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Commitment of the Contract of Service Teaching Personnel at Local Universities and Colleges (LUCs): A Hermeneutical Phenomenology

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Abstract:

This phenomenological study explores the experiences of contract-of-service (COS) teaching personnel, shedding light on less-explored dimensions in the commitment literature. Through in-depth interviews and observations, the research uncovers themes that intricately shape educators' commitment and professional journey. The study employs a phenomenological approach, utilizing in-depth interviews and observations to capture the lived experiences of COS teaching personnel. Thematic analysis is applied to derive key themes from the collected data. Findings revealed significant themes emerging from the data, covering a wide range of topics from Career Transition and Fulfilment to Learning, Adaptation, and Teaching Strategies. These themes contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing commitment among COS teaching personnel. Noteworthy among these are less-explored dimensions, including experiential learning, contractual perspectives, personal values and attributes, institutional impact and contribution, challenges and uncertainties, and personalized teaching approaches. The recommendations included fostering a supportive institutional environment, recognizing the value of positive teaching experiences, and integrating professional growth opportunities. Future research should examine identified less-explored dimensions to enhance our understanding of educators' commitment and well-being.

Keywords: Organizational commitment, local universities and colleges, job security, employee retention, teaching personnel, educators

1. Background

Higher education institutions stand as critical pillars in fostering knowledge, intellectual growth, and societal progress. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines are categorized into two groups: private institutions and public institutions. Public institutions are further divided into:

- State Universities and Colleges (SUCs),
- Local Universities and Colleges (LUCs),
- Other government-run schools, and
- Institutions under the supervision of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED)

SUCs receive funding from the national government, while CHED-supervised institutions are directly overseen by CHED, with their budgets included in the government's annual allocation for CHED. LUCs are managed, funded, and supported by local government units (www.ched.gov.ph).

Nowadays, SUCs and LUCs are funded by the UniFAST under R.A. 10931, otherwise known as the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, which is "an act promoting universal access to quality tertiary education by providing free tuition and other school fees in State Universities and Colleges, Local Universities and Colleges, and State-Run Technical-Vocational Institutions (www.unifast.gov.ph).

Within the context of local universities and colleges (LUCs) in the Philippines, a significant portion of teaching personnel operates under contract-of-service arrangements. These arrangements, which often entail limited-term

contracts and specific responsibilities, raise questions about the nature of commitment among educators who navigate the challenges of contractual uncertainty while striving to provide quality education.

The commitment of teaching personnel within higher education institutions is a multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon that encompasses the emotional attachment, loyalty, and dedication that individuals exhibit toward their roles and organizations. It is imperative to understand the commitment of teaching personnel because it is not only for their well-being but also for the institutions they serve as well. Committed teaching personnel contribute to a positive learning environment and the attainment of educational goals.

Existing literature has contributed significantly to the understanding of commitment, particularly among full-time faculty members. Studies such as those by Allen and Meyer (1990) and Chambel (2022) have established a foundation for conceptualizing and measuring organizational commitment, highlighting the intricate interactions between affective, continuance, and normative dimensions.

Studies also were conducted to identify the driving factors behind teachers' enduring commitment to their profession throughout their careers. The aim was to uncover essential conditions that enable teachers to sustain their commitment amid the dynamic shifts in local and global education. The study's principal conclusion was that middle managers and school administrators were essential in preserving teachers' dedication to their careers at all stages. These leaders act as crucial connectors, ensuring the teachers' dedication remains steadfast. To enhance professional commitment, particularly among teachers who may not exhibit a strong commitment or are at risk of leaving the profession, school leaders are advised to pay attention to educators who lack robust relationships with their students and colleagues. For the betterment of all parties involved, it is recommended that school leaders make efforts to comprehend these teachers' intentions and proactively integrate them into the school community (Low, 2022).

It is suggested that teachers' commitment to teaching exceeds their organizational commitment by the factors affecting their commitment, which include both personal and school-related variables, and take into account two dimensions of commitment: organizational commitment (affective, normative, and continuance) and commitment to the teaching profession. Furthermore, age, years of service, and length of stay at the same institution all contribute to promoting commitment. Conversely, factors such as heavy teaching workloads, multiple subject responsibilities, and non-teaching duties are associated with decreased commitment (Ibrahim, 2022).

Overall, these findings offer a perspective on what contributes to or hinders commitment among teaching personnel, which could be valuable in interpreting the research results and drawing meaningful conclusions about the commitment experiences of contract-of-service teaching personnel in this study.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry is to deeply explore and interpret the lived experiences of teaching personnel engaged in contract-of-service roles within local universities and colleges at San Mateo and Montalban, Rizal. This study seeks to uncover the underlying meanings, motivations, and challenges that shape teaching personnel's commitment to their contractual obligations. Using hermeneutic phenomenology, the research seeks to uncover the complex connections among personal aspirations, institutional dynamics, and socio-cultural factors that impact educators' commitment. Through a comprehensive analysis of their narratives, this study endeavors to provide a nuanced understanding of how teaching personnel navigate their roles and sustain commitment within the unique context of Philippine higher education institutions. In essence, the phenomenon being explored involves the complex interactions of experiences and commitment among teaching personnel. This refers to the level of dedication, loyalty, and responsibility demonstrated by individuals working in educational roles, particularly those engaged in contract-of-service positions.

Understanding the commitment experiences of contract-of-service teaching personnel within this context is crucial for several reasons. First, it has significant implications for educational policies, as it can reveal how contractual arrangements affect teachers' motivation and retention, leading to recommendations for policy reforms. Second, insights from this study can inform institutional practices, allowing universities and colleges to create more supportive work environments that enhance faculty well-being and productivity.

Finally, the exploration of commitment experiences provides a platform to address educator well-being, promoting practices that reduce burnout and increase job satisfaction among contract-of-service teaching personnel. This holistic approach can ultimately lead to a more stable and effective educational system, benefiting not only the teaching personnel but also the students and the broader academic community.

Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

- How do contract-of-service teaching personnel at LUCs describe their experiences?
- What are the contributing factors to the commitment of the participants in their workplace?
- How do contract-of-service teaching personnel interpret their experiences?

1.2. Research Design

The study employs a qualitative approach to understand the commitment experiences of contract-of-service teaching personnel at local universities and colleges (LUCs). Through hermeneutic phenomenology, it delves into the multifaceted dimensions shaping educators' commitment decisions. This method allows for a deep exploration of participants' narratives, revealing the underlying motivations and emotions driving their commitment. By focusing on participants' subjective perspectives and interpretations, the study aims to uncover the complex interplay of personal and contextual factors influencing commitment. This research design sheds light on the unique challenges faced by contract educators and contributes to enhancing their commitment to temporary employment arrangements in the academic community.

1.3. Research Setting

The research was conducted within the educational landscape of San Mateo and Montalban, both located in Rizal province, Philippines. These locations served as the primary research setting where the commitment experiences of the contract-of-service teaching personnel within local universities and colleges (LUCs) were explored. The phenomenon under examination was the commitment experiences of the contract of service teaching personnel within the selected local universities and colleges in San Mateo and Montalban, Rizal. This phenomenon encompassed how these educators perceive, interpret, and engage with their commitment to their institutions, students, and the teaching profession. The study seeks to uncover the underlying motivations, challenges, and factors that contribute to the commitment decisions and experiences of these educators within the specified research setting.

1.4. Sampling Procedure

In this study, a purposeful sampling approach was used to select contract-of-service teaching personnel from local universities and colleges (LUCs) in San Mateo and Montalban, Rizal. Participants were chosen based on recommendations from LUC executives to ensure diverse representation. The sample encompassed educators with varying years of service, backgrounds, and expertise, including lecturers, instructors, and faculty members from different academic disciplines. Permission was obtained from relevant institutions, and participants were approached to share their commitment experiences. This sampling procedure facilitated a comprehensive exploration of commitment within the context of local higher education institutions.

1.5. Participants

The study involved eight participants selected from local universities and colleges, adhering to specific criteria set by the researcher. These criteria included gender balance, age range from 23 to 65 years, a minimum of three years of service, employment at local universities and colleges (LUCs), status as teaching personnel, and voluntary participation. The purpose of these criteria was to gather diverse insights into the commitment experiences of teaching personnel within the institution. The criteria ensured representation across genders and career stages, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of commitment dynamics. Participants were selected based on their informed consent, confidentiality, and autonomy, adhering to ethical guidelines. This approach facilitated a thorough exploration of commitment phenomena within the specified educational context, enabling meaningful conclusions and recommendations to be drawn from the study.

1.6. Data Collection Method

The study utilized a combination of in-depth, semi-structured interviews and observations as its primary data collection methods to explore the commitment experiences of contract-of-service teaching personnel at local universities and colleges (LUCs) in San Mateo and Montalban, Rizal. Through these interviews, lasting between 45 and 60 minutes each, participants were invited to share their perspectives, motivations, challenges, and the meanings they attribute to their commitment as educators. The interviews provided a platform for participants to narrate their lived experiences comprehensively, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their commitment journeys within the context of LUCs.

Observations were employed as a complementary method to the interviews, offering insights into the behaviors, interactions, and non-verbal expressions of contract-of-service teaching personnel in their natural academic environments. Conducted within settings such as classrooms and administrative offices, these observations captured participants' facial expressions, body language, and other non-verbal cues that contribute to a deeper understanding of their commitment experiences. By adopting a non-participant observer role and following Spradley's (1980) grand tour strategy, the researcher gained a holistic understanding of the environment where teaching personnel operated and the interactions and cultural practices influencing their commitment experiences.

Together, the interviews and observations provided a robust framework for capturing the intricate details of participants' professional experiences, emotions, and motivations, aligning with the study's objective of offering a profound understanding of teaching personnel's commitment to the dynamic landscape of LUCs.

1.7. Data Analysis

Using a variety of techniques in addition to the researcher's positionality, phenomenological analysis seeks to discover and comprehend the themes or structures of lived experiences. When it comes to phenomenological analysis, there are no hard and fast guidelines. One's theoretical framework shapes how one interprets the descriptions, and the descriptions themselves can challenge their theoretical framework. As a result, the analysis is a dialectical process in which the interpretation of the descriptions is modified (Ferris, 2020). The goal of phenomenological analysis is to find themes that can be used to generate substantial meaning and learning.

Following the steps recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018) and van Mannen (1990, 2016) were pivotal in shaping the approach to data analysis, providing foundational guidance in qualitative research and phenomenological analysis. This expanded view demonstrates the intersection between these scholars' work and the current study's objectives, contributing to a rigorous and robust analytical process.

Creswell and Poth's qualitative research approach emphasizes a structured yet adaptable methodology. This structure offers a clear roadmap for researchers while allowing flexibility to accommodate the nuances and complexities inherent in qualitative data. Their work underscores the importance of thorough data collection, detailed analysis, and careful interpretation, ensuring that the research maintains a high level of credibility and reliability. By following their

step-by-step process, the researcher was able to systematically explore the data, maintaining consistency while accommodating emergent themes and patterns.

Van Mannen, a renowned scholar in phenomenological research, contributed significantly to my understanding of hermeneutic phenomenology. His work focuses on interpreting the lived experiences of participants to uncover deeper meanings and insights. Van Mannen's approach is rooted in the belief that phenomenology is not merely a method but a philosophy—a way to engage with the human experience at a profound level. This philosophical foundation inspired the analytical approach, encouraging the researcher to delve into the narratives of contract-of-service teaching personnel to reveal the underlying themes and meanings in their commitment experiences.

By integrating Creswell and Poth's structured methodology with van Mannen's hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher adopted a comprehensive approach to data analysis. This allowed the researcher to explore the data holistically and in detail, leveraging a variety of techniques to identify themes and patterns. Through this fusion, the research methodology maintained both rigor and flexibility, fostering a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of contract-of-service teaching personnel within local universities and colleges.

The data collected from the interviews with the contract-of-service teaching personnel were subjected to a rigorous analysis procedure. These are the following methods by which qualitative data could be systematically analyzed and interpreted to yield insightful conclusions.

The qualitative data analysis process begins with the researcher conducting a holistic reading of the entire dataset to develop a comprehensive understanding of its context and content. Subsequently, the researcher selectively highlights or marks portions of the text that appear significant, identifying key phrases, statements, or passages for further examination. Moving forward, the researcher adopts a detailed or line-by-line approach to coding, systematically assigning labels or tags to specific segments of the data to capture underlying concepts, themes, or patterns. Following coding, the researcher analyzes the data by grouping related codes into broader themes, abstracting from specific instances to discern more generalized ideas. Finally, the researcher synthesizes the findings to derive an explicit structure of meaning from the data, potentially organizing themes hierarchically, creating thematic maps, or crafting a narrative that effectively communicates the essence of the findings to the audience. This sequential process enables the researcher to extract rich insights and meaning from the dataset, facilitating a robust understanding of its implications.

This approach is consistent with qualitative data analysis methods that emphasize a systematic and in-depth exploration of the data, moving from the holistic to the detailed and ultimately synthesizing the findings into a meaningful structure. It aligns with approaches like thematic analysis, grounded theory, or phenomenological analysis, where the goal is to uncover patterns, themes, and meanings inherent in the qualitative data.

2. Result and Discussion

After carefully analyzing the data, this section of the research paper summarizes the results. The findings are arranged based on the statement of the problem and its analysis.

2.1. How Do Contract-of-Service Teaching Personnel at Lucs Describe Their Experiences?

The study delved into the experiences of contract-of-service teaching personnel at LUCs, aiming to comprehensively explore their professional journeys. Findings revealed that most personnel experienced career transitions marked by a rediscovery of passion for teaching, positive experiences, and supportive colleagues. Professional development and teaching effectiveness were crucial, with personnel taking on administrative roles alongside teaching duties. Despite challenges, job satisfaction was high, with personnel exhibiting loyalty to their institutions and a commitment to quality education.

Positive teaching experiences and relationships were highlighted, with personnel engaging in community service and cultural events. However, challenges in work-life balance persisted, necessitating effective time management strategies. Adaptive strategies were employed to navigate challenges such as career transitions and salary delays.

These findings have implications for educational practice, suggesting the need for stable work environments and opportunities for professional development. Policy changes addressing disparities between contract and regular employment are also recommended. Future research should explore long-term impacts on career development and job satisfaction, as well as the effectiveness of interventions.

While the study's qualitative approach provided rich insights, limitations such as generalizability and reliance on self-reported data should be considered. Nonetheless, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of contract-of-service teaching personnel's experiences, informing educational practice, policy, and future research endeavors.

2.2. What Are the Contributing Factors to the Commitment of the Participants in Their Workplace?

The commitment of contract-of-service teaching personnel to their workplace is influenced by various factors, including job satisfaction, professional growth opportunities, supportive work environments, intrinsic motivation, and adaptability. Participants expressed satisfaction with their roles, attributing their commitment to factors such as happiness, contentment, and a passion for teaching. Positive work environments, a sense of duty, and long-term commitment also fostered workplace harmony and commitment. Adequate salary and compensation, despite delays, were significant contributors, along with civic responsibility and aspirations for permanent positions.

Proximity and commute convenience, professional growth, trust in the workplace, and resiliency were identified as additional factors influencing commitment. Social support, positive leadership, and a supportive administration played crucial roles in fostering commitment. Intrinsic motivation, including personal connections, experiences, and a passion for

teaching, was fundamental. Participants also demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement, adaptation to new teaching trends, and innovation in teaching methods.

Specific examples highlighted the importance of supportive leadership, professional growth opportunities, and a positive work environment in sustaining commitment. While intrinsic motivation tends to have a lasting impact on commitment, extrinsic factors such as supportive leadership and financial stability are also crucial. To ensure long-term sustainability, educational institutions must nurture intrinsic motivation while providing stable and supportive work environments that adapt to the evolving needs of contract-of-service teaching personnel.

2.3. How Do Contract-of-Service Teaching Personnel Interpret Their Experiences?

The interpretations of contract-of-service teaching personnel's experiences encompassed various themes, including continuous learning, professional growth, job satisfaction, commitment, institutional impact, and perspectives on contractual arrangements. Participants viewed their experiences as a journey of learning and development, valuing professional growth through experiences, mentorship, and the integration of technology. Challenges and uncertainties were interpreted as opportunities for personal growth and acceptance of roles.

Job satisfaction was seen as deriving from personal fulfilment, student growth, recognition, and influence on young minds. Commitment extended beyond monetary considerations, emphasizing the importance of work culture and non-financial aspects. Participants emphasized their institutional impact, community engagement, and contributions to education.

Diverse interpretations of job satisfaction and professional growth were observed among participants, with some valuing intrinsic rewards and personal development, while others emphasized external recognition and career stability. These interpretations highlight the complexity of factors influencing job satisfaction and commitment among contract-of-service teaching personnel.

3. Implications

The study's empirical implications underscore the critical need for customized support strategies tailored to sustain commitment and job satisfaction among contract-of-service teaching personnel during career transitions. Mentorship programs, peer support networks, and professional development resources emerge as essential tools to guide educators through transitions and promote continuous learning. Addressing issues of time management and work-life balance is deemed crucial for sustaining job satisfaction and fostering positive teaching experiences. Moreover, institutions are encouraged to recognize and reward various teaching roles and responsibilities to cultivate a comprehensive and inclusive work culture. Integrating perspectives from organizational psychology, sociology, and human resource management is advocated to broaden the understanding of job satisfaction and commitment in educational settings. Ultimately, creating a supportive work environment with clear career advancement pathways and fostering open communication, teamwork, and effective leadership emerges as paramount for boosting job satisfaction and strengthening commitment.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study's findings align with various established frameworks, including organizational commitment theory, career transition theories, and social exchange theory, among others. The significance of organizational support during career transitions is highlighted, as illustrated by participants' experiences. Positive teaching experiences are found to reinforce commitment through the reciprocal relationship between dedication and recognition, while intrinsic motivation emerges as a crucial factor in sustaining enthusiasm for teaching despite external challenges.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of a supportive team environment in strengthening social identity within the institution, contributing to continuance commitment. Notably, job stability and institutional support are identified as significant factors in sustaining commitment, even within a contractual context. These theoretical insights provide a deeper understanding of the complex processes impacting commitment among contract-of-service teaching personnel, bridging the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical implications for higher education institutions.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, the researcher has reached the following conclusions:

4.1. Diverse Themes and Complex Commitment

The study on the experiences of contract-of-service teaching personnel at LUCs revealed a wide range of themes, indicating that commitment is a multifaceted phenomenon. Career transitions, teaching roles, and other interrelated dynamics within the educational landscape significantly influenced participants' narratives. Positive teaching experiences and relationships with colleagues and students played a crucial role in fostering commitment, while challenges related to time management, career goals, and employment uncertainty added complexity to their stories. Additionally, the participants expressed a strong desire for ongoing professional development and organizational support to navigate these challenges effectively.

4.2. Factors Contributing to Workplace Commitment

Several key themes emerged as contributing factors to the commitment of contract-of-service teaching personnel. Job satisfaction was closely intertwined with commitment, with personal satisfaction, compensation, job security, and workplace accessibility being critical elements. Professional growth and supportive work environments were also significant contributors, with participants highlighting the importance of intrinsic motivation, passion for teaching, and the

impact of their work on students. The study found that learning, adaptation, and innovative teaching strategies were vital in fostering commitment among contract-of-service teaching personnel, ensuring their dedication and effectiveness.

4.3. Interpretation of Contract-of-Service Teaching Experiences

Contract of service teachers' interpretations of their experiences encompassed a range of complex subjects. The integration of the theoretical framework provided depth to their interpretations, highlighting how these educators make sense of their experiences through continuous learning, mentorship, overcoming adversity, and holistic well-being considerations. Job satisfaction and commitment were often linked to fulfilment derived from teaching, recognition, and intrinsic motivation, extending beyond monetary considerations. The study also noted that challenges and uncertainties, such as job insecurity and balancing responsibilities, influenced participants' interpretations. Institutional impact, contributions to the community, and professional values added further depth to their perspectives. Contractual interpretations included evaluations, job stability aspirations, and the role of self-belief in shaping commitment. Overall, these factors played a significant role in shaping participants' commitment to their organization.

5. Recommendations

- *Develop Career Transition Programs:* Local universities and colleges should establish mentorship schemes and career counseling services to support contract-of-service teaching personnel during career transitions.
- *Formulate Policies for Job Satisfaction and Commitment:* Policymakers should focus on creating policies that enhance job satisfaction, compensation, job security, and career growth for contract-of-service teaching personnel.
- *Invest in Leadership and Organizational Development:* Educational administrators need to prioritize positive leadership and create a supportive work environment by investing in leadership training programs and initiatives to improve organizational culture.
- *Engage in Professional Development Opportunities:* Teachers should actively pursue continuous professional development to enhance their skills and knowledge, contributing to their overall job satisfaction and commitment.
- *Conduct Longitudinal Studies:* Future researchers should conduct longitudinal studies to track the career trajectories and commitment levels of contract-of-service teaching personnel, providing insights for targeted interventions.

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