



Balik-Serbisyo: A Phenomenological Study Exploring the Lived Experiences of DOST-SEI JLSS Scholars Working as Public-School Teachers to Fulfill the Return of Service Agreement

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Abstract

Some existing scholarships require a mandatory Return of Service Agreement (RSA) for their scholars, which include DOST-SEI JLSS Scholarship Program where the scholar-graduates work as teachers as part of the RSA. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of five (5) DOST-SEI JLSS scholar-graduates working as public-school teachers within the Division of San Pablo City through actual interviews. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis, where the responses of the participants were coded to generate categories and themes. The findings revealed that the scholar-graduates were experiencing difficulties in teaching due to inadequate preparation to teach, interpersonal stressors, and personality differences. It was also found out that they utilize internal and external assistance towards development and personal and social support with work regulation. The DOST-SEI should be able to provide assistance to their scholar-graduates by giving them proper training and holding teaching seminars and meetings that can help them with their work in the future.

Keywords: *challenges, DOST-SEI JLSS, return of service, scholar-graduates, teaching*

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Introduction

There are scholarship programs that may require a mandatory return of service agreement (RSA) from their scholars. According to CHED Memorandum No. 3 (s. 2017), return service is the work that must be done as part of the scholar's obligations under the grant after completing the scholarship. The scholar is expected to work under this return service term. This agreement is implemented to address the shortage of professionals in different fields, such as teaching. Some scholars were allocated to this profession since there were not enough teachers in the field. This shortage cannot be solved by just hiring 10,000 teachers, according to the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (Abarca, 2022). Because of these, scholars from different fields were assigned to be teachers. This will only become an issue when the scholars assigned to this field have no proper, adequate, and necessary training or background (Pasamanero, 2022).

At present, the graduates from the DOST-SEI scholarship program are given priority in job placements in the Philippines, specifically in teaching for Department of Education (DepEd) schools. These graduates are given the position of Special Science Teacher I. In general, most of the scholar-graduates major or specialize in fields related to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), however Parsons' Trait and Factor theory suggests that the teaching career might not be best suited for the scholars as talents, skills, and personality plays a role in career matching. In contrast, Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory suggests that factors like causal events have an impact on people's career choice, implying that through these several factors, the overall career and person match could change overtime.

In addition to the DOST-SEI program, several studies have looked at other national and international scholarships. There is also a lack of studies focusing on the education field and exploring the experiences of the scholar-graduates working as teachers for their return of service term. The majority of the research is focused on medical scholarships for students in the medical field. The interactions, activities, and environments in the medical field differ from those in the teaching field, which may have an impact on the findings of those studies. Moreover, local literature discussing scholarship programs in the Philippines is limited.

This research aimed to explore the life experiences of currently working teachers who were once DOST-SEI scholar grantees. In this way, the currently working teachers'

experiences helped to determine the impact of the scholarship program and its RSA had on the scholar grantees. This research also aimed to help students who were considering applying for the scholarship program in determining whether or not it was beneficial to get the scholarship based on the lived experiences of previous scholar grantees. Additionally, this could help aspirants of the scholarship by providing new knowledge regarding the program. Moreover, this research would help to understand the strategies and coping mechanisms of the past scholars to overcome the challenges of the RSA as teachers.

Methodology

This research study utilized qualitative-phenomenological research method to look into the lived experiences of the participants. This type of research is used to investigate the experiences of humans and what it means to them. The main goal of this research approach was to examine people's experiences in order to ascertain their shared understanding and the ways in which they understood both their own and other people's experiences. Using purposive sampling, five participants were selected who met the following criteria: (1) must be a DOST-SEI JLSS scholar-graduate; (2) must be fulfilling their return of service agreement as a teacher in public high schools for one to three years; and (3) handling STEM related subjects.

Data were collected in the form of individual interviews using a semi-structured interview guide that underwent expert validation. With their consent, the participants agreed to have their interviews audio-recorded. To analyze the data gathered, thematic analysis was used. This type of analysis is pertinent to phenomenology because it emphasizes the subjective nature of the perceptions, feelings, and experiences of the respondents (Chang & Wang, 2021). It is a technique for analyzing qualitative data that includes reading through a collection of data and identifying themes by looking for patterns in the meaning of the data. The researchers identify patterns, generate codes, and organize codes into themes using thematic analysis (Delve, 2020). Throughout the investigation, ethical standards were strongly adopted and followed. These ethical considerations were informed consent, voluntary participation and anonymity of the participants, confidentiality of their responses, risk of harm, and member checking.

Findings

The findings revealed that the scholar-graduates were experiencing difficulties in teaching due to inadequate preparation to teach, interpersonal stressors, and personality differences. It was also found out that they utilize internal and external assistance towards development and personal and social support with work regulation.

The participants experienced hardships fulfilling their return of service because of inadequate preparation to teach. All five participants experienced lack of (1) background information (2) training and four of them also had problems with lack of (3) materials. These experiences support the findings of Elnaga and Imran (2013), wherein it states that effective training is a key factor to increase individual and company capability, enhancing the employees' performance at work.

Aside from the lack of preparation, they also experienced interpersonal stressors. The participants indicated they were having problems with their (1) workload and (2) students, and two of those five individuals said they were also having problems with the (3) parents of the students. The study of Ketchumpol (2021) found out that the issues non-education major teachers encountered were classroom management, followed by difficulty using educational media, developing lesson plans, and overcoming student motivation issues similar to these findings.

Another challenge that the participants faced was the personality differences. Three out of five participants said that they have (1) deficient social skills, while two participants answered that they have (2) sufficient social skills. These statements support Haseeb and Sattar's (2018) results that some of their participants have stress due to having insufficient interpersonal skills needed to meet the requirements of the job.

When asked about their adaptive strategies in teaching, thematic two categories were formulated: (1) self-engaged learning, and (2) assistance from co-workers. In line with the scholar-graduates' responses, Saka (2021) found out that teacher cooperation is an effective strategy for raising teacher standards and that teacher collaboration will help teachers to succeed in their teaching endeavors and give them a chance to advance their knowledge, skills, and resourcefulness.

The coping mechanisms mentioned by the participants of this study include (1) self and relational assistance and (2) self or working time regulations. These findings support the implications of the study conducted by Rabago-Mingoa (2017) which mentioned coping

mechanisms which include dealing with their stress and its sources directly, having hobbies which bring entertainment, seeking outside assistance, and receiving support from a group.

Conclusion

This research study aimed to explore the lived experiences of DOST-SEI JLSS scholar-graduates working as public-school teachers to fulfil their return of service agreement. Emerging themes were derived from the challenges in working conditions and personal skills, coping mechanisms, and adaptive strategies of the scholar-graduates. There were three emerging themes that were identified about the challenges facing the scholar graduates in their working conditions and personal skills, and they are: inadequate preparation to teach, interpersonal stressors, and personality differences. There were also two emerging themes that were identified about the adaptive strategies and coping mechanisms of the scholar-graduates, and they are: included internal and external assistance towards development and personal and social support with work regulations.

The study recommends that the institution of DOST-SEI should be able to provide assistance to their scholar-graduates, for example, by giving them proper training regarding topics that pertain to pedagogies and classroom maintenance and holding teaching seminars and meetings that can help them with their work in the future before assigning them to their respective posts. It is also recommended that future researchers may explore the gender variable regarding DOST-SEI JLSS scholars in terms of whether they will continue to pursue teaching or not, as well as DOST scholar-graduates who have different scholarship contracts, like the Merit Scholarship, which has a different return of service assignment compared to the DOST-SEI JLSS Scholarship.

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