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Exploring Human Resources Management Practices in University Initial Teacher Education: An Analytical Framework

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This article analyzes the approach of human resource management (HRM) and its practice in teacher education, exploring the effect that the casualization of academic staff at universities has on initial teacher education and vice versa.

Drawing on a framework based on criteria of HRM practices, antecedents, and organizational commitment within the confines of academic identity, the article reviews the literature, considering the changing context of teacher education in Ireland, and explores the HRM concerns of part-time teacher education employees within this analytical framework. The article concludes by highlighting key issues and challenges in unbundling the traditional HRM approach, particularly in the context of educational research and the imperative of doing so within the evolving teacher education landscape.

Keywords: HRM practice; teacher education; higher education

Introduction

The majority of research on casualization in higher education has focused on academics in universities, particularly in the US, UK, and Australia, with some studies on Europe (Kimber 2003; Lopes and Dewan 2014; Willmott 1995). The number of academic staff employed on non-tenured teaching contracts at universities has increased, and in some institutions, the majority of teaching is conducted by this cohort of staff (Andrews et al., 2016.) Historically academic appointments at higher education (colleges and universities) benefited from favorable terms of employment and remuneration (Altbach

1999). Nonetheless education management practices have led to greater managerial control of employment conditions resulting in a greater number of academic part-time recruits (Kimber, 2003; Nadolny & Ryan 2015), with many non-tenured academic staff employed on teaching-only contracts (Andrews et al. 2016; Bryson 2013).

Under economic austerity, after the financial crisis and pressures of declining state funding, research shows that universities may have pressured faculty departments to generate a surplus cash flow, fulfilling university metrics and expectations (Hazelkorn, 2017; Lynch & Ivancheva, 2015). In many regards, these expectations have introduced private-sector management practices to public-sector institutions. Along with more assertive management behaviors, an ecosystem with “greater performance management, intensification of work, degrading of work, reduced worker autonomy, lower pay, and more casualized insecure jobs” (O’Sullivan et al. 2020, p. 54) evolved. Jacoby (2006) agrees, stating that the employment of part-time staff is one method by which higher education institutions maintain their financial health. Similarly, Thedwall (2008) argued that this type of hiring benefits higher education institutions in the US through salary savings.

In Ireland, most academic core state-funded staff are on permanent full-time contracts, according to the HEA (2018). However, as was first evidenced ten years ago during the decline in the Irish economy, when the government capped the number of posts in the public sector, there has been a resultant proliferation of part-time and fixed-term flexible research and teaching contracts (IFUT, 2015). Cush (2016) found that in numerical terms, the number of staff employed in part-time lecturing positions was high, though in some cases, the amount of lecturing or tutoring undertaken by a given person was low. Aligned with this, the priority of and resultant expansion of research activity in Irish HEI’s has created a scenario where there has been a proliferation in the

recruitment of contractual research staff and teaching buy-outs. Loxley et al. (2016) noted in a 2011 study, 80% of all the 5202 researchers in Irish higher education were on temporary contracts. Unlike research-only fixed-term positions, which allow time for publication and professional visibility, teaching-only positions are seen and experienced as an academic cul-de-sac (Locke 2014).

This paper examines the Irish higher education (HE) landscape and teacher education, exploring the literature and HRM practices affecting part-time teacher educators. In the paper, we refer to tenured staff as those employees on permanent contracts and non-tenured, sessional, casual, part-time staff as those without permanent contracts. The paper first introduces the Irish higher education and the teacher education landscape, followed by practices pertaining to HRM of initial teacher education. The analytical framework by Smeenk et al. (2006) is presented according to HRM practices, antecedents, organizational commitment, and academic identity categories.

Context, Irish Higher Education and Initial Teacher Education

Universities are complex organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Mechanic 1962). The Irish higher education sector comprises two main sectors: the university sector and the institute of technology (IoT) sector. Trinity College Dublin was established in 1592, with three others opening in October 1849. Irish higher education was reconfigured in 1908, and the National University of Ireland (NUI) was established, consisting of University Colleges in Cork, Dublin, and Galway. St. Patricks College Maynooth received NUI recognition two years later and university status was granted to the University of Limerick and Dublin City University in 1989. Aligned with this was a proliferation of teacher training colleges throughout the country. The IoT sector was established in the 1960s, originally titled Regional Technical Colleges (Clancy 2008), and many now are re-establishing themselves as Technological Universities (HEA,

2011). There are currently eight Universities and fourteen Institutes of Technology (Government of Ireland 2020).

The initial teacher education (ITE) landscape has been significantly affected by the aforementioned higher education organizational changes but has changed most significantly following recommendations by the Sahlberg Report (2012), commissioned by the Higher Education Authority. The most noteworthy proposals included an increased emphasis on research within teacher education and the location of all teacher education delivery within a university setting (HEA 2019). The international review panel was asked to “identify possible new structures ... leverage the current strengths in the system; and envision innovative strategies so that Ireland can provide a teacher education regime that is comparable with the best in the world” (p. 5). During a time of advancing internationalization and a transformative higher education sector, the panel was invited to bring Ireland in line with other countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and ‘strong performing’ education systems. The report found that in strong performing education systems, pre-service teacher education was located within a university setting “where theory and practice are combined to form a foundation for teaching that is on a par with other academic professions” (p.5). Therein followed a reconceptualizing of all Irish pre-service teacher education programs (HEA 2019) into national university-based teacher education Centres of Excellence (HEA 2019) along with a myriad of curricular reforms by the Department of Education primary and post-primary levels. Simultaneously these changes occurred at a time when there was a lack of human, material, and financial resources to support the restructuring of ITE programs (O’Donoghue et al., 2017), and the cuts to core funding in higher education during the economic crisis of 2008 was

never reversed even with student numbers continuing to increase (OECD, 2020) thereby leaving faculty and management constrained by resources available to them.

Teacher Education and HRM

The statutory body for teaching in Ireland, the Teaching Council, was established in 2006 and accredits initial teacher education programs and maintains the register of teachers. Their requirements for accrediting teacher education programs specify the program entry requirements, subject requirements, a partnership model for school placement, staff-student ratios, and curriculum content (Teaching Council, 2017). The Teaching Council requires a student-teacher ratio of 15:1 across all their accredited programs. This requirement undoubtedly challenges many university sector recruitment norms. A second challenge is recruiting staff in teacher education for school placement observation and subject methodology specialists required for post-primary education. The majority of this cohort are recruited on a part-time contractual basis for the few hours of teaching required. The part-time teacher education staff are undoubtedly necessary to support the accredited programs, but as Hyland (2012) expressed, concerns exist that many “do not hold doctoral degrees nor do they appear to be engaged in academic or pedagogic research” (p.20). The international expert panel also expressed similar research capacity issues, particularly regarding pedagogical content knowledge (Gleeson et al., 2012; Sahlberg et al., 2012).

The staffing profile of Schools of Education was explored by Gleeson et al. (2012) and again by MacPhail and O’Sullivan (2019) when they investigated the potential for research capacity building in initial teacher education programs in Ireland. They described

The dominant professional pathway to working in teacher education in Ireland has been, until recently, that those with professional experience as teachers,

along with a Master's degree, would have been initially seconded to a teacher education post for a period of up to ten years. (MacPhail & O'Sullivan, 2019, p.496)

Most of these teachers then secured permanent contracts and stayed within the university sector. More recent permanent appointments to teacher education have doctoral studies completed upon recruitment; therefore, they are research-informed. Being research-informed, but not necessarily research-active, was not a norm in the US (Cochran-Smith et al., 2008) but was more common in teacher education in Europe (Lunenberg et al., 2014).

Analytical Framework

This paper aims to examine factors connected to the HRM practices of part-time teacher education university employees. We start by using an analytical framework to explore the literature according to defined parameters. There is limited research on teacher education specifically, and therefore university teaching and university HRM practices are highlighted with parallels drawn within the context of initial teacher education. The analytical model adopted is that by Smeenk et al. (2006) based on four criteria: (1) HRM practices (2) antecedents (3) affect organizational commitment (4) within the confines of academic identity (figure 1). The arrows represent the effects of HRM practices and the antecedent categories on organizational commitment.

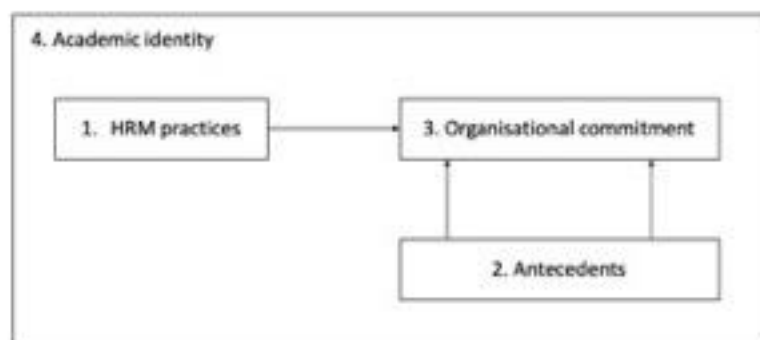


Figure 1. Analytical framework (adapted from Smeenk et al., 2006)

1. HRM practices

HRM practices include those related to decentralization, compensation, participation, training/development, employment security, social interactions, management style, communication, and performance appraisal (Smeenk et al., 2006).

Barrett (2004), drawing on the employer-employee relationship and ethical integrity, affirmed evidence of a violation of the psychological contract between universities and casual teaching staff due to a 'hard Human Resources Management' approach. Referring to the nature of the casual contract, he contended that

common strategies are to require tutors to attend lectures for which they are not paid or to undertake marking duties that extend beyond the scope of the conditions of the EBA. Hence, these strategies essentially reduce the hourly pay rate for teaching below what many tutors feel reflects their true worth. (Barrett, 2004, p.96)

Barret (2004) also highlighted the 'downward flexibility of pay and conditions for the work absorbed by casual teaching staff at universities. Similarly, Junor (2004) surmised that casual teachers spend more time on the job than is covered in their pay, and Kimber (2003) referred to the precarious working conditions having higher levels of job insecurity and financial uncertainty.

Concern has been raised over the lack of training and development for casual and non-tenured staff, with Kift (2003) and Percy and Beaumont (2008) evidencing risk taken by universities. Barrington (1999) explains, "As a larger number of undergraduate students are being exposed to ever-increasing numbers of part-time academics and postgraduate teaching assistants, there is a belated concern about the quality of educational experience that they might be receiving." (p.2). Lazarsfeld-Jensen and

Morgan (2009) also raised concerns about the teaching quality of part-time staff and the lack of appropriate professional development opportunities. Percy and Beaumont (2008) point out that in some cases, part-time staff are not held to the same accountability regimes and surveillance of teaching quality, student satisfaction, and student outcomes that tenured staff undergoes.

Regarding progression or promotion, in general at universities, research and research outputs are highly valued, and thus workloads are skewed towards a research focus as academics advance. With promotion advancement based on teaching, research, and service, the majority of tenured academic staff have the opportunity to perform research and teaching duties and thus have the promotion opportunities (Andrews et al., 2016). This is not the case for non-tenured staff.

2. Antecedents

The antecedents are the employee personal variables, job and role characteristics, and structural factors related to employment and HR practices. Naturally, reward and appreciation are important in employment contexts (Perkins & Jones, 2020), and some research indicates that part-time, casual academics are satisfied with their employment status (Brown & Gold, 2007). However, significantly more literature and research highlight the negative outcomes of casual part-time employment, not alone regarding pay and conditions, but also career and psychological well-being (Brown, Goodman, & Yasukawa, 2006; Courtois & O'Keefe, 2015; Lopes & Dewan, 2014). From a sociological perspective, there are many risks posed to individuals caught in the cycle of casualization (Brown, Goodman, & Yasukawa 2006; Junor, 2004). Such factors may be their marginal status, their average to poor working and employment conditions, the lack of recognition and opportunity, and the challenges they face as part-time employees while being important 'frontend' workers (Barrett, 2004; Kimber, 2003;

Percy & Beaumont, 2008). Many of these centrifugal forces do not lend themselves to part-time teacher educators' progression or advancement within the sector. Furthermore, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) in Australia observed that a high proportion of sessional teaching staff remains in an unstable employment position for prolonged periods with the university re-employing the same staff under the same casual conditions over many semesters (NTEU, 2005). Consequently, these staff members do not receive benefits such as sick, holiday, or parental leave and other entitlements to which full-time employees are entitled.

Klopper & Power (2014) found that the majority of part-time teacher's in higher education were females in the 50+ age bracket. NTEU (2005) observed large increases in female part-time non-tenured teaching staff in Australian universities, with Lynch and Ivancheva (2015) publishing similar findings from Ireland. Apart from the gender and age imbalance, such rapid growth is a cause for alarm where universities continue to hire a growing number of part-time academic staff. This trend observably correlates with budgetary cuts and a reduced level of investment in higher education (Kimber, 2003; Bradley et al., 2008).

3. Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment includes three forms, (1) that of affective commitment, when employees want to remain; (2) continuance commitment, the need to remain; and (3) normative commitment when one ought to remain. The strategic importance of developing employee commitment is not new (Walton, 1985), and a high-commitment approach to HRM attempts to create the conditions necessary to facilitate voluntary employee involvement and identification with organizational goals (Gellatly et al., 2009).

For university part-time non-tenured employees, the organizational commitment is not always evident. Junor (2004) argues that “University casualisation. . . [is more] a creature of political regulation than market freedom” (p. 277). Junor (2004) expands this by contradicting the prevailing narrative of individual choice and flexibility by arguing that long-term part-time employment is in many cases a ‘minority choice’ (p. 277), leading to the exclusion of professional growth, entitlement, privilege, and the security of permanency, which have the combined potential to decrease the competitive position of the part-time employee and a cycle ensues. Leathwood and Read (2020) analyzed how a ‘short-term’ temporal rationality impacts casualized non-tenured academics and their teaching and pedagogical relationships with students. Sahlberg et al. (2012) too noted that non-tenured part-time staff members were not adequately integrated into ‘the scholarly culture’ of the university, recommending that research-driven teacher education programs need to be adequately staffed by full-time university lecturers “well versed in research and current debated about practice” (Gleeson et al., 2012).

4. Academic identity

Many casual or non-tenured teachers bring valuable skills to higher education teaching; however, temporary and part-time employment has created a second class. Such a division creates a buffer protecting permanent and tenured staff from the effects of massification (Willmott 1995), enabling university management to achieve permanent budget and resource flexibility (Shumar 1997).

Rose (2000) suggested that university teaching professionals would score very low by combining the indices of job satisfaction, expressed happiness, and self-reported stress. In their study of Canadian and UK Universities, Knight and Trowler (1999) evidenced the academic environment as increasingly characterized by an erosion of

trust, an intensification of academic work, a decline in collegiality (Percy & Beaumont, 2008), threatening self-identity with feelings of alienation and stress.

While part-time teaching staff make significant and valuable contributions to university teaching activities, it can be noted that high-quality part-time non-tenured staff can impact the quality and effectiveness of programs ensuring a culture of student-centered success and quality graduate outcomes (Anderson, 2007; Percy & Beaumont, 2008). Nonetheless, a study by Jacoby (2006) presented results on student graduation rates at community colleges and the increase of part-time faculty employment adversely affecting student success. Allinder (1994) emphasized the bi-directional relationship between high self-efficacy and quality teaching, concluding that teachers with a strong sense of efficacy exhibit high levels of planning and organization, exhibit enthusiasm for teaching, are more committed to their profession. Miller (1998) argued that casualized non-tenured staff experience a significantly different work experience to that of their tenured colleagues. Universities and HRM practices need to proactively employ highly qualified part-time teacher educators and make continuous professional development and career trajectories available for equality and academic identity to be fully recognized.

Conclusion

There has been a dominant discourse surrounding higher education institutional compliance with an imperative to cut budgets and remain flexible, and thus produce a growing cohort of casual, part-time, non-tenured staff - primarily teaching staff.

Considering teacher education in Ireland, this paper presented explored the HRM concerns of part-time teacher education employees within the theoretical framework by Smeenk et al. (2006) and based on criteria of HRM practices, antecedents, organizational commitment within the confines of academic identity. Like all faculties,

Schools of Education have been affected by this. However, when universities engage in workforce planning, their part-time teacher educators can devote time to teaching preparation, innovative and creative curricula design, research development, and career progression. Through engaging in strategic workforce planning for the professional development of casual part-time teacher educators, research and pedagogical initiatives, HRM policies and supports can be enabled. Ensuring quality improvements for all employees through professional development and ongoing evaluation and review processes universities develop sustainable HR practices.

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