

Lived Experiences of College Instructors With Meager Salary: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of College instructors with a meager salary. This qualitative research focuses on the phenomenology method as it aimed to understand and explain the lived experiences of the respondents. Purposive sampling was used to determine the participants. To gather relevant data, an in-depth interview was conducted with the five (5) participants who are well-knowledgeable in the phenomenon. They were all part-time College Instructors who are willing to be interviewed. The gathered data were coded and analyzed based on the research questions. The research resulted in two major themes which emerged out of the experiences shared by the instructors: (a) Hurdling Colossal Challenges and (b) Strategic Intervention. The theme Facing Colossal Challenges is divided into sub-themes: reservations, worry, and stress. The theme Strategic Intervention is composed of thriftiness and resourcefulness. There were recommendations given in this study wherein the instructors and the school administration may consider elevating the status of the teachers.

Keywords: *Qualitative, Phenomenology, Lived Experience, Meager salary, College instructors*

1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers played a very important role in educating the youth especially in imparting knowledge, skills, and proper values to them. In school, they are always found as one of the most highly regarded and influential individuals. Hence, it is expected that teachers are well paid in the country. However, in the Philippines, salary increase is always the battle cry of teachers.

In 2013, during the Teachers' Day Celebration, it was emphasized by one of the Senators in the Philippines, Senator Angara in his speech the invaluable role of teachers in society and nation-building most especially as molders of the youth future. He said that giving high regard and priority to the welfare of hardworking teachers is needed. Though teachers are considered as the heart of the Philippine public school's system, however, they receive a basic salary that does not commensurate to their very significant contribution and they are among the most underpaid workers in the society.

The faculty under the Commission on Higher Education and teachers hired under the Department of Education are adversely affected due to financial problems and economic shortage which may immensely affect their duties and responsibilities most especially in

dealing with the learners and affecting as well the delivery of excellent standard education.

For most State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), salaries of College Instructors differ depending on the degree attained by the instructor and their academic specialty. The minimum requirement in terms of educational attainment for aspiring college instructors is a graduate of a Master's degree program that is vertically aligned to their field of specialization. Once the applicant does not meet this academic requirement, he or she will still be hired but as a part-time, contractual, temporary, or substitute teacher depending on the vacancy of position and as per the institution's hiring and selection policies and guidelines.

In the study of [1]A. Bagapuro stated that in the Philippines, the promotion and salary increase of faculty members greatly depends on finishing a post-graduate degree. Teachers need to graduate and be Master's degree holders to obtain higher positions or ranks in their chosen profession.

Furthermore, in the Philippines, the national average salary of a Part-time Instructor is Php 138.00 per hour. The Php 125/hour is considered below average and Php 150/hour is above average. In Asian countries, including the Philippines, part-time faculty receive a low wage, inequality in bonuses, overtime rate, other privileges like

allowances and medical assistance. Even abroad, according to the United States Department of Education, part-time instructors are far less expensive than those who work full time. They receive no health or retirement benefits, but their rate of pay is not in equal proportion to that of full-time faculty members.

College instructors are experiencing the same dilemma from this sad reality. Their meager salaries were not sufficient to make both ends meet. As a result, teachers find ways and strategize to cope with the meagerness of their income. Similarly, in Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College, the administration is hiring faculty needed for its six campuses. However, dearth of faculty-applicant who can meet the minimum requirements such as a Master's degree holder in line with his/her specialization is the main problem; hence, is the hiring of College part-time and contractual instructors to strengthen the teaching force of the College. Nonetheless, the meagerness of salary is the cry of most instructors.

[2] Aksan discussed the Symbolic Interaction Theory formulated by [3]Blumer (1969). In this theory, interaction in the formulation of meanings for individuals is involved in the process. This theory was initiated by Dewey (1981), which thought that through practical and interactive relations to the environment, human beings are best understood. This viewpoint depends on the symbolic meaning that every human being on the symbolic meaning that people grow and mature depending on the process of social interaction. Symbolic interaction theory analyses society dealing with the subjective meanings that people attribute objects, behaviors, or events. People interpret each other's behavior and form a social bond in these interpretations. These interpretations are called the definition of the situation. To interpret the situation, a qualitative researcher following a phenomenological perspective must be a keen and creative observer in asking questions to generate real answers. Teachers as the voice of the study have their interpretation of their situation. Their lived experiences are very subjective. That is why understanding their lives are very important to find meaning in the phenomena.

Like [4] Uysal explicated the Hierarchy of Abraham Maslow of the needs that analyze the complete physical, social, emotional, and intellectual properties of an individual and how they affect the lessons learning process. Maslow suggested that motivation is the result of a person's attempt to satisfy five basic needs namely physiological, security and safety, social, appreciation, esteem, and self-actualization. According to Maslow, these needs can create internal pressures that can affect a person's behavior. The application of Maslow's theory to teacher training work is obvious.

[5] Vroom's expectancy theory states that individuals have different sets of goals and can be motivated when

they have certain expectations. There are three beliefs in this theory, namely valence, expectancy, and instrumentality. When applying this theory to the workplace, managers/administrators should be aware of and ensure that they understand the financial/budgetary constraints of the employees in the organization and are realistic about the possible types of rewards. When monetary rewards will not be possible, extrinsic reward expectations should be managed to potentially encourage employees to find suitable alternatives.

This study hoped to serve as an eye-opener for the administration for basic governance as information in motivating and protecting the psychological and financial well-being of part-time instructors that greatly affect their performance and their willingness to remain in the teaching profession.

2. OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and understand the life of part-time instructors at Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College with the hope that through this study the voice of Part-Time Instructors may be heard.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was designed as a tool to examine the daily experiences of Part-Time Instructors at ISPSC. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions: (1) As College part-time instructor with a meager income, what challenges do you usually experience? (2) What coping mechanism do you employ with the challenges you are experiencing?

4. SCOPE AND DELIMITATION

This research study tried to explain and describe the experiences of five (5) College part-time instructors with a meager salary. The researcher interviewed the five (5) participants from Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College (ISPSC), Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur, Philippines to achieve necessary data to the phenomenon.

5. DATA GATHERING INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURE

In this study, phenomenological research was used informal one-on-one interviews in the form of semi-structured conversations with the respondents. Overall, the interview focused on the research questions: (1) What challenges do you typically experience as a College part-time instructor with low wage or income? (2) What coping mechanism do you use in the challenges you experience? The individual interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and were conducted in the faculty room or empty classroom chosen by the respondents. Prior to the interview, teachers were informed that participation

is voluntary, that they can withdraw from the interview at any time, and that they are free not to answer questions if they feel uncomfortable.

Collaizi's data analysis methodology is an approach to interpreting qualitative research data to identify meaningful information and organize it into themes or categories. The whole process involves two general steps, the cool and warm analysis. The cool analysis used the transcribed interviews. These transcribed interviews have been ordered and categorized. After the cool analysis, the warm analysis was carried out addressing the categories that paved the way for were thematized that paved the way for an in-depth study of the instructors' experiences in Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College. The researcher recorded personal experiences and obtained rich descriptions and deep meaning from the participants when they described the nature of their life as College instructors with a meager salaries.

All conversations were audio-recorded to capture the themes of conversation and to ensure its correctness.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data gathered from the five College instructor-participants in ISPSC, Main Campus, Philippines were treated using coding and organized into themes. The two themes found: (a) Facing Colossal Challenges and (b) Strategic Intervention. The theme Hurdling Colossal Challenges is divided into sub-themes: reservations, worry, and stress. The theme Strategic Intervention is composed of thriftiness and resourcefulness.

6.1. Theme 1: Hurdling Colossal Challenges

The first theme narrates the different challenges that teachers need to hurdle in their current situation. The theme is divided into sub-themes manifested into reservations, worry, and stress.

6.1.1. Reservations

The teaching profession is the noblest because it is the source of all workers, specialists, and/or experts in the world. Without a teacher, no knowledge is imparted or transmitted.

However, doubt has also become prevalent in teachers to their chosen career especially if they are not being compensated properly. The reservations they feel make them think twice and also part of their doubts making them mystified as to continue with the teaching profession they love despite the low compensation it offers.

This conforms with [6] Lyimo study that several teachers have dropped from the teaching profession and opted for other good-paying professionals; hence affecting students' learning due to a shortage of teachers.

Further, [7] Katz, Nicole said the salary gap between teachers and other comparable professionals has grown significantly. While [8] Redding stated that alternatively certified teachers were still more likely than traditionally certified teachers to leave the profession. Thus, for younger generations to become attracted to the teaching profession [9]Park stressed that it is needful to consider teachers' economic status as an invaluable factor.

With a concerned voice, Teacher-Participant 1 stressed "I keep asking myself, how could I possibly survive with this meager salary considering I'm the breadwinner of a big family with eight members?" as deep sighs surfaced in between the lines.

According to the Teacher Support Network (TSN), as cited by [2] W. Stewart, there is an increased worry among British teachers. In 2008, it was noted that the number of requests for assistance from teachers was found to have increased and this had a major impact on the 2008 global financial crisis.

This same experience manifested to Teacher-participant 2 saying "Sometimes, I do not know what to do especially when our salary is delayed, I am confused. There were times I want to go abroad just to provide for my family's needs.

With the aforementioned statements from the Teacher-Participants, we cannot afford to lose our quality teachers. However, we cannot do otherwise if our teachers are being enticed to find greener pastures abroad especially if they can earn five times more than they are earning in the Philippines.

Moreover, Teacher Participant 3 also had reservations about how to handle his situation having a meager income. As she held both her hands placing them in front she stressed "*Often I am confused and wondering. Questions and speculations came rushing. Am I capable of providing for my personal and family's need with my meager income?*".

With those statements, we understood that teachers were full of reservations on how they can handle their lives considering the meagerness of their income. The economic well-being of teachers is directly related to the general satisfaction of a person with their economic situation. Poor economic well-being or the presence of financial difficulties negatively affect physical and mental health, reduce confidence and productivity in the workplace, and increase absenteeism, delays, and lack of concentration. Debt is also contributing to lower financial well-being and is identified as an "unfavorable financial condition" that causes financial stress.

6.1.2. Worry

Teachers have so much to worry about, as they always have. Being in this noblest profession, aside from spending most of their time preparing and delivering their

lessons, they also have personal needs that need to be satisfied, more importantly, if it involves their family.

Teacher-Participant 1 highlighted that “I worry too much. With this present situation of mine, I might give up my teaching career and land for a better job abroad.”

Similarly, Teacher-Participant 2 agreed, “I’m worried about my little salary as an instructor, I might look for another job aside from teaching, especially this time of crisis, I need to support my growing family.”

[7] Kats, Nicole said Frontloading teacher compensation by increasing starting salaries and reducing the annual step increases while increasing their size could make the labor market more attractive to young teachers. A higher percentage of teachers would remain in the teaching profession if they would be helped meet salary benchmarks and through frontloading.

Teacher-Participant 3 expressed his worries too. “I have debts to pay, I am worried, I have just received my salary the other day, but now it is almost gone. I do not know where to get my allowance until the next payday.”

The financial well-being of teachers in the Philippines is a dire situation, characterized by mounting debt problems and low net income. Lack of financial planning, inability to manage assets or money, poor support from teachers’ spouses to generate income for the family, a problem with housing debts, among others, contribute significantly to these problems.

[10] the article, reports on increased worries among British teachers concerning their financial situations and their relationships with co-workers, according to the charity the Teacher Support Network (TSN). In 2008, the organization reported that there was a dramatic increase in the number of requests for assistance coming from teachers.

[11] M. C. Martínez-Monteaudo pointed out the significant differences between emotional intelligence profiles about burnout, depression, anxiety, and stress. Based on the results, the teachers in the low generalized emotional intelligence high attention, and low repair groups had higher scores on emotional exhaustion, anxiety, depression, depersonalization, and stress and lower scores on personal performance.

6.1.3. Stress

The teaching profession is one of the professions that is most often associated with high stress due to the demands of the current teaching activity and in the face of constant change and the need for innovation.

Moreover, the stress that these teachers experienced is inevitable. The unending paper works coupled with not being properly compensated added to a high level of stress which degrades their capacity to work, thus, productivity is at risk.

In the study by [12] E. Skaalvik, teachers experienced various causes of stress in their work. Each of six sources of stress in school was cited by half or more than half of the teachers. This finding indicates that many teachers experience an accumulation of sources of stress that may account for high levels of physical and emotional exhaustion.

While [13] J. Kim et.al. said that teaching is one of the most demanding jobs with a high turnover rate. Teachers who believe in the benefits of stress were less likely to quit their jobs in one school year.

Teacher-Participant 2 narrates the experience as rigid and complicated because “there are many things I am concerned with especially on financial matters. It caused me stress especially at times when we have emergencies in the family, knowing that my salary is not enough even for my personal needs. Honestly, sometimes I can’t focus teaching because of this”.

Under this premise, the financial concerns of the faculty stem from the fact that their salary is insufficient to cover the basic needs of the family and much more to raise their standard of living, which is everyone’s dream.

This is consistent with the results of [14] T. Mingoa that the most common sources of stress originate from monetary reasons. As the main drivers of stress, public school teachers consider insufficient salaries and oversized classes to be the most onerous.

Having the same concern, TP 3 asserts that “as teachers today, we are loaded with lots of stressors aside from paper works and students, I am more stressed on how to stretch our limited salary.”

Moreover, Teacher-Participant 5 expressed with a deep sigh “with my meager salary, it causes me sleepless nights thinking how to sustain my family needs and my personal needs because I enrolled in the Graduate School hoping that I could finish it so I can be qualified to teach as a permanent instructor of the college in the future.

Those statements are manifestations that aside from the great volume of paper works which causes an excessive amount of stress to the respondents, is also their meager salary which affects their teaching performance.

Another study that examined that occupational stress predisposes teachers to anxiety and depression is [15] D. Desouky. According to the results, occupational stress, depression, and anxiety scores were significantly higher among teachers with elementary school teachers, those with insufficient salary, greater teaching experience, higher qualifications, and greater or heavier workloads.

On the other hand, [11]M.C. Martinez-Monteaudo, showed the significant differences between the teacher profiles in terms of stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression.

This agrees with [16] C. Ventayen and other studies that salary contributes to the stress level of workers.

When teachers are highly stressed and emotionally exhausted, students are at greater risk of being suspended or disciplined by school leaders. Teacher stress can have a trickle-down effect on their students, leading to disruptive behavior resulting in student suspensions.

[1]A. Bagapuro said the role of stressors and supports for the quality of the ECE (Early Care and Education) classroom. Of the stressors, only a low teacher salary was significantly associated with qualitative outcomes, and only 2 of 8 outcomes evaluated (poor class management and poorer quality of teaching). Moreover, the study of [17] Santoro, led to the fact that they don't stop because they are exhausted from the demands of their job.

However, this refutes the study of [4] J. Kim found that teaching is one of the most demanding tasks with a high turnover rate. In his study, he examined whether the stress mindset of preschool teachers is harmful or beneficial. According to the findings, teachers who believed in the potential benefits of stress were less likely to experience stress at work and therefore less likely to quit their jobs. The results suggest that the stressful mindset of teachers predicts their psychological well-being.

Similarly, in the study by [5]A.D. Johnson, although Early Care and Education (ECE) teachers receive surprisingly low salaries, they are increasingly promoting children's learning by providing quality education.

Studies suggest some strategies for dealing with teacher stress that include personal coping mechanisms, such as reflecting on things to be grateful for, as well as collaborating with school administrators to identify ways to reduce some of the demands placed on overburdened and under-supported teachers, among others. In this study, however, the strategic interventions deduced from the respondents revolve around positive values.

Teachers do not just overcome these challenges. They find ways to stay the course despite the difficult situation caused by low wages. They have coping mechanisms to relieve the stress of their current situations. Instead of complaining, they manifest the virtue/ value of thriftiness and resourcefulness. These efforts of our teachers are manifestations that they are not limited to what is given them; however, they are looking for opportunities that can help them personally and make the teaching and learning process more important and relevant even at these difficult times.

Similar results with [18] Frufonga, despite the financial difficulties experienced, the faculty continues to participate, and do their job well.

Therefore, as the [19] Journal, International, in its recommendations, emphasized that educational planners and policymakers could positively influence teacher motivation through appropriate policy changes and implementation, including mobilizing resources to provide teachers with attractive salaries and benefits on par with other countries, pay for public services like medicine, law, and engineering. Comments similar to [20] Arain, on the importance of giving attractive salaries which make it especially attractive for young professionals.

6.2. Theme 2: Strategic Interventions

Especially at new normal, the lessons with a low salary are very demanding, but the teachers always dominate the current situations with positive values.

6.2.1. The Value of Thriftiness

The conviction on Teacher-Participant 1's face registered to stress, "With the challenges I confronted particularly handling my financial issues, I made all the necessary way to be thrifty, be practical and save money".

This finding is consistent with [18] R. Frufonga's study that faculty members were very practical in dealing with financial difficulties. Most of them prioritized their basic and family needs. They put aside their other needs to survive the financial difficulties they experienced. Furthermore, they are also tightening their belts and looking for other ways and means to make ends meet, such as loans, credits, and mortgages on their paychecks and premiums in advance to cover necessary expenses. Most of them have no way of supplementing their income.

Just like Teacher-Participant 1, Teacher-Participant 3 also highlighted the positive implication of thriftiness. "My family and I learned to be contented to live below our means and trim down unnecessary expenses."

Moreover, Teacher-Participant 2 asserted that "as much as possible I say no to debt. A thrifty lifestyle is one of the best things I have learned as values over time."

6.2.2. The Value of Resourcefulness

For teachers, resourcefulness is a crucial skill most especially in this time of crisis. A resourceful teacher can quickly adapt to new, different, and difficult situations. He/she can find solutions, manage things with the available things he/she has.

Teacher-Participant 1 highlighted the need to look for extra income like using her talent in singing. "One way of strategizing my finances is joining gigs. I tried being invited to sing on different occasions like birthdays, christening, and even during funeral services", then she

laughed. “At least I earned extra, to meet both ends for my family. I will do everything for my dreams, for my family”, Teacher-Participant 1 added intently.

Similar to Teacher-Participant 4’s way of resourcefulness, stressing “I am not ashamed to say that I do online selling, since it is the new trend nowadays”.

Teacher-Participant 4’s statement jive with Teacher-Participant 5 strategy. She said, “Every time I get my salary, I set aside a small amount as my capital for any business like selling goods or anything just to make my money roll”.

These experiences of part-time teachers highlight their positive attitude in dealing with or confronting their biggest challenge- their meager salary. They work hard using what they have like using their talents and the small amount they earned to gain extra income.

According to [16]C. and R. Ventayen, stress and depression must be adequately treated to maintain productive teaching as the noblest profession. Uncontrolled stress and depression can lead to a serious outcome affecting the happy atmosphere in the classroom. Therefore, dealing with stress and avoiding depression in the workplace is one of the important situations that a teacher must strive for to be successful.

[15] D. Desouky and H. Allam noted that the Egyptian education system faces many challenges, including teacher’s salaries, and resource constraints. Egyptian teachers complain about wages, salaries, work, etc. and they have expressed it through protests and strikes during the past 5 years.

7. CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion, with the narrated experiences of five teacher-participants, they show the realities of the situations confronted by many teachers, particularly in the Philippines. They are puzzled as to how they can manifest quality education to their learners such as they go through a labyrinth day by day.

On top of everything, albeit the colossal challenges that these part-time instructors need to endure during these challenging times. Their experiences living with meager income help them acquire skills that manifest their positive outlook in life by displaying the right values such as being thrifty and resourceful despite the doubts and anxiety that surfaced in the present situations. The challenges they faced were nothing compared to the efforts they executed to continue providing quality education despite their current predicaments. This manifests their great passion to carry the torch of education to illuminate the lives of many especially the youth of future generations.

This corresponded to [21] Hobfoll, Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) which describes the motivation

that drives people not only to preserve their existing resources but also to accumulate new resources. IN this theory, people try to protect and retain their acquired and accumulated resources. Resources are the things that are valued by individuals, they can be certain objects, states, or conditions.

Therefore, College part-time instructors, despite the colossal challenges they need to endure with great determination to overcome the challenges because they wanted to grow professionally and be promoted in their academic rank/status. Hence, they are hopeful and carrying the right values and attitudes in facing these challenges to continue the torch of education from lighting.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The government must implement teacher salary increases, additional incentives and benefits, offers, bonuses, and other privileges.

The College should have a Faculty Development Program which includes College Part-time instructors. Faculty members should be encouraged to attend seminars, training, and workshops to maintain and strengthen their teaching performance and professional growth.

For future research, the present study can be replicated in other settings to support the results of this study.

AUTHOR’S CONTRIBUTIONS

This study complemented the literature on sensitivity and appreciation of teachers and the needs considered necessary for the financial well-being of part-time teachers in the country.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This study owes its completion to ICETECH and Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College, the full cooperation of the teacher-respondents and several friends who had been very helpful, and to my family, I offer my deepest gratitude for their assistance and encouragement. And finally, to the Almighty Father, for His wonderful grace and provision.

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