Exploring Faculty Experiences on Workload: A Phenomenological Approach

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the multifaceted challenges faculty encounter in managing teaching workloads and balancing professional responsibilities within higher education. The study aimed to understand how these challenges affect teaching quality and faculty well-being. Using purposive sampling, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with faculty members across various disciplines. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis, revealing nine key themes: overwhelming workload, impact on teaching quality, time constraints, commitment and coping, role prioritization and coping strategies, overwhelming workload and role conflict, structured time management and self-care, imbalance between teaching and research duties, and disruption from unforeseen tasks and imbalance. Findings indicate that excessive teaching loads, administrative burdens, and unpredictable tasks significantly compromise teaching effectiveness and contribute to faculty stress. While faculty employ diverse coping mechanisms, institutional support remains insufficient. These insights underscore the urgent need for workload transparency, administrative relief, and policies promoting work-life balance. Future research should investigate intervention effectiveness and workload experiences across diverse institutional contexts.

Keywords: administrative burden, faculty workload, teaching quality

1. Introduction

The experiences of faculty members regarding their workloads in public-sector universities have drawn considerable attention due to their significant influence on academic success and teaching effectiveness. Over recent years, there has been growing concern about faculty workloads, with many educators reporting feelings of stress and burnout as a result of their responsibilities. In public-sector universities, faculty often contend with large class sizes, substantial administrative duties, and increasing pressure to meet performance benchmarks. This overwhelming workload can lead to high levels of stress and eventual exhaustion among educators, adversely affecting their teaching and overall job satisfaction [26].

Faculty workload in higher education is multifaceted and includes a variety of responsibilities such as teaching, research, service, advising, and administrative tasks [2]. Each of these roles demands specific time commitments and can contribute to feelings of being overburdened. For instance, while faculty members are expected to prepare lectures and assess student assignments, they are also responsible for engaging in original research, publishing findings, attending academic conferences, and seeking research

funding—activities that are essential for their professional growth and institutional reputation. In addition, many faculty members take on administrative roles that require additional time and effort, further complicating their workload management [17].

The classification of workload into categories such as overload, regular, and underload can help in understanding the complexities surrounding faculty responsibilities [31]. Overload occurs when faculty are tasked with more responsibilities than the designated workload allowance, leading to adverse effects such as stress and reduced teaching effectiveness. Conversely, underload refers to situations where faculty have fewer responsibilities than prescribed, which might not capitalize on their skills effectively but could lead to a more manageable workload. Regular workload, which constitutes the standard expectations for faculty, reflects a balance that departments strive to maintain in order to ensure the success and well-being of teaching staff.

As universities strive for quality education and high academic standards, the management of faculty workload emerges as a crucial factor influencing teaching performance. The burdens associated with heavy workloads can lead to challenges in meeting institutional expectations, resulting in negative consequences not only for faculty members but also for the students they serve. Therefore, understanding faculty perceptions of their workload and the implications of these perceptions on their professional performance is essential. The insights gained from this inquiry will provide a clearer picture of how workload management practices can be optimized at the State University of Northern Mindanao to support faculty effectiveness and overall institutional goals.

Theoretical Framework
Under this section, clearly describe the theoretical lens or model guiding your This study is guided by the Role Theory [18] and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model [4], both of which provide valuable lenses for understanding faculty experiences of workload within academic institutions.

Role Theory posits that individuals occupy multiple roles within organizations, each with its own set of expectations, responsibilities, and potential conflicts [18]. In the context of higher education, faculty members are expected to balance teaching, research, administrative duties, and service, often resulting in role overload and conflict. This theory is particularly suitable for the present study as it helps explain how conflicting demands and ambiguous expectations can contribute to faculty stress, job dissatisfaction, and performance challenges [15].

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model further complements this perspective by categorizing workplace factors into job demands (e.g., workload, time pressure, administrative tasks) and job resources (e.g., support, autonomy, professional development) [4]. According to the JD-R Model, high job demands can lead to strain and burnout, especially when not balanced by adequate resources. This model is relevant to the study as it provides a framework for examining not only the burdens faculty face but also the institutional supports that may mitigate negative outcomes [5].

These theories help interpret the phenomenon of faculty workload by highlighting the interplay between multiple role expectations and the availability of resources to manage these demands. Key concepts from Role Theory include role conflict, role overload, and role ambiguity, which are directly related to the research questions exploring how faculty perceive and cope with workload. From the JD-R Model, the central constructs are job demands, job resources, and their impact on well-being and performance.

2. Methodology

Research Design

This research employed a phenomenological qualitative approach to explore the lived experiences of faculty members regarding their workload. By focusing on the subjective perceptions and interpretations of these individuals, this study aimed to uncover the essence of how faculty members experience and understand their workload. A phenomenological design, rooted in the exploration of lived experiences, is particularly suited for understanding the complex and nuanced ways in which faculty members perceive and navigate the demands of their professional workload [11]. This approach will prioritize in-depth interviews and reflective analysis to illuminate the meaning and significance that faculty members ascribe to their experiences with workload.

Research Setting

The research was conducted at the State Universities of Northern Mindanao. The university's commitment to advanced education, research, and extension work within these diverse settings creates a dynamic learning environment that shapes the experiences of both students and faculty.

Participants and Selection Technique

The study was conducted at the State Universities of Northern Mindanao. This research encompassed faculty members who held two or more designations. The researchers adapted the data saturation recognition steps [14]. First, participants were selected based on priority. These participants were chosen for the first round of interviews and served as the initial analysis sample size. In the present study, five participants were selected. Second, the researchers identified the number of additional participants to include whenever new ideas or themes emerged, in order to determine when data saturation was reached. For this study, three more participants were selected, referred to as stopping criterion participants.

Role of the Researcher in a Qualitative Study

In this qualitative study, the researcher played an active and central role in all stages of the research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The researcher was directly involved in conducting interviews, engaged with participants to build rapport, and encouraged open, honest sharing of experiences. This close interaction allowed for a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives but also required careful attention to potential biases. To address any assumptions or preconceptions, the researcher practiced reflexivity by regularly reflecting on their own perspectives and how these might have influenced data interpretation. Strategies such as member checking and peer debriefing were employed to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. The researcher's background as a faculty member with experience in higher education provided valuable insight into the context of the study but also necessitated ongoing self-awareness to minimize the impact of personal experiences on the research outcomes. By acknowledging and managing these influences, the researcher aimed to ensure that the findings accurately represented the voices and realities of the participants.

Data Collection Tools

In this qualitative study, the primary data collection tool was a semi-structured interview protocol, which was carefully developed and validated to ensure alignment with the study's objectives.

To ensure the instrument's relevance and validity, the draft interview protocol was subjected to expert review by faculty members experienced in qualitative research and the study's subject area. Their feedback was used to refine the wording and sequence of questions, ensuring clarity and alignment with the study's aims. A pilot interview was also conducted with a participant who met the study's inclusion criteria,

allowing the researchers to assess the effectiveness of the questions in capturing the intended data and to make further adjustments based on the pilot results.

Additionally, the researchers implemented member checking by sharing sample responses with participants to confirm that the questions were interpreted as intended and that the responses accurately reflected their experiences. This process enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the instrument. Through these steps—expert validation, pilot testing, and member checking—the interview questionnaire was thoroughly validated, ensuring that it effectively supported the collection of meaningful and relevant qualitative data for the study.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis, which identified, analyzed, and reported patterns within the data [6]. Codes were generated based on the respondents' answers to the semi-structured interview questions.

With advancements in research technology, the researchers integrated artificial intelligence (AI) into the data analysis process to enhance efficiency and accuracy. Specifically, Perplexity AI was used to assist in coding and theme generation. To maintain transparency and rigor, the specific prompts used in AI-assisted analysis were documented. Examples of prompts that were used included:

1. "Identify key themes from the following interview transcript."
2. "Summarize the recurring patterns in these responses."
3. "Categorize these statements based on common topics."

Additionally, the use of artificial intelligence for qualitative data analysis and emphasized the importance of human oversight in AI-assisted analysis. The researchers ensured that they verified and interpreted AI-generated themes to maintain credibility, reliability, and alignment with the research context [24].

Ethical Consideration in Qualitative Research

In this qualitative study, informed consent was obtained from all participants after they were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participants were assured that their confidentiality and privacy would be rigorously protected through anonymizing data and securely storing all sensitive information in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. To minimize potential harm or discomfort, the researchers carefully designed interview questions and procedures to be respectful and non-intrusive, providing participants with the option to skip questions or pause the interview as needed. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional review boards, ensuring that all research activities adhered to established ethical standards and legal requirements.

Limitations of the Study

Several factors may have affected the interpretation and validity of the qualitative research findings in this study. First, the sample size was limited to faculty members from selected State University of Northern Mindanao, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to other contexts or institutions. Second, participants' responses may have been influenced by social desirability bias, as some individuals might have provided answers they believed were expected or acceptable rather than fully candid accounts. Third, time constraints and scheduling difficulties occasionally limited the depth of some interviews, potentially affecting the richness of the data collected. Additionally, the use of AI-assisted analysis, while enhancing efficiency, required careful human oversight to ensure accurate theme identification and interpretation. Finally, language barriers and varying levels of familiarity with qualitative interviews among participants

may have influenced the clarity and detail of their responses. These boundaries and constraints should be considered when interpreting the study's findings and conclusions

3. Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Overwhelming Workload

Across various educational settings, overwhelming workload remains a pressing concern among faculty members. The narratives in this study vividly illustrate this reality. Participant 1 remarked, "Honestly, the 18-unit teaching load is challenging, especially because there are additional duties as Sports Coordinator and Graphic Artist." This sentiment aligns with the literature highlighting the growing trend of workload creep, where faculty are expected to undertake increasingly diverse responsibilities beyond their original job scope [20]. Participant 2 shared a similar concern: "My teaching load is 12 units, but the administrative duties are very demanding." These narratives indicate a mismatch between institutional expectations and individual capacity, creating systemic overload.

Participant 3 described their experience in detail: "The workload is intense, especially since the registrar's office handles student records, graduation, and enrolment—which cannot be delayed. Then, as Innovation Coordinator, I also need to prepare tech-related projects. My teaching load is 15.75 units." The burden of administrative and technical responsibilities and a heavy teaching load contribute to increased stress and decreased job satisfaction. Research supports this observation, showing that role overload contributes significantly to burnout and emotional [23, 13]. High workload intensity is key to burnout among university instructors [29]. Faculty often view service and administrative tasks as burdensome and undervalued [22]. These findings underscore the need for institutional mechanisms to support faculty and manage workload effectively

These narratives reflect not only a crisis of time but also of institutional support. Teaching professionals should not have to choose between performance and well-being. Clearly defined roles and fair distribution of responsibilities are essential.

Theme 2: Impact on Teaching Quality

Beyond workload volume, a significant consequence is the impact on teaching quality. Participant 1 noted, "It's not just about the amount of work, but also the quality of my teaching. Sometimes, because of the many tasks, the time for proper lesson planning gets sacrificed." This points to the degradation of instructional quality due to competing responsibilities.

Participant 3 explained, "Sometimes I get delayed in checking papers because of urgent concerns at the registrar's office. The effect is that pressure builds up, and there's a risk that the quality of teaching might be compromised." Likewise, Participant 5 stated, "I used to be more creative in my teaching methods, but now, with so many responsibilities, I resort to repetitive strategies just to manage my workload."

Research supports these experiences. Teaching quality is directly related to adequate preparation time and mental energy [27]. Repetitive and passive instructional methods often result from exhaustion and time scarcity. High workloads limit personal well-being and teaching enthusiasm, affecting performance [25]. Participant 4 shared, "Due to excessive workload, I find it difficult to focus on one task at a time. There are days when I feel mentally drained, which affects the quality of my teaching" confirm that mental fatigue undermines pedagogical innovation and engagement [1].

The cost of overwork isn't just fatigue—it's a decline in teaching quality. Students deserve educators who are prepared and inspired. Reducing workload is essential for maintaining instructional excellence.

Theme 3: Time Constraints

Time constraints emerged as a fundamental barrier to effective teaching. Participant 1 stated, "The challenge is when the deadlines for class, sports events, and graphic design projects all happen simultaneously—it feels like I'm juggling many balls simultaneously." This reveals the cognitive strain of managing multiple priorities. Participant 2 added, "The impact on my teaching performance is the lack of time for student consultations. I feel that sometimes I cannot address all my students' concerns because of the many meetings and coordination with other institutions." This illustrates how time scarcity affects task completion and student support.

Reduced time for relational teaching undermines educators' sense of flow and satisfaction [27]. It was argued that faculty are often burdened with invisible labor, such as mentoring and feedback, which is not formally accounted for in workload models [16]. Time poverty is not due to inefficiency but structural imbalance. Inadequate time management at the institutional level leads to a sense of helplessness among faculty [13]. Teaching and learning often take a backseat to administrative tasks.

Time is more than a resource—it is a prerequisite for effective teaching. Institutions must protect time for instruction, planning, and student engagement. Without this, educational goals remain unmet.

Theme 4: Commitment and Coping Strategies

Despite the overwhelming workload and time pressures, participants firmly committed to student learning. Participant 1 stated, "But I still try to maintain the standards because it's ultimately for the students." Participant 3 echoed, "But I still prioritize the students' needs, even if it means working overtime."

This dedication, while commendable, often leads to personal sacrifices. Teachers with high intrinsic motivation may continue to perform well despite inadequate support, which is unsustainable [1]. Over-reliance on self-sacrifice can lead to emotional exhaustion [27].

Institutional reforms are needed to address workload, rather than depending on individual coping strategies [16]. Teacher heroism should not mask systemic issues or delay necessary change.

Educators' dedication is inspiring, but their well-being should not be compromised. Institutions must offer concrete support, not just rely on personal commitment. Systemic change is essential to sustain quality education.

Theme 5: Role prioritization and coping strategies

The theme of "role prioritization and coping strategies" is evident in the narratives of educators who must balance teaching with additional responsibilities, this captures how educators navigate the complex demands of their professional responsibilities. This theme highlights the ongoing challenge of balancing teaching duties with other roles and the strategies educators employ to manage these competing demands. One participant expressed, "The balance between teaching and other duties is not perfect. I prioritize time management to handle my responsibilities. Despite planning, I sometimes struggle, especially with unexpected tasks" (P1). This highlights the imperfect yet essential role of time management strategies in coping with professional demands. Another participant emphasized, "Being a teacher is my main priority despite having other designations. Designations are secondary to the teaching role" (P1), reflecting a clear prioritization of teaching above other roles. These experiences align with findings in the literature, which indicate that role conflict and workload can contribute to teacher stress and burnout if not managed effectively [21].

Furthermore, the importance of supporting teachers through professional development and organizational policies is underscored by research that advocates for resilience-building and workload management

within educational settings [6, 12]. By recognizing these challenges and implementing targeted interventions, schools can help educators maintain their well-being and effectiveness.

Theme 6: Overwhelming workload and role conflict

The theme of "overwhelming workload and role conflict" is vividly illustrated by educators' accounts of balancing teaching with administrative and designation responsibilities. This refers to the experience of educators managing excessive and competing demands from both teaching and administrative responsibilities. This theme highlights how juggling multiple roles without adequate support can lead to stress, reduced teaching quality, and professional dissatisfaction.

One participant described, "The workload is very difficult because I have no dedicated staff to assist me. I handle all documents, emails, meetings, and coordination alone" (P2), highlighting the solo workload burden that many teachers face. Another reflected, "Now, I have additional roles such as International Affairs and ICET Coordinator. These additional roles involve significant administrative work. Administrative tasks always feel urgent, making it hard to focus on teaching" (P2), pointing to administrative overload. The tension between these competing demands is further captured in the statement, "Focusing on teaching causes delays in reports; focusing on reports sacrifices teaching quality" (P2), underscoring the teaching time sacrifice and the challenge of maintaining teaching role priority. Recent research supports these experiences, showing that increased administrative duties and role conflict are linked to higher stress and burnout among educators, which can negatively impact both teacher well-being and instructional quality [9, 30]. Addressing these issues through supportive policies, administrative assistance, and clearer role delineation is essential for sustaining teacher effectiveness and job satisfaction [19].

Theme 7: Structured time management and self-care

The theme of "structured time management and self-care" refers to the deliberate organization of one's daily tasks through methods such as time-block scheduling, while also making conscious efforts to maintain personal well-being. This theme highlights the balance educators strive for between efficiently managing work responsibilities and prioritizing rest to prevent burnout, even when work demands encroach on personal time.

One participant described, "I separate my day into time blocks for different tasks" (P3), illustrating the use of time-block scheduling as a proactive approach to organizing responsibilities. However, the demands of the profession often require additional sacrifices, as another narrative reveals: "Sometimes I sacrifice weekends to complete tasks" (P3), pointing to the challenge of maintaining boundaries between work and personal life. Despite these pressures, the participant notes, "Despite this, I try to rest to avoid burnout" (P3), emphasizing the ongoing effort to achieve self-care amidst competing demands. Research from recent years confirms that structured time management strategies, such as time-blocking and intentional rest, are linked to lower stress and greater job satisfaction among teachers [6, 2]. However, studies also warn that persistent work-life imbalance and weekend work can increase the risk of burnout, underscoring the need for educators to prioritize self-care and for institutions to support healthy work practices [3]. By fostering environments that encourage both effective time management and genuine rest, schools can help educators sustain their well-being and professional effectiveness.

Theme 8: Imbalance between teaching and research duties

The theme "Teaching Role Priority and Imbalance" refers to the tendency within academic settings for teaching responsibilities to be prioritized over other professional duties, such as research or administrative

work. This theme highlights the persistent imbalance educators experience when teaching is given greater importance, often at the expense of other essential roles.

One participant described this situation, "There is naturally no balance between teaching and other responsibilities. Teaching responsibilities are given more importance than other duties. Both teaching and other duties are important, but teaching dominates" (P4), emphasizing the dominance of teaching in their professional life. This imbalance can lead to challenges in fulfilling research obligations and may contribute to role conflict, stress, and reduced job satisfaction. Recent studies have shown that when teaching is consistently prioritized over research and other roles, faculty may experience diminished research productivity and increased professional strain [28, 32]. Furthermore, the lack of balance can hinder career progression and impact overall academic performance [8]. Addressing this issue requires institutional policies that recognize and support the multifaceted roles of educators, promoting a more equitable distribution of responsibilities to enhance both faculty well-being and institutional outcomes.

Theme 9: Disruption from unforeseen tasks and imbalance

The theme "Disruption from Unforeseen Tasks and Imbalance" refers to the challenges educators face when unexpected duties interfere with their ability to maintain equilibrium between teaching and research responsibilities. This theme underscores how sudden, unplanned tasks can exacerbate the already delicate balance between core academic roles, often leading to professional strain and reduced productivity.

As one participant explained, "There is no balance between teaching duties and research commitments" (P5), highlighting the disruption and imbalance caused by unforeseen responsibilities. Such disruptions can hinder research progress, increase stress, and diminish job satisfaction, as educators are forced to constantly shift focus and reprioritize their work. Recent studies reinforce these concerns, showing that unforeseen administrative and teaching demands are significant predictors of work-life conflict, emotional exhaustion, and decreased research output in higher education [8]. Addressing these issues requires institutions to implement supportive structures—such as flexible scheduling, clear workload policies, and administrative assistance—to help faculty manage unexpected tasks without compromising their primary academic commitments [28].

4. Conclusion

This qualitative study illuminates the multifaceted challenges faculty face in managing heavy teaching workloads, administrative duties, and the ongoing struggle to balance teaching with research and other professional commitments. The key findings reveal that overwhelming workload—characterized by high teaching loads, demanding administrative tasks, and the absence of dedicated support—significantly impacts both the quality of teaching and faculty well-being. Faculty frequently experience mental fatigue, reduced creativity, and compromised lesson planning, all of which detract from their ability to maintain high educational standards.

Time constraints emerge as a persistent issue, with faculty juggling multiple deadlines and struggling to provide adequate student consultation. The coping strategies employed—such as time-block scheduling, sacrificing weekends, and prioritizing student needs—highlight the resilience of faculty but also underscore the unsustainable nature of current workload expectations.

The study also exposes a pronounced imbalance between teaching and research responsibilities. Teaching duties consistently dominate, with administrative overload and unforeseen tasks further disrupting efforts to achieve a healthy work-life balance. Faculty often report imperfect time management and a lack of institutional support, leading to role conflict and chronic stress.

These findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing rich, narrative-based evidence of the lived realities behind faculty workload statistics. They reinforce the need for institutions to move beyond quantitative workload measures and address the qualitative impacts on teaching quality and faculty morale.

However, the study is limited by its qualitative scope and the potential lack of generalizability across different academic disciplines and institutional contexts. The reliance on self-reported data may also introduce bias. Future research should employ mixed-methods approaches and comparative studies across various institutions to deepen understanding of workload dynamics and their effects on both faculty and student outcomes.

Practical applications of these findings include the recommendation for institutions to implement clear workload policies, provide administrative support, and foster a culture that values both teaching and research. Policymakers and educational leaders should consider strategies to reduce administrative burdens and promote work-life balance, ensuring that faculty can sustain high-quality teaching while pursuing scholarly activities. For practitioners, adopting structured time management and self-care strategies may help mitigate some workload pressures, but systemic change is necessary to achieve lasting improvements.

In summary, this study underscores the urgent need for institutional reforms and targeted support to address faculty workload challenges, thereby enhancing both educator well-being and the quality of student learning experiences.

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