

Transcendental Phenomenological Study on Faculty Turnover in a Faith-Based Higher Education Institution in the Philippines

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Abstract-Employing Husserl's transcendental phenomenology research design, this study explores the lived experiences of faculty who resigned or accepted a job offer in another institution in a faith-based higher educational institution in the Philippines. Five participants were purposively sampled and presented in pseudonyms. A semi-structured interview guide was developed and utilized in the light of the research questions. One-on-one interviews through Zoom were guided by the relevant ethical considerations. Reflexivity was applied. Data were transcribed and analyzed employing Moustaka's (1994) transcendental phenomenological procedures for data analysis. Three central themes emerged: *Fulfillment of a Higher Purpose or Calling*, where participants followed God's leading into new mission fields; *Further Growth, Development, and Actualization*, reflecting the pursuit of professional challenge, skill expansion, and self-actualization; and *Common Challenges Encountered*, including heavy workloads, limited support, and uneven policy application. Contextually, participants recalled strong collegial bonds, a nurturing spiritual environment, and meaningful student engagement, while envisioning fairer policies, greater inclusivity, and more robust professional development. The study underscores how spiritual calling, growth needs, and workplace realities intertwine in shaping turnover decisions, offering insights for faith-based institutions to strengthen retention through alignment of mission, culture, and supportive practices.

Keywords: educational institution, faculty turnover, faith-based, higher education institution, transcendental phenomenological study

I. INTRODUCTION

The quality of faculty is one of the most important components of quality assurance in higher education. Faculty turnover can potentially impede efficiency, productivity, and sustainability. In the post-pandemic world, the prevalence of faculty turnover is considered one of the challenges encountered by school leadership. A high degree of faculty turnover has affected

instructional quality. Studies have shown that "retention is driven by factors like culture, policy, salary and benefits, and career progression" (Fitzenz as cited in Yousuf, 2025, para. 1).

Retaining employees who are engaged in knowledge work jobs such as academic faculty, IT engineers, accountants and the like is relatively more challenging than retaining employees who do non-knowledge work jobs. Rathod (2020) states that in educational setting, finding the right people for the educational task is already a challenging task in itself; much more so

motivating them to perform and keeping them. In addition, Pradhan and Choudhary (2022) investigated the retention strategies of faculty members in higher education institutions in the context of India and concluded that the present major challenge is to recruit and retain qualified and experienced faculty. On the other hand, Khan et al. (2021) explored the different influencing factors and criteria for retaining teaching staff at higher education institutes. Ghahramanian et al. (2024) conducted a study which attempted to develop a model that establishes factors of teachers' intention to leave the university. Interestingly, this study determined retention capability by means of the strength of relationship between teachers' intention to leave and factors like teachers' affective commitment, talent management practices of attracting, retaining and engaging.

"Considering the dearth of studies documenting faculty retention capability of higher education institutions in the Philippines, the study shall increase the understanding of paradigms that explain what could help higher education institutions enhance their retention capability . . . The study sees the need for the universities to strengthen talent management practices and nurture affective commitment among teachers." (para. 1)

Gibbons (2023) investigated the workplace factors that contribute to teacher intention to leave the profession. According to Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond as cited in Gibbons (2023), nationwide shortage of qualified teachers was prevalent with 90% of shortage brought about by attrition. In the context of faith-based higher education institutions in terms of employee's motivation to stay and eventual retention, a qualitative study on staff motivation and welfare in Adventist health facilities in Malawi found both motivating and demotivating factors among workers. Institutions' spiritual nourishment and working conditions with long-term benefits for individual and families were among the motivating factors. Meyer (2021) conducted mixed-method research to investigate teacher perceptions of factors contributing to higher retention in Christian schools. Perceptions were in the areas of individual theological ideology alignment with the organizational vision and mission, effective school leadership, and level of job satisfaction.

While global and national research has explored these factors in various contexts—including public, private, and faith-based institutions—there is a lack of inquiry into the lived experiences of faculty members in the Philippines who have chosen to resign or accept opportunities elsewhere. Most existing studies focus on identifying determinants of retention rather than describing the essence of the departure experience itself. In faith-based higher education institutions, where spiritual mission and institutional culture play a central role, understanding these experiences offers both practical and philosophical value.

This transcendental phenomenological study sought to capture and describe the lived experiences of former faculty from a Philippine faith-based higher education institution, with the aim of uncovering the essence of their decision to leave. Guided by Moustakas' (1994) approach, the research explores two central questions: (1) What are the lived experiences of former faculty that led to their decision to leave? and (2) How do they make sense of their contributions and experiences after leaving? By giving voice to those who have departed, the study aimed to draw out insights that can inform retention strategies, enhance talent management practices, and deepen understanding of the human experience of faculty turnover within faith-based academic settings.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Higher education remains central to national development, acting as a catalyst for economic growth, social mobility, innovation, and sustainability (Gao, Han, & Nie, 2023). Contemporary analyses highlight the diverse ways higher education institutions (HEIs) drive development by cultivating skilled human resources, advancing technological innovation, and producing leaders who carry forward sustainable national strategies.

However, as HEIs expand—especially in developing regions like the Philippines and Malaysia—faculty retention has become an ongoing challenge. Academic staff turnover rates in Malaysian private universities regularly exceed 26%, a figure that is more than double the rate at public universities (Orpina et al., 2023). The consequences of high turnover include operational inefficiencies, weakened institutional memory, and disruptions to accreditation or long-term planning (Columna & Garcia, 2024).

Recent studies (2020–2025) attribute faculty turnover mainly to voluntary departures rooted in a combination of workplace dissatisfaction, inadequate compensation, limited career advancement, and a perceived lack of recognition and fairness (Paul & Kee, 2020; Vijayan & Abbudullah, 2020). Empirical investigations in Malaysia have demonstrated turnover rates among academics of up to 26% annually, with salary, lack of promotion, work overload, perceived procedural and distributive injustice, and employer brand as major determinants (Orpina et al., 2023). Psychological well-being, social support, and institution-led health and safety measures also play important roles in moderating turnover intention (Ilyas, Abid, & Ashfaq, 2023).

Within the Philippines, recent research points to a very high level of turnover intention among private HEI faculty driven by dissatisfaction with compensation and benefits, quality of leadership and management, workplace culture, and external factors such as alternatives and economic pressures (Columna & Garcia, 2024). Organizational commitment, supportive leadership, and alignment of individual and institutional values have emerged as protective factors in both Malaysian and Philippine contexts (Paul & Kee, 2020; Orpina et al., 2023).

Solutions include transparent and competitive compensation, structured pathways for career advancement, improved recognition, flexible work arrangements, and fostering an inclusive, supportive workplace culture (Columna & Garcia, 2024; Vijayan & Abbudullah, 2020). The literature consistently advocates for multifaceted strategies to address turnover which aims to alleviate academic quality by ensuring that committed and qualified faculty are attracted, retained, motivated, and productive according to the goals of the institution.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This section presents the research design, participants, tools, procedures, and analysis technique utilized in the study:

1. **Research Design:** This study employed a qualitative research approach, a transcendental phenomenology research design. Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is a philosophical approach that seeks to understand that structures of consciousness and how they constitute our experience of the world. In line with this, the study followed Moustakas's (1994) systematic process of data collection and analysis to uncover the essence of the participants' lived experiences.
2. **Participants/Data Sources:** Five participants were purposively sampled through the following inclusion criteria: 1) The separation from the institution was through resignation or acceptance of a "call" or a job offer/opportunity in another institution, 2) The separation from the institution was within the last three years, and 3) Wiling to participate in the study. Four were female and one was male. Three were PhD degree holders, one was a master's degree holder, and one was a Bachelor's degree holder. Three were above 40 years old and two were above 30 years old. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned: Anne (P1), Bella (P2), Camille (P3), Danny (P4), and Emma (P5).
3. **Tools and Instruments:** A semi-structured interview guide was developed in conformity with the research questions. This guide aligns with the Transcendental Phenomenology research design to draw the lived experiences and capture the meaning attached by the participants to their experiences.
4. **Procedures:** After obtaining informed consent from the participants, a schedule for one-on-one interview was arranged and facilitated. They were asked to sign an informed consent assuring participants of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. Interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom and these ranged between 25-45 minutes. The researchers practiced reflexivity to minimize subjectivity through acknowledgement of their beliefs and potential biases in the conduct of the study, particularly in the analysis of data.
5. **Analysis Techniques:** Data were analyzed following Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological analysis. The process involved several stages:
 - Epoche and Horizontalization –The researchers first engaged in bracketing (epoche) to suspend personal judgments. Then, each statement in the transcripts was treated with equal value through horizontalization. Significant statements that related directly to the experience were identified, and overlapping or repetitive statements were eliminated.
 - Clustering and Thematizing – The significant statements were grouped into meaning units or clusters to identify emerging themes. These themes represented the invariant constituents of the experience across participants.
 - Textural and Structural Descriptions – For each participant, a textural description (what was experienced) and a structural description (how it was experienced, including the context and conditions) were constructed.
 - Essence Formation – Finally, the researchers synthesized the textural and structural descriptions to arrive at the essence of the phenomenon. This essence represents the shared core of the participants' experiences of leaving the institution, capturing both the individual and collective meanings.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and discussions in relation to the two research questions: 1) What are the lived experiences of former faculty that led to their decision to leave a faith-based higher education institution in the Philippines? and 2) How do former faculty of a faith-based higher education institution in the Philippines make sense of their contributions and experiences after leaving the institution?

Experiences of Former Faculty

The lived experiences of former faculty members of a faith-based university in the Philippines were explored using Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenology. Through horizontalization, significant statements were clustered into themes that reflect both the textural (what was experienced) and structural (how it was experienced) dimensions of meaning. Three major themes emerged: (a) Fulfillment of a Higher Purpose or Calling, (b) Further Growth, Development, and Actualization, and (c) Common Challenges Encountered. In addition, participants reflected on the broader context of their experiences, highlighting both life-giving aspects and areas they hoped the institution would improve.

Table 1

Experiences of Former Faculty in a Faith-based University in the Philippines

Codes	Themes	Moustakas' Structure	Universal
Less participation in church activities due to exhaustion from too much workload in school	Common Challenges	Bodily Concerns	
Wanting career growth Outgrew the role Professional stagnation Needing time for break Feeling alone in my role Advocacy efforts were unsupported Lack of teachers	Further Development, Actualization	Growth, and	Time
Expand skills Further growth and development Go where God leads New mission field New opportunities for service	Common Challenges Common Challenges		Space Relationality
	Further Development, Actualization	Growth, and	Materiality
	Fulfillment of a Higher Purpose or Calling		Causality

Fulfillment of a Higher Purpose or Calling

When asked about the key factors that influenced their decision to leave, participants consistently expressed a longing to pursue a higher purpose. Anne shared, "As a

denominational worker, I would like to answer a call for ministry." She recalled nights of prayer and conversations with her family, weighing the stability of her teaching job against the conviction that "God was opening another field." Emma also echoed the same sentiment, *"It has always been my dream to serve as missionary."* She described her calling as a dream carried since youth—one she often whispered in prayer during faculty worships. For Bella, the pursuit of fulfillment was closely tied to her expertise: *"I felt that I could expand and achieve more if I went out of the institution and availed of the open opportunities."* These participants were in unison on the calling they perceived that they were convicted about.

Participants expressed that the calling was experienced through prayer, discernment, and a sense of spiritual conviction that their departure was part of God's leading. Seemingly, leaving the institution was not seen as abandoning service but as extending it into new mission fields where their gifts could be more fully utilized. Megerian and Zarei (2020) found that individuals often leave stable employment not from dissatisfaction but from a conviction that they are meant to serve a more meaningful purpose. This is even more evident in the context of this faith-based higher education institution as part of a large education system worldwide which is attached to or one with the work of the church. Generally, faculty of this specific context do not have an employee mindset but a missionary mindset which leads to the spiritual analysis when a need in another mission field opens. Such is based on the treatment of work as a lifework, a calling, a sacred responsibility to God.

This supports the participants' accounts that their transitions were vocational redirections rather than resignations. Particularly, this finding provides insights to the leadership, through the Human Resource Office, on the reality of the employees' sense of higher purpose; such that, the institution might look into initiating and facilitating programs to fill this longing, especially from the academic faculty sector whose profile is in demand somewhere and nature of work is dynamic and evolving.

Further Growth, Development, and Actualization

Growth is one of the recurring themes across all participants. They explicitly expressed their need for continuous growth. Bella explained, *"I really wanted to learn, to be in more challenging situation where I can practice my advocacy."* She spoke vividly of her longing to join workshops and research networks that were beyond the reach of her institution. She imagined herself learning from peers abroad, and applying new methods in her classes. Each semester that passed without those opportunities felt, in her words, like "being left out while the world outside was moving forward." Moreover, Danny stated, *"I need time for break for me to grow. I don't want to be serving without passion."* His words carried both fatigue and hope—an awareness that true service must flow from renewal, not exhaustion. Camille on the other hand, emphasized the importance of stewardship over her own gifts, saying, *"It is important for me to use what God has given me to continue to grow."* Her statement revealed a deep sense of responsibility, viewing growth not as personal ambition but as a sacred duty to nurture and maximize the talents entrusted to her.

The data elicited that growth was constrained by repetitive work, limited institutional opportunities, and heavy workloads. Participants felt that stepping outside the institution was necessary for self-actualization, aligning with their authentic selves and passions, aspiring for better work conditions, organizational set-ups with more equitable policies, and rooms for

growth. Duffy et al. (2011) emphasize that individuals who view their work as a calling often seek continual growth and self-realization. For the participants, leaving was an intentional step toward such development.

Growth is inevitable. Hence, every human being is wired with innate desire to grow, change, and improve. This is more evident among academic faculty, professionals who deal with learning and research. Pylvas et al. (2022) conclude that professional growth in workplaces is connected to formal and informal practices, versatility of working environments and social relations . . . professional growth and contemporary challenges in working life [are related]" (p. 1). This finding points to the vital role of professional development programs in higher education. There is a pressing need for school leadership to plan, act, and reflect with intentionality when it comes to professional growth programs across all departments in an institution.

Common Challenges Encountered

In any organization, challenges from all sides abound. Profession-related challenges also factored into the decisions of the faculty to leave. Danny, for example, lamented, *"It wasn't just the tasks—it was the lack of support. I felt like I was constantly carrying a heavy load with no one to turn to."* He recounted how he often wrestled alone with difficult student cases and even threats from parents, yet felt he had no safe space or trusted avenue to share these burdens. This put him in a seemingly vulnerable situation which eventually affected his mental and emotional state. In addition, Anne noted, *"Lack of teachers and load of work is distributed to a few individuals only. Responsibilities are all in the College, because we cannot rely on adjunct faculty to help us with other activities . . . There are responsibilities in the department that are not reflected in the load."* Camille, whose expertise is uncommon and is a pressing need of the community and the Church, expressed that she endeavored to initiate and champion programs within and outside the institution. However, through the years that she did, she felt that she was not really able to reach the zenith of that dream due to the perceived lack of support of the institution. She was glad that she could serve various external groups but she came to a point of plateau. This challenge, among others, led her to look for a place to go to grow and to keep herself abreast with the trends of her field.

Participants experienced these difficulties through unbalanced workloads, strained supervisor relationships, and inconsistently applied policies. Such conditions created exhaustion, isolation, and frustration. Miller and Taylor (2012) found that interpersonal dynamics, workload, and perceived unfairness in policies often drive voluntary turnover—echoing the participants' lived realities. These affirm the challenges that the participants shared. According to White-Lewis et al. (2022), there are several reasons, at the personal or individual and organizational level, faculty leave their academic positions in an institution. "These include dissatisfaction in the general sense and with work-life balance; limited job security and dissatisfaction with compensation; productivity; familial and geographic concerns; and discrimination experienced in the workplace stemming from gender, race, and partner status" (para. 5).

No organization is perfect, but this finding affirms numerous literature on faculty turnover and how challenges contribute to such. For the school administration and human resource leaders, much can be gleaned from this finding which is not only true to the locale of

this research but also to the rest of the institutions where some faculty might feel unsupported through policies, process, and practices which have long existed. Leaders are called to review policies and ensure that qualified academic faculty are attracted, retained, motivated, and productive.

Context of the Experiences of Former Faculty in a Faith-based University in the Philippines

Table 2 presents the contextual backdrop of the lived experiences of former faculty members from a faith-based university in the Philippines. It highlights the most significant moments in their journey, the reasons they would consider returning or recommend the institution to others, and the specific institutional practices they hope to see improved.

Table 2 *Context of the Experiences of Former Faculty in a Faith-Based University in the Philippines*

Codes	Themes
Supportive and warm relationship with colleagues; Opportunities to mentor and guide students; Meaningful contribution to student growth and success	Living in a Circle of Care: Collegial Bonds and the Joy of Shaping Young Lives
Serene and peaceful campus atmosphere; Supportive environment for family life and child development; Uplifting and meaningful spiritual programs and worship services	Dwelling in a Sanctuary of Peace, Faith, and Family Nurture
Revised and fairer workload distribution policies; Promotion of an inclusive and welcoming work culture; Strengthened opportunities for professional development; Clearer and more transparent communication from leadership	Flourishing through Just Policies, Belonging, and Paths for Growth

The experiences of former faculty in a faith-based university in the Philippines reveal an interplay of community, spirituality, and institutional support that shaped both their professional and personal lives. Anne recalled late-night review sessions with students preparing for board exams—moments when exhaustion turned into joy as she watched their confidence grow and later celebrated their success.

Bella and Camille described their years of teaching as a journey of growth, where mentoring students deepened their resilience, faith, and sense of purpose. They also discovered a love for research, nurtured by the university's encouragement, which they viewed not only as an academic task but as a meaningful avenue for service and professional development.

The campus itself was remembered as a sanctuary of peace, with its serene environment, faith-centered programs, and culture of holistic well-being. Looking forward, participants

envisioned policies that promote fairness, inclusivity, and professional development—conditions that would help faculty fully flourish in their calling.

These aspirations affirm Van Manen's (2016) view that meaning arises from lived relations and Tisdell's (2003) insight that faith-based institutions can create transformative spaces where spirituality, community, and professional practice converge.

Essence

In the quiet corridors of a faith-based university, former faculty recall a life woven with threads of calling, care, and challenge—a tapestry where sacred purpose intertwined with the rhythms of teaching. They remember the joy of mentoring students and the peace of a campus that nurtured both family and faith. Yet they also carry memories of unbalanced loads, unsupported advocacy, and dreams constrained by institutional structures. Their departures were not acts of discontent alone, but acts of faith—decisions to embrace growth, authenticity, and God's leading toward new mission fields. They envision a future where fairness, inclusion, and professional flourishing are lived realities, so that every teacher may serve with passion, purpose, and peace, embodying the biblical truth: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (Colossians 3:23, NIV).

V. CONCLUSION

Through the Transcendental Phenomenology research design, faculty turnover is seen through the lens of the participants—faculty who have resigned or have been called to serve another institution. The four themes—fulfillment of a higher purpose or calling; further growth, development, and actualization; alignment of personal goals with the institution's goals; and common challenges encountered—depict the lived experiences of the participants and the meaning they attached to their experiences. It is noteworthy how the participants underpinned fulfillment of a calling as primary reason for moving to another mission field. This standpoint could be attributed to the profile of the institution as faith-based in which work is regarded as a calling and as a ministry, a spiritual responsibility. The second theme which is on further growth and development is somewhat related to the first theme. Fulfillment transpires when there is a continuous quest for growth and such is fulfilled.

Alignment of goals and beliefs is attributed to the school profile as faith-based. Challenges encountered were commonly on localized work areas where issues related to policies, processes, and practices come into play. For future research, it is recommended that a wider survey on faculty turnover across faith-based institutions in the region be explored. Based on the results, it is recommended that school leaders and human resource managers strengthen policies on continuing professional education. They are to also devise mechanisms to improve the work culture and environment, through periodic review of policies, processes, and practices thereby making faculty retention more likely than faculty turnover.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The authors have played different roles in the conduct of this research. Dr. Annalyn Bacolod, Dr. Gracel Ann Saban, and Dr. Lolina Mostaza had their share of responsibilities from the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data analysis, and writing supervision.

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