

Lived Experiences of Contractual Criminology Teachers: A Phenomenological Study

Joy E. Doromal

Misamis University, Ozamiz City, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Contractual teachers at state colleges are educators hired by the institution on a temporary or per-contract basis to cover teaching positions in the higher education system. These professors may be hired to cover specialized courses, fill in for regular faculty members on leave, or address short-term staffing requirements. This study investigated the lived experiences of contractual criminology teachers. This study used a qualitative approach using phenomenological research design. The participants of this study were six contractual criminology teachers from one of the public higher educational institutions in Zamboanga del Sur who have been employed for more than five years in the institution. It uses purposive sampling to identify the potential participants. An interview guide was used as the instrument of the study. Moustakas' method of data analysis was used in analyzing the data gathered. Results yielded eight themes: educational qualifications, institutional processes and opportunities, personal commitments and responsibilities, intrinsic fulfillment and connection with students, financial strain and inadequate compensation, professional limitations and discrimination, having personal determination and professional integrity, and having self-trust and support networks. Contractual criminology teachers struggle for tenure, motivated by family and student success, facing financial hardships, limited discipline ability, and relying on determination and support. Institutions should support contractual teachers with funding, flexible schedules, clear pathways to regular status, inclusive policies, professional development opportunities, and research on educational policies' impacts.

Keywords: challenges, coping mechanism, contractual teachers, motivations, strategies

INTRODUCTION

Rationale of the Study

In contemporary society, educators are pivotal in shaping future generations and fostering societal advancement. Teachers, often unheralded, not only impart knowledge and skills but also serve as mentors and role models, demonstrating resilience and dedication, particularly in challenging circumstances (Modi, 2020; Maad, 2023). Within this context, criminology educators, especially those in contractual positions at state colleges, play a crucial role in preparing students for careers in law enforcement and criminal justice. These contractual teachers, typically registered criminologists pursuing or holding a master's degree, are employed on a temporary basis to address specific institutional needs, such as covering specialized courses or filling in for regular faculty on leave (Thea, 2023). However, unlike their tenured counterparts, they often face job insecurity, limited benefits, and restricted opportunities for professional development, with their employment contingent upon institutional staffing requirements and financial constraints (Gayatri, 2022).

The challenges faced by contractual educators are further exacerbated by external factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which has intensified issues related to job security and support structures (Wolfenden, 2022). In the Philippines, the practice of contractualization, or "endo," has been a longstanding concern, with many educators employed on fixed-term contracts to address staffing shortages, particularly in underserved areas (Luciano, 2023). Despite their significant contributions, these educators often grapple with inadequate benefits and limited avenues for career advancement (Guiang, 2020). Addressing these challenges necessitates comprehensive reforms aimed at enhancing job security, ensuring fair compensation, and providing robust

professional development opportunities (Enicola, 2021).

Criminology educators, in particular, have a profound impact on their students' academic and professional trajectories. Studies indicate that criminology students generally express satisfaction with their instructors' teaching methodologies and course requirements, underscoring the importance of effective pedagogical practices in this field (Damayon, 2022). Moreover, ethical conduct among educators, encompassing professionalism, responsibility, and equity, is paramount in fostering a conducive learning environment (Mekonnen & Golga, 2023).

Despite the critical role of contractual criminology educators, there exists a significant gap in the literature concerning their lived experiences. While some research has explored the characteristics of criminology teachers and their influence on student motivation (Callora, 2020), there is a paucity of studies examining the specific challenges faced by contractual faculty, including factors contributing to non-tenureship, motivational dynamics, and coping mechanisms employed to navigate professional stressors (Villarmia et al., 2021; Macapagong et al., 2023). Understanding these dimensions is essential for developing targeted interventions and support structures that enhance the well-being and professional satisfaction of contractual educators.

This study aims to fill these research gaps by delving into the lived experiences of contractual criminology teachers in Zamboanga del Sur. It seeks to elucidate the factors influencing their non-tenured status, explore the motivations that drive them to continue in their roles despite challenges, identify the obstacles they encounter in their daily teaching activities, and understand the coping strategies they employ. By providing a nuanced understanding of these educators' experiences, the study aspires to inform policy decisions and institutional practices that bolster support systems, enhance job satisfaction, and optimize teaching effectiveness for contractual faculty, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on academic employment dynamics and pedagogical practices.

METHODS

The study utilized a qualitative research design employing Moustakas' phenomenological approach, which aims to holistically understand individuals lived experiences by exploring their perceptions, emotions, and interpretations (Bhandari, 2020; Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Alele & Aduli, 2023; Praveena Kr, 2022). This design was chosen to deeply investigate the experiences of contractual criminology teachers, particularly regarding their non-tenureship, motivations, challenges, and coping mechanisms. Conducted in a public higher education institution in Zamboanga del Sur—a province in western Mindanao, Philippines—the study setting is characterized by diverse academic programs and serves as an educational hub for the region.

Participants were six purposively selected criminology teachers meeting specific criteria: at least five years of teaching experience, contractual employment status, family breadwinners, and willingness to participate. Data were gathered through one-on-one in-depth interviews guided by a semi-structured interview instrument.

For data analysis, Moustakas' phenomenological reduction method was applied, encompassing several systematic stages: bracketing (epoche) to suspend researcher biases; horizontalization to treat all statements equally and eliminate irrelevant data; clustering to identify core themes; and developing textural and structural descriptions to narrate what happened and how it was experienced. The final synthesis combined these descriptions to articulate the essence of participants' experiences, offering meaningful insights into the complexities of contractual teaching roles.

Ethical considerations were rigorously addressed following Lincoln's five dimensions of ethical research and the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173), ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and respectful handling and reporting of all data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study examined the lived experiences of six contractual criminology teachers employed at a public higher education institution in Zamboanga del Sur, highlighting their challenges and motivations. The participants,

consisting of two males and four females, predominantly served as family breadwinners while facing the intricacies of their roles as college instructors over a five- year period. Eight key themes emerged from the qualitative analysis, encompassing educational qualifications, institutional processes, personal commitments, intrinsic fulfillment, financial strains, professional limitations, personal determination, and self-trust, all of which played critical roles in shaping their teaching experiences and overall career trajectories.

Educational qualifications emerged as a significant theme, emphasizing the necessity for a master's degree as a prerequisite for obtaining tenured positions in higher education. Participants expressed the difficulties associated with completing their master's degrees, which are mandated by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) for career advancement. Their statements underlined the connection between educational attainment and job stability, as well as the broader struggles faced by contractual teachers in meeting institutional standards for advancement (Knapp, 2023; Belanich et al., 2019). Meanwhile, institutional processes highlighted the competitive nature of securing regular employment; participants noted that meeting qualifications did not guarantee a permanent position, showcasing the additional complexities of navigating institutional policies and budget constraints (Mae & Matilde, 2023). Personal commitments to family emerged as a powerful motivator, with educators indicating that the need to support their families often outweighed the security provided by tenured positions (Sadeghi et al., 2021).

Financial strain was a prominent theme illustrating how inadequate compensation influences both professional performance and well-being. Participants shared experiences of working under significant financial constraints, with concerns about their salaries being insufficient for basic living expenses (Burgess & Maitra, 2021). Furthermore, many expressed feelings of marginalization and professional limitations related to their contractual status, impacting their opportunities for professional development (Apat & Swain, 2023). However, the theme of personal determination and integrity emerged as a counter to these challenges; participants demonstrated resilience and commitment to providing quality education, indicating that self-trust and supportive peer networks were for coping with job instability and enhancing professional efficacy (Florica Ortan et al., 2021; Yao et al., 2022). This study underscores the complex interplay of personal aspirations and institutional barriers faced by contractual educators, emphasizing the need for reforms that address the challenges inherent in contractual teaching positions to support their professional growth and job satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

The study's conclusions emphasize the essential role of academic achievement for contractual criminology teachers in advancing their careers. Completing a master's degree, despite its challenges, is crucial for securing permanent positions within educational institutions. This process is complex and lengthy, demanding significant dedication and effort from teachers to meet institutional standards. Furthermore, even without tenure, these educators remain motivated by families and derive deep personal satisfaction from their interactions with students, making their professional journey fulfilling and meaningful, contractual ology teachers face considerable financial challenges, as their low salaries negatively impact their overall happiness and well. The financial strain often prevents them from accessing professional development, such as training and seminars, and they feel marginalized in suggesting improvements to departmental programs due to their non-permanent status. Despite these obstacles, these teachers remain committed to providing quality education, driven by their desire to help students succeed.

Ultimately, their belief in themselves and their aspirations fosters resilience in the face of adversity. The support they receive from family and colleagues, particularly spouses, further strengthens their emotional well-being, allowing them to maintain focus on their teaching responsibilities and positively influence their students' lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's findings and conclusions lead to several recommendations aimed at supporting contractual teachers in their professional development and job security. First, institutions should implement structured support mechanisms, such as funding or scholarships for graduate studies and flexible scheduling, to assist contractual teachers in completing their master's or doctorate degrees. There should also be clear pathways

established for transitioning to regular status based on educational attainment. Additionally, institutions need to streamline the process for moving from contractual to regular status, ensuring equitable access to vacancies and providing timely feedback to candidates.

Furthermore, it is essential for institutions to develop inclusive policies that address and support the commitments of teachers. Flexible leave policies and family support initiatives would help ease the pressures faced by contractual teachers as they balance their familial responsibilities with professional demands. On the part of contractual teachers, they are encouraged to proactively seek professional development opportunities and pursue advanced qualifications to improve their career prospects and job security. Lastly, future research should focus on evaluating the impact of educational policies on the career trajectories and job satisfaction of contractual teachers. This includes analyzing the effectiveness of institutional frameworks and policy interventions, as well as conducting longitudinal studies to understand how financial strain and career uncertainties impact teachers' retention rates and overall well-being over time.

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