savings, part-time work, social support, and skills development. The study recommends strengthening collective bargaining mechanisms, enhancing social protection policies, and promoting flexible work arrangements to better safeguard employment rights during economic downturns.

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Economic recessions represent critical phases in the global economic cycle, with far-reaching consequences for employment and labour markets (Guerra & Eboreime, 2021). During such periods, rising unemployment, job insecurity, wage instability, and deteriorating mental health outcomes become widespread, disproportionately affecting vulnerable workers (Ozili, 2021; Benmelech, Frydman, & Papanikolaou, 2019). Recessions alter the economic landscape by constraining public and private resources, thereby intensifying pressures on employment systems (Felipe & Estrada, 2020). As organizations adjust to declining revenues, employment rights and protections often come under strain. This makes recessions a crucial context for examining how workers' rights are upheld or weakened. Employment therefore emerges as one of the most sensitive domains during economic downturns. Understanding these dynamics is essential for assessing labour market resilience.

Economic recessions are typically characterized by sustained contractions in Gross Domestic Product, rising unemployment, reduced investment, and heightened financial volatility (Guerra & Eboreime, 2021). These conditions result in reduced consumer spending and a slowdown in overall economic activity. Historical experiences such as the 2008–2009 Global Financial Crisis and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic recession illustrate the depth and speed with which economic shocks can disrupt employment structures (Felipe & Estrada, 2020; Padhan & Prabheesh, 2021). Governments often respond with fiscal and monetary interventions

to stabilize economies. However, such measures are frequently accompanied by austerity, restructuring, and workforce adjustments. These responses have direct implications for employment conditions, particularly in the public sector.

Employment rights and protections play a vital role during periods of economic recession, serving as safeguards against excessive worker vulnerability (Colovic et al., 2019). These rights include job security, fair wages, safe working conditions, and collective bargaining, all of which contribute to worker dignity and social stability (Alam et al., 2020). During recessions, the erosion of these protections can exacerbate inequality and social insecurity. Strong employment rights frameworks also guide institutions in implementing necessary adjustments in a transparent and equitable manner. In the public sector, where employment is closely linked to fiscal capacity, these protections are especially critical. Examining their status during economic recessions is therefore essential for informed policy and labour governance.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Existing research on the effects of economic recessions on employment rights has largely focused on the private sector, with limited empirical attention given to the public sector (Larsen & Navrbjerg, 2015; Fahmi et al., 2025). Although economic downturns are known to trigger budgetary constraints and institutional restructuring, their specific implications for public sector employment rights and protections remain insufficiently examined. This gap is problematic because public sector employment is governed by distinct institutional arrangements. Civil service regulations, collective bargaining systems, and government employment policies differentiate public sector work from private sector employment (Amankwaah, 2023; Ahsany et al., 2020). These differences shape how employment rights respond to economic stress. A limited understanding of this interaction constrains effective policy formulation.

The public sector plays a critical role in delivering essential services and sustaining social stability, particularly during periods of economic crisis (Pepra-Mensah & Kyeremeh, 2019). Any erosion of employment rights in this sector can therefore have consequences beyond individual workers. Job security, working conditions, and labour protections directly influence employee morale and service delivery. Despite this importance, empirical evidence on how recessions affect public sector employment rights in Ghana remains sparse. This limits policymakers' ability to balance fiscal discipline with workforce protection during downturns. Addressing this gap is essential for maintaining institutional resilience.

Additionally, existing studies exhibit a strong geographical bias toward Europe and North America (Verd, Barranco, & Bolíbar, 2019; Farber, 2015; Fedotenkov, Kvedaras, & Sanchez-Martinez, 2024). Differences in legal frameworks, labour policies, and governance systems across countries shape the resilience of public sector employment rights during recessions. These contextual variations remain underexplored in comparative research. A broader perspective is required to identify best practices and contextual influences. Given the global interconnectedness of economies, cross-regional analysis is increasingly necessary. This study therefore seeks to bridge these gaps by examining the effect of economic recession on public sector employment rights across diverse contexts.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- I. To assess the impact of economic recession on the job security and employment rights of public sector employees.
- II. To examine the coping strategies of public sector employees during economic recessions in maintaining their employment rights and protections.
- III. To explore the challenges and responsibilities faced by public sector employers in upholding employment rights and protections for their workforce during economic recessions.
- IV. To identify the strategies and initiatives undertaken by public sector employers to safeguard employee rights and protections during economic recessions.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- I. How does economic recession affect the job security and employment rights of public sector employees?
- II. What strategies do public sector employees employ to safeguard their employment rights and protections during economic recessions?
- III. What challenges do public sector employers encounter in ensuring the preservation of employment rights and protections for their employees during economic recessions?
- IV. What strategies and initiatives do public sector employers in Ghana employ to protect and uphold employee rights and protections during economic recessions, and how do they evaluate their effectiveness?

2.1 THEORETICAL REVIEW/ FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in Labour Process Theory (LPT), which examines how work is organized, controlled, and contested within employment relationships. LPT emphasizes the power dynamics between employers and employees, focusing on how managerial strategies are used to regulate labour in pursuit of efficiency and cost reduction. Central to the theory is the assumption that employment relations are inherently conflictual, as employers seek to maximize productivity while workers pursue job security, fair

wages, and acceptable working conditions (Thompson & Newsome, 2004; Omidi et al., 2023). This perspective is particularly relevant in periods of economic recession, when pressures to cut costs intensify managerial control over labour.

A key concept within LPT is deskilling and managerial control, where work tasks are simplified and standardized to reduce worker autonomy and increase oversight (Majeed, 2021; Liang, 2021). Such processes enable employers to maintain output with fewer resources, but often at the expense of employee satisfaction and rights. LPT also highlights the labour process itself-comprising work activities, objects of work, and tools of production-as a site where economic pressures reshape working conditions and performance expectations (Briken et al., 2017). Additionally, the theory draws attention to surplus value and exploitation, explaining how organizations may extract increased effort from workers without proportional compensation, a dynamic that can extend to the public sector through heavier workloads during fiscal constraints (Jaros, 2000).

Applied to this study, LPT provides a useful lens for understanding how economic recessions affect employment rights and protections in the public sector. The theory helps explain how austerity measures, budget cuts, and restructuring heighten employer-employee tensions, increase managerial control, and weaken job security. LPT also accounts for worker resistance, including protests and collective action, as responses to perceived erosion of rights (Majeed, 2021). Overall, the framework enables a critical analysis of how recession-driven control strategies influence employment conditions, worker autonomy, and the protection of labour rights in the public sector.

2.2 EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Empirical evidence consistently shows that economic recessions adversely affect job security, working conditions, and employment rights. Studies from Europe demonstrate that recessions are associated with increased job insecurity, work stress, and unfavorable psychosocial conditions. For example, Russell and McGinnity (2014) found that Ireland's recession led to heightened work pressure due to staff reductions, restructuring, and intensified monitoring. Similarly, Torá et al. (2015) reported increased job insecurity and physical demands among workers during Spain's economic crisis. Gender and age dimensions further complicate these outcomes, as Ficapal-Cusi et al. (2018) and Axelrad et al. (2018) showed that women and older workers experienced greater deterioration in job quality, reduced advancement opportunities, and weakened employment protections during recessions. Evidence from the COVID-19 period also confirms that downturns trigger pay cuts, loss of benefits, and layoffs, disproportionately affecting lower-level and vulnerable workers (Agarwal, 2021).

Research indicates that employees adopt both individual and institutional coping strategies to maintain employment rights during recessions. Tu, Li, and Wang (2021) showed that layoffs increased stress and reduced performance among remaining workers, although family support helped mitigate these effects. In the public sector, Kim et al. (2024) found that increased workloads during the COVID-19 pandemic were partly offset by flexible work arrangements and resilience-enhancing HRM practices, which reduced turnover intentions. However, unequal access to occupational health support and flexible arrangements limited the effectiveness of these strategies, particularly for employees facing heavy workloads.

From the employer perspective, recessions create tensions between cost containment and the protection of employee rights. Ogbonnaya et al. (2022) demonstrated that cost-cutting measures weaken trust and employee-management relations, leading to increased workplace grievances. Johnstone (2024) further highlighted that employers adopt varied HR strategies during recessions, shaped by organizational culture, resources, and managerial philosophy. Some organizations mitigate negative impacts by investing in training, flexible work systems, and employee support initiatives, which improve wellbeing and resilience. Overall, the literature suggests that while recessions strain employment rights, proactive and inclusive management strategies can moderate their negative effects.

2.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 below for this study delineates the interrelatedness between economic recession, job security, and employment rights during economic downturns in the public sector. Economic recession stands as the independent variable, acting as the catalyst for changes in both job security and employment rights within the public sector. Job security and employment rights serve as dependent variables, directly influenced by the economic recession. The arrow from economic recession to job security illustrates the impact of economic downturns on the stability of employment within the public sector. Similarly, the arrow from economic recession to employment rights signifies the effect of economic downturns on the legal and contractual protections afforded to public sector employees. This framework elucidates the complex relationships between economic conditions, employment dynamics, and the rights and protections of public sector employees during times of recession.

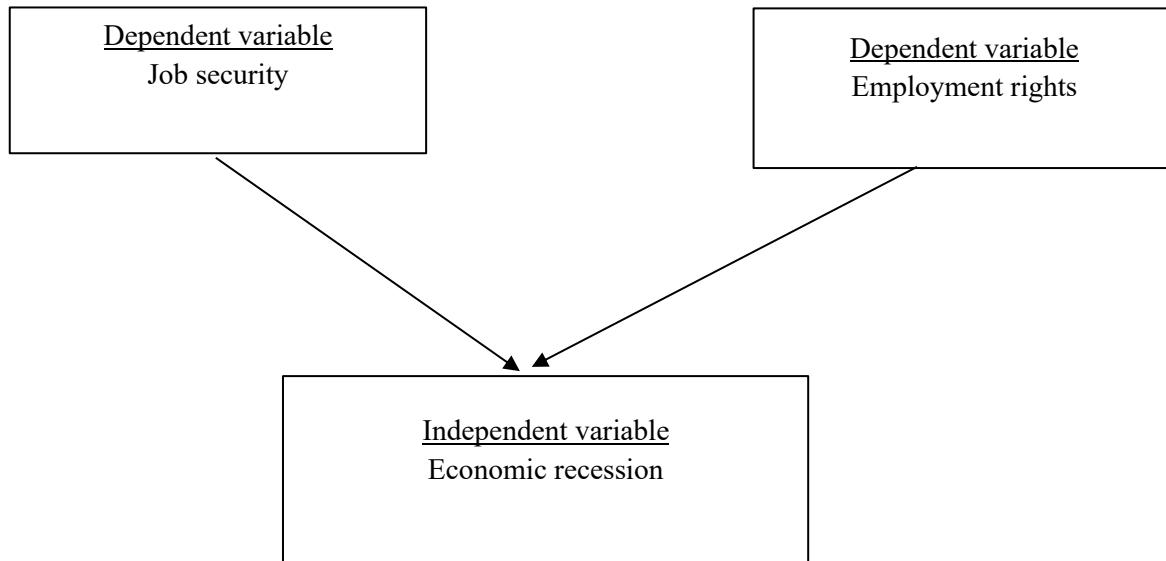


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

3.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Design

The study adopted a mixed research approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the effect of economic recession on employment rights and protections in the public sector. An explanatory sequential research design was employed, in which quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data to explain and contextualize the quantitative results.

Study Area and Population

The study was conducted within the public sector in Ghana. The study population comprised public sector employees and human resource managers. Public sector employees provided insights into the direct effects of economic recession on job security and employment rights, while human resource managers offered institutional perspectives on policy implementation and organizational responses during economic downturns.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A total of 300 public sector employees participated in the quantitative phase, while 8 human resource managers were selected for the qualitative phase. Convenience sampling was used to select employees due to accessibility and feasibility during economic constraints, while purposive sampling was employed to select human resource managers based on their expertise and decision-making roles.

Data Collection Instruments

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of close-ended items designed to assess job security, employment rights, and perceptions of economic recession. Qualitative data were gathered through a semi-structured interview guide, which facilitated in-depth exploration of employer challenges, employee coping strategies, and institutional responses.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS, employing descriptive statistics as well as inferential techniques such as correlation and regression analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving systematic coding, theme development, and interpretation to identify recurring patterns and explanatory insights.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and participants' privacy and right to withdraw from the study were fully respected.

4.1 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1.1 Demographic data

The demographic data from Table 1 showcases a sample size of 300 respondents, with a fairly balanced representation across gender, with 58.3% female and 41.7% male. In terms of age distribution, the majority fall within the 32-38 age bracket, comprising 27.67% of the sample, followed closely by the 39-45 age group at 32%. A total of 12.33% of respondents fall within the 25-31 age group, whereas 28% are 46 years and above. Moving on to educational qualifications, the data reveals a diverse range, with 20% holding diplomas, 45.67% having bachelor's degrees, and 34.33% possessing master's degrees.

Table 1: Demographic data

Demographic	Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	175	58.3
	Male	125	41.7
Age	25-31	37	12.33
	32-38	83	27.67
	39-45	96	32
	>46	84	28
Educational Qualification	Diploma	60	20
	Bachelor's Degree	137	45.67
	Master's Degree	103	34.33
Total		300	100%

4.1.2 The impact of economic recession on the job security and employment rights of public sector employees

This is the first objective and it focused on employees and economic recession impacts their job security and employment rights. The first section dealt with the kinds of economic recessions employees have encountered.

The data presented in the Table 2 illustrates the various facets of economic recession experienced by employees, shedding light on their perceptions regarding different factors and their impacts. The foremost concern highlighted is the substantial effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment and finances, indicated by a mean score of 3.4 and a standard deviation of 1.1. This is closely followed by the perceived impact of high levels of inflation on the cost of living, with a mean score of 3.3 and a standard deviation of 1.2. Additionally, employees express significant apprehensions about the consequences of government debt restructuring programs, bank collapses, and personal financial instability, as reflected by mean scores ranging from 3.3 to 3.6 and standard deviations between 1.1 and 1.3. While housing market instability is a concern, it is rated slightly lower with a mean score of 3.2 and a higher standard deviation of 1.4.

Table 2: Economic recessions experienced by employees

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Employment and Finances	3.4	1.1
High Levels of Inflation affecting Cost of Living	3.3	1.2
Impact of Government Debt Restructuring Program on Financial Stability	3.3	1.3
Effects of Bank Collapses and Failures on Financial Security	3.6	1.2
Personal Bankruptcy or Financial Insolvency	3.4	1.2
Housing Market Instability	3.2	1.4

The second section examined job security and employment rights of public sector employees during economic recessions. As shown in Table 3, the most severe concern relates to changes in workload and working conditions, which recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.7$, $SD = 1.2$). This indicates that economic recessions substantially increase workload pressures and deteriorate working

conditions, often due to reduced resources and staff shortages. Closely following this is the issue of discrimination and unequal opportunities, also with a high mean score ($M = 3.7$, $SD = 1.3$), suggesting that periods of economic downturn may exacerbate workplace inequalities and perceptions of unfair treatment among employees.

In contrast, the least reported impact concerns reduction in work hours, which recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 2.6$, $SD = 1.2$). This suggests that while employees may face salary cuts, benefit reductions, and increased workloads, outright reductions in working hours are less prevalent within the public sector during recessions.

Table 3: The job security and employment rights situation of employees during economic recessions

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
I have experienced reduction in work hours	2.6	1.2
I have experienced changes in my salary and benefits (e.g., reductions, freezes, cuts) during economic recessions	3.2	1.0
I have felt less secure about my job stability and tenure during economic recessions.	3.4	1.2
I have experienced layoffs or downsizing	3.4	1.2
Reduction in Benefits (e.g., healthcare, retirement)	3.6	.9
I have experienced changes in my workload and working conditions (e.g., increased workload, decreased resources) during economic recessions	3.7	1.2
I have observed discrimination and unequal opportunities in the workplace during economic recessions.	3.7	1.3
I have noticed poor health and safety protocols and standards at my workplace during economic recessions	3.6	1.3

Inferential analysis

The correlation analysis in Table 4 below reveals a very weak and statistically insignificant relationship between economic recession and job security and employment rights for public sector employees. The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.042 suggests only a slight positive association, and the high p-value of 0.466 indicates that this association is not statistically significant. Therefore, based on this analysis, there is no strong evidence to conclude that economic recessions significantly impact job security and employment rights in the public sector. Further research might be needed to explore other factors or methodologies that could provide more substantial insights into the effects of economic recessions on these variables.

Table 4: Correlation

		Economic recession	Job security and employment rights
Economic recession	Pearson Correlation	1	.042
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.466
	N	300	300
Job security and employment rights	Pearson Correlation	.042	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.466	
	N	300	300

The regression results in Table 5 below indicate that the effect of economic recession on job security and employment rights is minimal. The unstandardized coefficient of 0.032 suggests a very small positive impact, meaning that as the severity of the economic recession increases, job security and employment rights slightly increase, although the effect is negligible. The standard error of 0.043 implies that this estimate has a relatively high level of uncertainty. Overall, these results align with the earlier correlation analysis, showing that economic recession does not have a significant impact on job security and employment rights based on this model.

Table 5: Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
1 (Constant)	3.488	.162		21.529	.000
Economic recession	.032	.043	.042	.730	.466

a. Dependent Variable: Job security and employment rights

4.1.3 The coping strategies of public sector employees during economic recessions in maintaining their employment rights and protections

Table 6 provides insights into the coping strategies adopted by employees during economic recessions to maintain their employment rights and protections. These strategies reflect individuals' proactive efforts to navigate through challenging economic conditions while safeguarding their professional well-being.

One prominent coping strategy highlighted is the emphasis on financial preparedness, with employees showing a willingness to increase savings or engage in financial planning (mean = 3.4, standard deviation = 1.2). This suggests a recognition of the importance of financial resilience in mitigating the impact of economic downturns on personal finances and employment stability.

Another notable strategy involves the pursuit of additional employment opportunities or side jobs, albeit with a slightly lower mean score of 3.1 and a higher standard deviation of 1.5. This indicates a willingness among some employees to explore alternative sources of income to supplement their primary employment during periods of economic uncertainty.

Moreover, there is a focus on enhancing skills or qualifications through training or education, with a mean score of 3.4 and a standard deviation of 1.3. This reflects a proactive approach by employees to improve their employability and adaptability in response to changing market dynamics and job requirements.

Networking or seeking support from colleagues or professional networks is also considered a coping strategy, albeit with a lower mean score of 2.8 and a higher standard deviation of 1.6. This suggests that while some employees actively seek support and guidance from their professional circles, others may be less inclined to leverage external networks for assistance.

Furthermore, seeking guidance from HR or management regarding employment rights is identified as a coping strategy, with a mean score of 3.3 and a standard deviation of 1.4. This underscores the importance of clear communication and transparency between employees and organizational leadership regarding rights, protections, and avenues for recourse during economic downturns.

Table 6: The coping strategies of employees during economic recessions in maintaining their employment rights and protections

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
Increasing savings or financial planning	3.4	1.2
Seeking additional employment opportunities or side jobs	3.1	1.5
Enhancing skills or qualifications through training or education	3.4	1.3
Networking or seeking support from colleagues or professional networks.	2.8	1.6
Seeking guidance from HR or management regarding employment rights	3.3	1.4

4.2 QUALITATIVE RESULTS

The main objectives for this section are: the challenges and responsibilities faced by public sector employers in upholding employment rights and protections for their workforce during economic recessions, and the strategies and initiatives undertaken by public sector employers to safeguard employee rights and protections during economic recessions.

4.2.1 The challenges and responsibilities faced by public sector employers in upholding employment rights and protections for their workforce during economic recessions

Theme 1: Budget cuts

The results indicate that headmasters in public schools face difficult decisions regarding resource allocation, particularly during periods of budget cuts or limited resources. Respondents indicate that these challenges make it challenging to maintain benefits, and programs that support teacher well-being.

One respondent expressed,

"When faced with budget constraints, headmasters are often forced to make trade-offs that can directly impact teacher well-being. Cutting back on benefits or support programs can demoralize teachers and diminish their overall satisfaction with their jobs and workplace environment" (Participant 1).

Furthermore, respondents expressed concerns about the long-term consequences of budget cuts during economic recessions on teacher retention and school culture. One respondent remarked,

"The constant pressure to do more with less takes a toll on teacher morale and job satisfaction. If we continue to face budget cuts and resource constraints, it will become increasingly challenging to attract and retain qualified educators" (Participant 4).

Theme 2: Weakened Bargaining Power

The results indicate that headmasters in public schools face significant challenges in negotiation and advocacy, particularly in the context of economic hardship and limited authority over school expenditures. Respondents suggest that teacher unions may exert pressure for raises and benefits during economic downturns, placing headmasters in the position of needing to balance the school's needs with advocating for teachers' rights. Additionally, headmasters often have limited control over overall school expenses, making it difficult for them to secure the resources needed to uphold teacher rights.

Respondents indicate the complexities of negotiating with teacher unions during economic hardship. One respondent stated, *"We all know that our teacher unions push for raises and benefits okay but when it is in periods of economic hardships, it becomes difficult to protect members' interests during economic downturns to protect their members' interests"* (Participant 3).

Furthermore, respondents expressed concerns about the impact of limited authority on their ability to advocate effectively for teachers. One respondent remarked,

"Without sufficient control over school budgets, I struggle to negotiate favorable terms for teachers or secure the resources needed to support their well-being. This can create tension and frustration among staff and hinder efforts to maintain a positive working environment" (Participant 2).

Theme 3: Increased Workload

The results indicate that economic pressures, such as high levels of inflation affecting the cost of living, have a significant impact on teachers, leading to increased workload and challenges in meeting both obligations and student needs. Respondents indicate that factors such as larger class sizes, reduced support staff, and heightened job demands exacerbate the already demanding nature of teaching during economic downturns.

One respondent commented,

"The country experiences inflation rises every now and then. When this happens the cost of living becomes. Most of the teachers tend to have multiple part time jobs in addition to their larger class sizes. And you know there is less support for staff and this mean this often results in stress to teachers" (Participant 5).

Another respondent highlighted the impact of increased workload on teacher well-being, stating,

"The combination of economic pressures and larger class sizes has led to increase workload. It's becoming increasingly difficult to meet both obligations and the individual needs of students, leading to burnout" (Participant 6).

4.2.2 The strategies and initiatives undertaken by public sector employers to safeguard employee rights and protections during economic recession

Theme 1: Flexible Work Arrangements

The results indicate that respondents including have implemented flexible work arrangements as a strategic initiative to safeguard teacher rights and protections during economic recessions. Respondents indicate that these alternative work schedules offer teachers greater flexibility in managing their professional responsibilities while balancing personal needs and external challenges posed by economic downturns.

One respondent noted,

"In response to economic uncertainties, we've introduced flexible work arrangements to accommodate the diverse needs of our teaching staff. For example there are options such as different time tables for teachers who might want to be on different teaching tables for official classes or extra classes whether it be childcare responsibilities. These enable them to take care of other responsibilities such as health concerns, or financial constraints" (Participant 8).

Another respondent highlighted the benefits of flexible work arrangements in promoting teacher well-being and job satisfaction, stating,

"Flexible work arrangements have been instrumental for our teaching staff especially when there are salary delays" (Participant 7).

Theme 2: Collaboration and Negotiation

The results indicate that employers, particularly headmasters have prioritized collaboration and negotiation with teachers' unions as a strategic approach to safeguarding teacher rights and protections during economic recessions. Respondents emphasize the importance of fostering constructive partnerships with unions to advocate for fair compensation, job security, and working conditions amidst budgetary constraints and economic uncertainties.

Respondents indicate that collaboration with teachers' unions allows for collective bargaining and advocacy efforts to address the unique needs and concerns of teachers during budget discussions. By working collaboratively with union representatives, employers can negotiate agreements that prioritize teacher rights while also considering the financial realities faced by educational institutions during economic downturns.

One respondent stated,

"During budget discussions, we actively engage with teachers' unions to ensure that their voices are heard and their rights are protected" (Participant 2).

Another respondent highlighted the benefits of collaboration and negotiation in promoting transparency and trust between employers and teachers' unions, stating,

"Because we work closely with teachers' unions, we are able to foster a sense of partnership and mutual respect" (Participant 4).

Theme 3: Shared Resources and Collaboration

The results indicate that most public sector employees, in this case, teachers, have implemented initiatives to promote shared resources and collaboration among teachers as a strategic approach to safeguarding employee rights and protections during economic recessions. Respondents emphasise the importance of creating a supportive and cooperative work environment where teachers can collaborate to address financial challenges and manage their workloads effectively, particularly during economic uncertainties. Respondents indicate that encouraging collaboration among teachers to share resources, such as financial contributions for transportation allowances, provides a practical solution to support colleagues facing financial difficulties during economic recessions. By pooling resources and offering assistance to those in need, teachers can alleviate financial burdens and ensure that all employees have access to essential resources and support.

One respondent stated,

"During economic hardship, we encourage collaboration among teachers to support colleagues facing financial difficulties. Sometimes, there are contributions for transportation or health matters" (Participant 6).

Furthermore, respondents emphasized the importance of creating a culture of collaboration and mutual support within the workplace.

One respondent remarked,

"These little supports to teachers during hard times enable them to cope properly" (Participant 1).

4.3 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.3.1 Impact of Economic Recession on Job Security and Employment Rights

The findings indicate that public sector employees experienced multiple challenges during economic recessions, including salary adjustments, reduced benefits, increased workload, job insecurity, and concerns about health and safety. These challenges were linked to macroeconomic shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, debt restructuring, and financial sector instability. Despite these perceived challenges, the statistical results reveal no significant relationship between economic recession and job security or employment rights in the public sector, as evidenced by a weak correlation ($r = 0.042$, $p = 0.466$) and a negligible regression effect ($B = 0.032$).

This suggests that although employees feel the effects of economic downturns, formal employment protections in the public sector may buffer against severe rights erosion. This finding partially aligns with Russell and McGinnity (2014) and Torá et al. (2015), who documented increased stress and job insecurity during recessions, but contrasts with studies such as Axelrad et al. (2018), which found stronger negative employment outcomes. The divergence implies that institutional safeguards in the public sector may moderate the impact of recessions on formal employment rights.

4.3.2 Coping Strategies of Public Sector Employees

The study reveals that public sector employees adopt proactive coping strategies during economic recessions, including financial preparedness, supplementary income generation, skills development, and reliance on professional networks. Employees also seek guidance from management and HR units to better understand and protect their employment rights. These strategies reflect adaptive behaviour aimed at sustaining job security and financial stability in uncertain economic conditions.

These findings align with Tu et al. (2021), who highlighted heightened stress among remaining employees following recession-induced layoffs, reinforcing the importance of individual resilience. Similarly, Kim et al. (2024) emphasize the role of organizational support and resilience-enhancing HR practices in mitigating workload pressures during crises, supporting the relevance of both individual and institutional coping mechanisms.

4.3.3 Challenges Faced by Public Sector Employers

Public sector employers face significant constraints in upholding employment rights during economic recessions, particularly due to budget cuts, weakened bargaining power, and increased workload demands. Limited financial autonomy restricts employers' ability to maintain benefits and negotiate effectively with unions, while inflation and staffing shortages intensify pressure on teachers, increasing burnout risks.

These findings are consistent with Ogbonnaya et al. (2022), who found that recession-driven cost-cutting undermines trust and employee-management relations. Johnstone (2024) similarly notes that HR managers face complex trade-offs during downturns, reinforcing the structural challenges public sector employers encounter in balancing fiscal constraints with employee protection.

4.3.4 Employer Strategies to Safeguard Employment Rights

The study identifies flexible work arrangements, collaboration with unions, and shared resource initiatives as key strategies used by public sector employers to protect employee rights during economic recessions. Flexible schedules help employees manage personal and financial pressures, while union collaboration enhances transparency and trust. Shared resource practices foster solidarity and collective resilience among staff.

These strategies align with Agarwal (2021), who demonstrated the effectiveness of flexible HRM practices in supporting employee well-being during the COVID-19 crisis. Likewise, Srivastava et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of social support and collective

coping in enhancing resilience during economic hardship. Overall, the findings underscore that supportive organizational practices are critical for sustaining employment rights and employee well-being in times of economic recession.

5.1 CONCLUSION

The key lessons learned from this analysis show the vulnerability of public sector employees to economic downturns and the critical importance of safeguarding their employment rights and protections. Economic recessions, exacerbated by factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, high levels of inflation, and government debt restructuring, pose significant challenges to job security, financial stability, and overall well-being. Reductions in work hours, changes in salary and benefits, decreased job stability, layoffs, and reductions in healthcare and retirement benefits highlight the multifaceted impact of economic downturns on employees' professional lives.

Amidst these challenges, public sector employees demonstrate resilience and adaptability through various coping strategies, including financial preparedness, pursuing additional employment opportunities, enhancing skills, seeking support from colleagues, and seeking guidance from management. These proactive efforts underscore the importance of individual agency and resourcefulness in navigating economic uncertainties.

Furthermore, public sector employers face substantial responsibilities in upholding employment rights and protections for their workforce during economic recessions. Budget cuts, negotiation challenges with unions, and increased workload on employees present significant hurdles that require strategic responses. Flexible work arrangements, collaboration with unions, and promoting shared resources and collaboration among employees emerge as effective strategies for mitigating the negative impacts of economic downturns on employee rights and well-being.

The implications of these findings are twofold. Firstly, there is a pressing need for public sector employers to prioritize employee rights and protections, particularly during times of economic hardship. This entails proactive measures to safeguard job security, financial stability, and overall well-being through strategic resource allocation, negotiation with unions, and fostering a supportive work environment. Secondly, individual employees must cultivate resilience and adaptability by leveraging coping strategies and seeking support networks to navigate economic challenges effectively.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy makers should review and update employment laws to ensure robust protections against job loss and unfair treatment. Promote fair work practices and ensure compliance with employment standards.

Policy makers should support flexible work arrangements and invest in employee training and development to help employees adapt to economic challenges while maintaining job security.

Given the challenge of budget cuts impacting employee benefits, it is recommended that public sector employers prioritize essential support programs for employees' well-being, even during economic downturns.

In light of the difficulties in negotiating with teacher unions during recessions, it is recommended that public sector employers invest in training and development for negotiation skills among managerial staff.

With the increased workload on employers during economic pressures, it is recommended that public sector employers explore strategies to alleviate workload burdens, such as hiring additional support staff or implementing more efficient work processes.

Given the challenges of poor health and safety protocols during economic recessions, it is recommended that public sector employers prioritize employee safety by ensuring compliance with health and safety regulations and providing necessary resources for maintaining a safe work environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should conduct longitudinal studies to track the impact of economic recessions over time. This can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how economic downturns affect job security and employment rights in both the short and long term.

Future research should study the psychological and social impacts of economic recessions on employees, including stress, mental health, and job satisfaction. This research can inform support services and interventions aimed at improving employee well-being.

Future research should study how different demographic groups (e.g., age, gender) within the public sector are affected by economic recessions. This can reveal disparities and help tailor support measures more effectively.

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