

**Exploring Factors Affecting Adjunct Faculty Marginalization, Institutional Support
Deficits, and Exclusion in Higher Education**

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NANA SHAIBU AKAEZE

San Diego, California

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Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of adjunct faculty regarding marginalization, institutional support deficits, and exclusion within higher education institutions. Guided by organizational support theory (OST), the research addressed three central questions: how adjuncts perceive their marginalization, the adequacy of institutional support, and their exclusion from decision-making processes. Data was collected through interviews with ten adjunct faculty members teaching in New York City institutions, each with a minimum of three years of experience. Thematic analysis identified six key themes: feeling like “second-class” faculty, undermined professional identity, lack of professional development and resources, financial and emotional stress, exclusion from governance, and structural barriers to inclusion. Findings revealed a consistent pattern of systemic inequity that compromises adjuncts’ engagement, morale, and instructional effectiveness. Participants highlighted the emotional toll of job instability, insufficient institutional support, and exclusion from shared governance. These experiences align with OST’s assertion that perceived organizational neglect reduces employee commitment and efficacy. The study offers critical implications for institutional leaders and policymakers, emphasizing the need for inclusive governance models, equitable compensation, and structured professional development for adjuncts. Addressing these challenges is vital for fostering faculty engagement, academic excellence, and sustainable institutional growth.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my immediate family, whose unwavering love and support have been the foundation of my life and academic journey. To my mother, who once said to me, “*My darling, never forget — you can become anything you choose to be, because you already have everything you need within you.*” Mama, I will be forever grateful for everything you poured into me. Words cannot truly express the depth of my love for you or the pride I feel to be your daughter. Your strength, sacrifices, and prayers carried me further than I ever imagined. May your beautiful soul continue to rest in perfect peace. I will always love you, Mama. To my darling husband, what more could I ask for. You have carried my burdens, celebrated my wins, and seen greatness in me even when I couldn’t see it in myself. I love you with every beat of my heart. Thank you for standing by me, believing in me, and lifting me every step of the way.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study focuses on the persistent challenges that adjunct faculty face within higher education institutions. As a significant portion of the academic workforce, adjunct faculty play an important role in delivering quality education. According to Greenlee-Rasnake (2023), adjunct faculty are key contributors to (Creswell, 2023) student success, yet they frequently lack adequate guidance and involvement in institutional student support initiatives. Despite their contributions, adjunct faculty often experience systemic marginalization, insufficient institutional support, and exclusion from critical decision-making processes. These challenges manifest through inequitable compensation, limited access to professional development, job insecurity, and restricted opportunities for participation in institutional governance (Matos, 2021; Yeager-Okosi et al., 2024). Consequently, adjunct faculty may experience diminished job satisfaction, reduced teaching effectiveness, and lowered engagement within the academic community. Research indicates that faculty job satisfaction and institutional support foster a positive learning environment, while low satisfaction among adjunct faculty undermines institutional effectiveness (Barnes & Fredericks, 2021). In addition, the conditions of employment and an instructor's teaching and working environment can influence student outcomes (Zhu, 2021).

The disparities faced by adjunct faculty, in contrast to their full-time counterparts, raise substantial concerns regarding the quality of education (Mueller et al., 2013). Their marginalization and exclusion have implications for faculty engagement and student success, positioning this issue as a critical concern that needs institutional attention. Addressing these inequities is crucial to creating a more inclusive and supportive environment that enhances adjunct faculty contributions to teaching and learning.

An improved understanding of these experiences is essential for formulating institutional policies and practices that support adjunct faculty in professional growth, teaching effectiveness, and contributions to student outcomes. These considerations align with broader institutional goals, such as student retention and academic achievement. By addressing these issues, educators may be able to use the data from this study to develop a more inclusive and supportive academic environment that benefits faculty and students.

Despite the vital link between faculty preparation and student outcomes, most adjunct faculty receive minimal formal training or professional development in effective teaching practices, even as part-time, non-tenure-track appointments have increasingly replaced full-time faculty positions (Butters & Gann, 2022). The marginalization of adjunct faculty in higher education is shaped by limited access to resources, exclusion from essential institutional processes, and the necessity of balancing multiple jobs, all of which restrict their engagement (Zhu, 2021). Institutional support deficits, including inadequate access to private office space, comprehensive benefits, and opportunities for participation in governance, contribute to this marginalization. These limitations affect adjunct faculty's effectiveness, sense of belonging, and job satisfaction (Villanueva et al., 2023).

The implications of adjunct faculty marginalization extend beyond the faculty themselves to impact student academic outcomes. Zhu's (2021) analysis of student transcript data revealed that students taught by adjunct faculty performed worse in subsequent courses than those taught by full-time faculty. This suggests that adjunct faculty's exclusion may negatively influence students' learning experiences and academic progress. These contextual challenges highlight the need to re-evaluate how higher education institutions manage and support adjunct faculty to improve outcomes for faculty and students.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study was the marginalization, institutional support deficits, and exclusion of adjunct faculty from institutional support, shared governance, and involvement in making decision-making at institutions (Bakley & Brodersen, 2018; Kezar & Sam, 2014; Liljegren, 2016; Rhoades, 2020) within higher education institutions, which undermine their professional efficacy, job satisfaction, and contributions to student success (Burleigh et al., 2021; Flaherty, 2022; Gelman et al., 2022; Zitko & Schultz, 2020). Adjunct faculty, representing a substantial portion of the academic workforce, frequently face precarious working conditions, such as job insecurity, inadequate compensation, and limited access to essential benefits and professional development opportunities (Villanueva et al., 2023). These challenges contribute to a systemic issue of inequity, as adjunct faculty are often treated as expendable labor, which restricts their engagement and opportunities for professional advancement.

The American Federation of Teachers (2020) illustrated the economic precarity of adjuncts, noting that in a survey of 3,076 contingent faculty members from two- and four-year institutions, one-third of respondents earned less than \$25,000 annually, placing them below the poverty line for a family of four. Additionally, less than half had access to employer-provided health insurance, and 41% experienced job insecurity, highlighting the limited support available to them. This financial instability affects their well-being and ability to perform effectively in their roles, ultimately impacting student outcomes and institutional quality.

Research demonstrates that insufficient support leads to adjunct faculty disengagement, which adversely affects their teaching effectiveness and student engagement. Kezar and Maxey (2016) report that disengaged adjuncts are less inclined to utilize innovative teaching strategies,

which hinders student learning. Further, Zhu (2021) found that students taught by adjuncts were 2.7% less likely to enroll in subsequent courses, highlighting the broader academic implications of adjunct marginalization. Institutional practices that limit adjuncts' participation in governance reinforce their exclusion, resulting in dissatisfaction and disengagement (Zitko & Schultz, 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of adjunct faculty regarding marginalization, institutional support deficits, and exclusion within higher education. Without addressing these systemic issues, adjunct faculty will continue to face challenges that detract from their professional development and educational contributions. This study examines these lived experiences to inform policies that enhance adjunct faculty engagement, professional growth, and educational outcomes. Addressing the underlying issues of marginalization and exclusion is critical to promoting a supportive and equitable academic environment, ultimately benefiting both faculty and students.

By examining the lived experiences of adjunct faculty across diverse institutions, this study aims to uncover the root causes of these challenges, providing insights to improve employment policies and institutional practices that address adjuncts' specific needs. Adjunct faculty are vital to fulfilling instructional needs but often experience inequities such as inadequate compensation, exclusion from decision-making processes, and restricted access to professional development (Villanueva et al., 2023; Kezar & Maxey, 2016). These issues hinder their professional growth and job satisfaction, compromising teaching quality and ultimately impacting student success.

To investigate these issues, I conducted in-depth interviews with adjunct faculty from various disciplines across multiple institutions, using a purposive sampling approach to capture

diverse perspectives. The sample consisted of ten adjunct faculty members who had experienced the effects of limited institutional support. The data underwent an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore how adjunct faculty made sense of their lived experiences of marginalization, support deficits, and exclusion. This inductive, iterative method involved close readings of transcripts to identify and interpret emergent themes (Larsen & Adu, 2022). NVivo 12 was used to support data organization. Bracketing and reflexivity were applied throughout the process to help minimize bias.

This approach balanced participant perspectives with analytical interpretation, offering deep insight into both individual meaning-making and shared systemic challenges in higher education. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for both institutions and participants. This study's findings will inform the development of equitable employment policies and enhanced support structures within higher education, ensuring adjunct faculty are effectively integrated into the academic community, which could elevate job satisfaction, teaching effectiveness, and student outcomes (Zitko & Schultz, 2020).

Introduction to Theoretical Framework

This study was guided primarily by organizational support theory (OST) to explore the factors affecting adjunct faculty marginalization, institutional support deficits, and exclusion in higher education. As defined by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002; see Appendix A), OST posits that employees form perceptions of organizational support (POS) based on the belief that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. This theory suggests that higher perceived support leads to positive outcomes, such as enhanced job satisfaction, commitment, and performance (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). This framework is particularly relevant for adjunct faculty, as their perceived lack of institutional support frequently

contributes to feelings of exclusion, dissatisfaction, and reduced engagement within their roles (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

The OST centers on several key antecedents and outcomes of perceived organizational support (POS) that are particularly relevant to this study. Fairness in resource distribution and decision-making processes is critical, as it affects adjunct faculty members' perceptions of equitable treatment within the institution. Supervisor support is also essential; supervisors who demonstrate genuine concern and provide necessary resources foster a heightened sense of organizational support. Additionally, human resources practices, such as offering developmental opportunities and fair compensation, significantly contribute to shaping POS by emphasizing the value of employees' growth and contributions. Favorable job conditions such as autonomy, manageable workloads, and job security further enhance adjunct faculty members' perceptions of institutional support. The outcomes of robust POS include increased job satisfaction, affective commitment, and reduced turnover intentions. Employees who feel valued and supported tend to be more motivated, committed, and engaged, leading to better job performance, reduced stress, and lower burnout rates (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

The OST framework has influenced the development of this study's problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions. By focusing on perceived organizational support, this study uncovered the impacts of institutional practices and policies on adjunct faculty's sense of inclusion, engagement, and job satisfaction. The theoretical underpinnings of OST informed the selection of variables related to faculty support, professional development, and inclusion in governance. These factors were integrated into the research questions to ensure alignment with the study's goals of understanding the challenges adjunct faculty face in higher education.

The OST aligns closely with the study's focus on exploring how adjunct faculty's experiences and perceptions of support (or lack thereof) impact their engagement and inclusion within higher education institutions. The theory's emphasis on perceived support makes it particularly suited to identifying institutional support gaps and informing policy reforms to address adjunct faculty marginalization. Applying OST to adjunct faculty contributes novel insights by extending the theory to a largely understudied group within academia. This study's findings could provide actionable recommendations for institutions to develop strategies that increase adjunct faculty's sense of belonging, job satisfaction, and professional growth, ultimately enhancing their performance and positively impacting student outcomes.

While Herzberg's two-factor theory (Herzberg et al., 1959) and expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) also offer valuable perspectives on adjunct faculty motivation and satisfaction, OST is deemed the primary framework due to its direct implications for job satisfaction, commitment, and engagement. This framework provides a holistic view of adjunct faculty's institutional support challenges, offering a lens to investigate how perceptions of support influence adjunct faculty's experiences of marginalization and exclusion.

Introduction to Research Methodology and Design

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, which is well-suited for exploring adjunct faculty's nuanced and subjective experiences in higher education, specifically regarding marginalization, institutional support deficits, and exclusion. Qualitative research is crucial for understanding complex phenomena, as it captures subjective experiences that quantitative methods may not achieve (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). By examining personal experiences comprehensively, this approach effectively addresses the study's research questions.

The qualitative methodology was selected to delve into the lived experiences of adjunct faculty, capturing the depth and complexity of their perspectives. This choice aligns with the research problem by facilitating an exploration of the personal and professional challenges faced by adjunct faculty, which are difficult to quantify and benefit from detailed, subjective accounts (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Furthermore, qualitative methods provide an interpretive focus essential for understanding how adjunct faculty experience their roles within academic institutions, a critical factor for informing potential policy improvements.

This study utilized a phenomenological research design, which, as Creswell (2007) explains, aims “to distill individual experiences with a phenomenon into a description of its universal essence” (p. 58). The phenomenological design centers on how adjunct faculty make sense of their experiences within institutional structures that influence their job satisfaction, professional growth, and sense of inclusion within the academic community. This approach enables a detailed exploration of the meaning of marginalization, institutional support deficits, and exclusion, as experienced by multiple adjunct faculty members (Creswell, 2007). It is particularly effective for capturing the emotions and perceptions associated with their positions and the impact of institutional policies on their engagement (Neubauer et al., 2019).

The qualitative methodology employed in this study included several key features. First, naturalistic inquiry allowed data to be gathered in real-world settings, which enhanced the authenticity of adjunct faculty responses. Detailed descriptions provided comprehensive data on adjunct faculty experiences, illuminating how institutional dynamics influenced their engagement and inclusion. Additionally, subjectivity and interpretive focus emphasized the personal perspectives of adjunct faculty regarding their work conditions and institutional support. A flexible approach to data collection, primarily through semi-structured interviews, allowed

participants to discuss their experiences, ensuring responsiveness to individual narratives. Contextualization was also important, as findings were situated within broader social, economic, and institutional contexts to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by adjunct faculty (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews with ten adjunct faculty members across various disciplines and institutions in New York served as the primary data source. This method's flexibility ensured that participants could freely share their experiences, contributing to a rich understanding of marginalization, support deficits, and exclusion themes. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns within the data, illuminating how institutional policies impacted adjunct faculty engagement and performance.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1

How do adjunct faculty perceive and describe their experiences of marginalization within higher education institutions?

RQ2

How do adjunct faculty perceive and describe their experiences regarding insufficient institutional support in higher education institutions?

RQ3

How do adjunct faculty perceive and describe their experiences of exclusion from key activities and decision-making processes in higher education institutions?

Significance of the Study

This study provides valuable insights into why adjunct faculty feel marginalized, unsupported, and excluded in higher education. Over the past 4 years, academic staffing trends have increasingly relied on adjunct faculty. While 70% of faculty members held tenure or tenure-track positions four decades ago, today, 75% are in non-tenure-track roles, with 47% being adjuncts (American Federation of Teachers, 2021). This shift highlights the need for better working conditions for adjuncts, who play a crucial role in educational institutions.

Using organizational support theory (OST), this study examines how perceptions of support from institutions affect adjunct faculty's job satisfaction, commitment, and performance (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Research shows adjuncts often feel disconnected and lack the administrative support they need, impacting their job satisfaction and effectiveness (Grieve & Worden, 2000; Lyons, 2007). Furthermore, Scarborough (2024) found that being excluded from institutional decision-making limits adjunct faculty's professional growth, adding to their sense of marginalization. By exploring these issues, this study helps highlight the specific challenges adjunct faculty face and the barriers within institutions that affect their experiences. Insights from this research can guide university leaders and policymakers in creating inclusive policies that improve adjunct faculty's access to resources and opportunities for professional growth. Supporting adjunct faculty engagement and well-being can benefit institutions by improving faculty retention and enhancing student outcomes. Ultimately, this research offers practical recommendations for policies that support adjunct faculty satisfaction and integration, contributing to higher education's goals of quality and success.

Definitions of Key Terms

This section presents definitions of key terms that are central to understanding the context and findings of this qualitative study. The terms have been carefully selected based on their relevance to the lived experiences of adjunct faculty in higher education and are not commonly used or understood by the general public. Each definition is paraphrased in complete sentences and supported by scholarly citations. The terms defined here do not include theoretical frameworks, research methodology, or constructs, as those are discussed in separate sections of the dissertation. Instead, this section focuses on clarifying concepts that directly shape the meaning, scope, and interpretation of the participants' experiences.

Adjunct Faculty

Adjunct faculty are part-time instructors hired on a contractual basis to teach specific courses at higher education institutions without permanent or full-time appointments. They typically lack the job security and benefits afforded to full-time faculty members (Casagrande, 2015; Robinson, 2023).

Exclusion

Exclusion refers to the systematic process of excluding specific individuals or groups from essential institutional processes, decision-making, or opportunities, resulting in reduced representation, engagement, and access within the academic community (Scarborough, 2024).

Institutional Support

Institutional support encompasses the resources, services, and policies an educational institution provides to assist faculty in their professional roles, such as administrative support, access to professional development, and essential teaching resources (Eisenberger et al., 2002).

Marginalization

Marginalization is a social process whereby individuals or groups are relegated to the edges of society or organizational structures, often resulting in reduced access to power, resources, and opportunities due to systemic inequities (Lyons, 2007).

Summary

This study examines the experiences of adjunct faculty within higher education institutions, specifically focusing on their perceptions of marginalization, lack of institutional support, and exclusion from academic decision-making. Through this exploration, the research aims to understand how adjunct faculty navigate their roles in environments often marked by limited resources and restricted access to professional development. Grounded in Organizational Support Theory (OST), this qualitative study investigates how organizational practices and leadership strategies impact adjunct faculty engagement, job satisfaction, and commitment to their institutions (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades, 2022).

I used a purposive sampling approach to select ten adjunct faculty members from institutions recognized for their supportive work environments, representing diverse academic disciplines. Through thematic analysis, four primary themes emerged: perceived inequity in resource allocation, barriers to inclusion in institutional governance, constraints on professional development, and the effects of exclusion on teaching efficacy. These themes highlight the significant impact of institutional practices on adjunct faculty engagement, which often reinforces marginalization (Matos, 2021; Yeager-Okosi et al., 2024).

The findings underscore the importance of addressing systemic disparities to enhance adjunct faculty satisfaction and, by extension, improve student outcomes. The study's implications suggest that targeted support and inclusion initiatives are critical for fostering a

more equitable academic environment for adjunct faculty, thereby contributing valuable insights to institutional policies and practices that support faculty engagement and effectiveness.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to situate the study within the broader context of adjunct faculty challenges in higher education, progressively narrowing to the specific institutional issues of marginalization, support deficits, and exclusion that this study addresses. This chapter introduces the primary theories framing the study, followed by an analysis of prior research on adjunct faculty experiences and their effects on job satisfaction, student outcomes, and institutional quality. “The databases and search engines used included search terms such as *‘adjunct faculty support,’ ‘faculty marginalization,’* and *‘organizational support in academia,’* as well as relevant combinations. The literature search was conducted within the date range 2020–2025, with the exception of seminal research studies included to provide foundational context.

This review is organized into the following sections: Theoretical Framework, Institutional Challenges Facing Adjunct Faculty, Effects of Engaging Adjunct Faculty, Perceptions, Treatment, and Support Gaps in Adjunct Faculty Marginalization, Institutional Challenges and Marginalization of Adjunct Faculty, Benefits and Compensation, Adjunct Employment Conditions and Contract Stability, Job Insecurity and Employment Status, Limited Access to Institutional Support and Resources, Exclusion from Governance and Decision-Making, Need for Policy Reform to Support Adjunct Inclusion, Institutional Support Deficits and Professional Development, Limited Opportunities for Professional Development, Adjunct Faculty Job Satisfaction, Impact of Institutional Support on Faculty Morale, Engagement, and Student Outcomes, Impact on Student Outcomes, Policy Implications and Institutional Recommendations, Impact of Institutional Support on Faculty and Student Outcomes, Faculty Job Satisfaction and Commitment, Professional Development and Teaching Effectiveness,

Institutional Support and Faculty Engagement, Impact on Student Outcomes, Existing Gaps and Rationale for the Current Study.

Theoretical Framework

This section explores organizational support theory (OST) as the primary theoretical framework guiding this study. It defines key concepts within OST, detailing the assumptions and propositions that underscore its relevance to understanding adjunct faculty experiences in higher education. By emphasizing how perceived organizational support influences job satisfaction and engagement, OST provides a structured approach to analyze adjunct faculty's institutional challenges, including marginalization, support deficits, and exclusion. Alternative frameworks considered during the study's development were also examined, along with the rationale for prioritizing OST. Synthesizing these theoretical perspectives, the section demonstrates how OST aligns closely with the study's objectives, shaping the development of the problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions to effectively address adjunct faculty's experiences and needs within academia.

The guiding theoretical framework for this study is organizational support theory (OST). The OST explores how employees perceive support from their organization, emphasizing the degree to which they feel valued, and their well-being is prioritized (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Central to this theory is Perceived Organizational Support (POS), a concept that reflects employees' views on organizational support, influenced by factors such as fairness, leadership support, HR practices, and overall working conditions. The POS influences job satisfaction and engagement by fulfilling employees' socioemotional needs (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Higher POS is linked to increased organizational commitment, stronger organizational identification, and a heightened motivation to contribute to organizational success (Kurtessis et

al., 2017). The OST operates under the assumption that employees who perceive high levels of support respond positively, developing both an emotional attachment to the organization and a sense of obligation to reciprocate (Eisenberger et al., 2001).

The theory posits that support enhances engagement and productivity, particularly for adjunct faculty, who may experience disengagement without adequate support. The OST originated from the work of Eisenberger and colleagues, who focused on understanding how POS meets employees' socioemotional needs, fostering greater commitment and engagement (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Early studies, such as those by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), established foundational insights into OST by linking organizational support to employee well-being and engagement. Further studies, like those of Kurtessis et al. (2017), expanded on these ideas, confirming POS's role in enhancing job satisfaction and performance across various industries. Research by Ramirez (2013) and Baran et al. (2012) applied OST within educational settings, demonstrating how POS contributes to improved faculty commitment and job satisfaction.

Alternative Frameworks Considered: Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, also known as the Motivation-Hygiene Theory, proposes that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction arise from two separate sets of factors: motivators and hygiene factors (Herzberg et al., 1959). Herzberg's theory suggests that motivators, such as achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and advancement, drive job satisfaction. In contrast, hygiene factors like company policy, supervision, salary, and working conditions, if inadequate, lead to job dissatisfaction but do not necessarily motivate employees when they are improved (Gawel, 1996). According to Herzberg, long-term satisfaction is associated with motivators, while hygiene factors only have short-term impacts on employee performance.

Over time, Herzberg's theory has been widely applied across various industries and remains influential in understanding employee motivation. In educational settings, this theory provides insight into how adjunct faculty members might respond to different institutional policies and working conditions that satisfy or dissatisfy them. In the context of the study on adjunct faculty, Herzberg's theory can be used to analyze how motivators and hygiene factors affect the satisfaction and retention of adjunct faculty. Understanding whether adjunct faculty responds more to intrinsic motivators (e.g., recognition, responsibility) or external hygiene factors (e.g., salary, job security) can help institutions design better support systems.

This research could deepen the understanding of Herzberg's theory by exploring whether adjunct faculty are primarily motivated by the same factors as full-time faculty or if their unique position in academia alters the balance between motivators and hygiene factors. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory was reviewed for its insights into job satisfaction through motivators and hygiene factors. However, OST was selected for its focus on perceived support, which directly addresses the support deficits experienced by adjunct faculty.

Alternative Frameworks Considered: Expectancy Theory

Expectancy Theory (ET), developed by Victor Vroom, suggests that individuals are motivated to act in a certain way if they expect their efforts to lead to a desired outcome, typically a valued and attainable reward (Vroom, 1964). Expectancy Theory is based on the relationship between an individual's effort, performance, and outcomes. The theory posits that motivation is determined by three factors: expectancy (the belief that effort leads to performance), instrumentality (the belief that performance leads to outcomes), and valence (the value of the outcome to the individual) (Mathibe, 2008). Employees who believe their efforts

will be rewarded and that the rewards are valuable are more likely to increase their performance (Chiang et al., 2008).

The theory has evolved to include broader applications in employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational performance. It emphasizes the importance of aligning rewards with employee expectations and ensuring that organizational goals resonate with individual aspirations. In the adjunct faculty study, Expectancy Theory could frame the investigation into how adjunct faculty members' efforts are linked to their perceptions of institutional support, rewards, and professional recognition. If adjuncts feel that increased effort will not result in meaningful rewards (e.g., promotions, better pay, inclusion in decision-making), their motivation and engagement may decline.

This research could expand the application of expectancy theory by focusing on how adjunct faculty who often face precarious work conditions navigate the balance between effort and reward, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of motivation in higher education. Expectancy Theory was also considered, as it centers on motivation in relation to expected rewards, but OST was deemed more suitable because it addresses socioemotional needs that are essential to adjunct faculty engagement and loyalty.

For example, in using different methodologies on the same subject, Kezar and Maxey (2016) employed surveys to explore adjunct faculty engagement, revealing that insufficient institutional support is linked to faculty disengagement. In another qualitative study using different methodologies on similar subjects, Zhu (2021) examined student outcomes and observed that students taught by disengaged adjunct faculty were less likely to succeed in later courses, highlighting the importance of OST in ensuring faculty feel valued and supported.

The Application of OST in the Present Study:

The OST is directly applicable to the study's aim of understanding adjunct faculty perceptions of marginalization and exclusion, as it examines how organizational support can positively impact job satisfaction, motivation, and engagement. The rationale for Selection includes that OST's emphasis on socioemotional support aligns with this study's goal of identifying ways to enhance adjunct faculty engagement and refine institutional practices. The framework's focus on the reciprocal relationship between POS and employee commitment offers valuable insights into potential interventions for creating a more inclusive and supportive academic environment for adjunct faculty.

The evolving role of adjunct faculty in higher education has prompted growing scholarly interest in their lived experiences, institutional roles, and the broader impact of contingent labor on academic environments. Several key themes have emerged from the literature, providing a nuanced understanding of the conditions under which adjunct faculty operate. The first major theme, *Institutional Challenges Facing Adjunct Faculty*, examines structural barriers such as limited job security, inadequate compensation, and lack of access to institutional resources. These constraints contribute to professional instability and weaken faculty engagement.

Another important subtopic, *Effects of Engaging Adjunct Faculty*, focuses on the outcomes of meaningful inclusion. Studies in this area explore how adjuncts, when supported and integrated into the academic community, can positively influence student success, curriculum development, and institutional innovation. In contrast, the theme *Perceptions, Treatment, and Support Gaps in Adjunct Faculty Marginalization* reveals how inequitable treatment and lack of support diminish adjuncts' sense of belonging, leading to disengagement and diminished instructional effectiveness.

Closely related, the literature on Institutional Challenges and Marginalization of Adjunct Faculty highlights systemic patterns of exclusion, emphasizing the role of administrative practices and cultural norms that relegate adjuncts to the academic periphery. Together, these themes reveal an urgent need for policy and leadership strategies that foster inclusive practices, equitable treatment, and organizational support.

In addition to these central subtopics, the literature further addresses issues such as the impact of leadership styles, differences in adjunct experiences across disciplines, and the relationship between faculty working conditions and student learning outcomes. These collective insights form the foundation for this study's exploration of adjunct faculty perceptions and provide a critical context for interpreting their experiences within higher education institutions.

Institutional Challenges Facing Adjunct Faculty

This section examines the critical institutional challenges faced by adjunct faculty, focusing on recurring themes such as job insecurity, inadequate compensation, restricted access to professional development opportunities, and exclusion from governance (Evans, 2023). These challenges create substantial barriers that contribute to the marginalization of adjunct faculty, constraining their engagement within the academic environment and reducing their overall contributions to the institution (Zitko & Schultz, 2020). By addressing these conditions, this section highlights the pervasive issues limiting adjunct faculty's active participation and engagement in the academic community. Adjunct faculty are a vital yet often marginalized part of higher education institutions, facing a variety of institutional challenges that impact their job satisfaction, engagement, and overall effectiveness (Danaei, 2019). This review explores existing research on key institutional challenges that adjunct faculty encounter, including job insecurity, limited access to institutional support, lack of professional development opportunities, exclusion

from decision-making, and the resulting impact on both faculty and student outcomes. Building on prior research, this section reviews the pervasive issues faced by adjuncts, including job insecurity, low compensation, limited access to professional development, and lack of governance involvement (Greenlee-Rasnake, 2023; Yeager-Okosi et al., 2024).

These conditions are shown to restrict adjuncts' ability to engage effectively within the institution, adversely affecting both their well-being and the quality of their contributions. The increasing reliance on adjunct faculty across higher education institutions has introduced complex challenges, particularly related to working conditions, institutional support, and career advancement. While adjunct faculty provide critical teaching support, they often face inequitable treatment compared to their full-time counterparts, raising concerns about the long-term sustainability of such employment practices in academia (Kezar & Maxey, 2016). This literature review examines key institutional challenges facing adjunct faculty, focusing on employment insecurity, inadequate access to resources, exclusion from governance, and limited professional development opportunities.

Effects of Engaging Adjunct Faculty

Research highlights the inconsistent and often rushed approaches in hiring adjunct faculty, revealing a need for more structured processes. According to the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE; 2014b), adjunct faculty are frequently hired at the last minute with minimal planning, which can result in a lack of rigor in hiring protocols. The CCCSE (2024b) report observed that adjunct faculty are sometimes assigned courses without formal interviews or teaching demonstrations, a sharp contrast to the more stringent hiring processes for full-time faculty. Effective recruitment, selection, and hiring practices should have

a clear purpose and be applied consistently to foster a more equitable environment for adjunct faculty (Danaei, 2019).

The literature on adjunct faculty in higher education often centers on the adverse educational outcomes linked to their increased use, with many studies pointing to differences in instructional impact between adjunct and full-time faculty. These differences are understood as complex and influenced by multiple factors beyond basic measures of teaching effectiveness (Anthony et al., 2020; Eagan & Jaeger, 2009; Xu, 2019; Zitko & Schultz, 2020). For instance, Zhu (2021) establishes that adjuncts have significantly worse student outcomes than full-time counterparts indicating that the widespread reliance on adjunct instructors may negatively affect institutional success metrics. Related studies by Danaei (2019), Jacoby (2006), Lei (2007), and Ran and Sanders (2018) further highlighted that adjunct faculty often demonstrate reduced classroom cohesion and limited advising capabilities, contributing to decreased student outcomes.

While some studies suggest a lack of clear evidence on the impact of tenure-track status on student learning (Figlio et al., 2013), more recent research has found associations between faculty employment status and student retention. For example, Franke (as cited in Danaei, 2019) compiled national data to examine four-year colleges and found that a 1% increase in the share of non-tenure-track faculty correlated with a 1.75% decrease in graduation rates among STEM majors, suggesting a potential influence of faculty status on academic persistence. Adjunct faculty are frequently tasked with developmental or remedial courses, placing them in charge of students who require significant support (Jacoby, 2005; Smith, 2016). Unfortunately, these instructors often receive minimal institutional resources, training, or professional development,

further limiting their capacity to meet student needs effectively (Eney & Davidson, 2006; Smith, 2016).

Ran and Sanders (2018) found that students in introductory courses taught by adjuncts may face academic challenges later, as some adjuncts reportedly adopt lenient grading practices. This leniency, potentially aimed at reducing student complaints and securing future employment, may ultimately hinder students' preparedness for subsequent coursework (Eney & Davidson, 2006; Jacoby, 2005; Smith, 2016). The lack of clear teaching standards and support systems for adjuncts also presents a challenge, particularly in community colleges where adjuncts comprise a substantial portion of the teaching workforce (Wallin, 2004). Without adjunct faculty, community colleges would struggle to meet fluctuating course demands, yet the absence of structured support significantly hampers these faculty members' effectiveness (Wallin, 2004).

Consequently, Wallin (2004) advocated for policies that prioritize training and support for adjuncts, arguing that their inclusion and development are essential to fulfilling institutional objectives. Many educators and researchers agree that the contributions of adjunct faculty could enhance educational quality if these instructors were given adequate resources, preparation, and institutional backing (Antony & Valadez, 2002; Smith, 2016; Street et al., 2012). Efforts to strengthen adjunct faculty support are, therefore, seen as integral to promoting student success, highlighting the need for structural changes that would empower adjunct faculty as valuable members of the academic community.

Perceptions, Treatment, and Support Gaps in Adjunct Faculty Marginalization

The increased reliance on adjunct faculty in higher education has led to numerous unintended negative consequences, impacting both the faculty and the broader institutional environment. Pearch and Marutz (2005) found that adjunct faculty often experience strained

relationships with full-time colleagues and administrators, which can permeate the classroom setting. Students may perceive adjuncts as having lower status compared to full-time or tenured faculty, which can diminish adjuncts' sense of professional worth and, ultimately, their classroom experience (Mathieu-Frasier & Gurung, 2024; Pearch & Marutz, 2005). These perceptions of diminished status contribute to adjunct faculty feeling marginalized, potentially increasing their intent to leave the institution (Cronin & Smith, 2011). To secure higher student evaluations and improve re-employment prospects, some adjunct faculty may engage in grade inflation (Johnson & Malone, 2023; Nikolakakos et al., 2012; Sonner, 2000).

Tashchian et al. (2022) and Mueller et al. (2013) indicated that students report perceiving greater learning outcomes from full-time faculty in online courses, a perception not necessarily aligned with content quality, but which may still shape adjuncts' self-perception and affect the classroom environment. This complex interplay of perceptions ultimately impacts the student experience and teaching effectiveness (Nikolakakos et al., 2012). Departmental culture also shapes adjunct faculty members' perceptions of inclusivity and support. According to Kezar (2013), an elitist culture often exists within departments, where those holding tenure or terminal degrees are granted more respect and opportunities. Such a culture can leave adjuncts feeling excluded, mistrustful of institutional leadership, and more likely to consider leaving (Danaei, 2019; Gibson & Petrosko, 2014). Adjunct faculty are frequently left out of essential activities such as faculty meetings and academic committees, further intensifying feelings of isolation and creating an "us-versus-them" mentality between adjuncts and full-time faculty (Cronin & Smith, 2011; Gosink & Streveler, 2000).

In particular, online adjunct faculty may face unique challenges of isolation due to their physical disconnection from the main campus. This lack of proximity limits regular

communication and access to professional development, which are often inconveniently scheduled (Dolan, 2011; Dailey-Hebert et al., 2014; Hofman et al., 2024). Meanwhile, adjunct faculty at rural institutions report higher job satisfaction than those in urban institutions, likely due to a better fit with institutional culture and increased sense of value in rural settings (Charlier & Williams, 2011; Ouellette et al., 2018). However, adjunct faculty with heavier teaching loads face unique challenges, as their increased responsibilities often do not come with proportionate compensation (Brennan & Magness, 2016; Danaei, 2019; Dimaria, 2012).

Interpersonal dynamics within departments significantly affect adjunct faculty satisfaction. Malone and Johnson (2023) and Hoyt (2012) observed that adjunct faculty often face tensions with both administrators and tenured colleagues, a situation partly stemming from the disparities between tenured and non-tenured groups. When adjunct faculty experience marginalization and lack trust in institutional leadership, they are more likely to seek alternative employment. Mentorship programs, as used for retaining junior faculty, may offer a promising approach to support adjunct faculty, fostering greater job satisfaction and retention (Steele et al., 2013). Comprehensive support structures such as orientations, professional development, and flexible office hours—are vital to reducing adjunct faculty isolation and improving their engagement (Forbes et al., 2010). Addressing adjunct faculty perceptions, treatment, and support gaps is essential for promoting equitable work environments. Literature underscores the need for institutional policies and practices that value adjunct contributions and foster inclusivity to alleviate marginalization, enhance job satisfaction, and improve professional experiences for adjunct faculty members.

Institutional Challenges and Marginalization of Adjunct Faculty

Adjunct faculty play an essential role in the academic landscape, yet they frequently encounter a range of institutional challenges that hinder their professional growth, job satisfaction, and overall teaching effectiveness. Despite their integral contributions, adjunct faculty often face significant inequities in institutional support, such as limited access to resources, exclusion from governance, and restricted professional development opportunities compared to full-time faculty. These disparities foster a sense of marginalization, reducing adjuncts' job satisfaction and engagement, which can ultimately compromise the quality of education provided to students (Matos, 2021; Yeager-Okosi et al., 2024). Part-time faculty often feel marginalized, perceiving that administrators and full-time faculty regard them as "second-class citizens," both economically and professionally (Zitko, 2020).

One critical aspect of adjunct faculty marginalization is their exclusion from institutional governance and decision-making processes. Scarborough (2024) noted that adjunct faculty are often sidelined in discussions that shape institutional policies, which reinforces their marginalized status within the academic community. This exclusion affects their sense of belonging and limits their professional development, further entrenching the divide between adjunct and full-time faculty. Moreover, adjuncts frequently face job insecurity and limited benefits, which contributes to a precarious work environment that exacerbates feelings of undervaluation (Villanueva et al., 2023).

Benefits and Compensation

The need to address compensation and benefits remains a significant concern for adjunct faculty. Adjuncts typically earn substantially less than their tenure-track counterparts (Jones, 2019), with one-third of them making under \$25,000 annually, placing many below the federal poverty line (AFT, 2020). According to a survey by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT),

25% of adjunct faculty members rely on public assistance to make ends meet, and 40% struggle to cover basic living expenses. The AFT further emphasized the importance of compensating adjuncts for duties outside classroom hours, such as orientation and professional development (CCCSE, 2009). Recognizing fair compensation as critical, (Shulman, 2019; Yakoboski, 2018) advocated for establishing structured career tracks with progressive salary standards. Shulman (2019) similarly called for equitable pay, merit increases, cost-of-living adjustments, and fair compensation for all work performed.

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona responded to these concerns by creating measures to engage adjuncts more fully, including providing compensation for orientation and stipends for professional development (Guthrie et al., 2019). In addition to compensation, access to benefits, particularly health insurance, is a major need among adjunct faculty. The CCCSE (2014a) survey highlighted health coverage as a critical gap, with the AFT reporting that fewer than half of adjuncts have employer-provided healthcare, leading 45% of them to delay necessary medical care due to costs (Flaherty, 2020). Some institutions have taken steps to address these needs. For instance, the Community College of Philadelphia offers adjuncts medical, dental, drug, and life insurance, along with tuition reimbursement and professional development funds. Similarly, Maricopa County Community College District provides tuition reimbursement to enhance its benefits package for adjunct faculty (Maricopa County Community College District, 2012).

Adjunct Employment Conditions and Contract Stability

Literature on adjunct faculty employment conditions emphasizes the critical need for institutions to improve working conditions and contract stability, moving beyond foundational concerns of compensation and benefits. Many adjunct faculty members lack access to essential

resources such as office space, clerical support, technical assistance, and private areas to meet with students, limiting their capacity to fulfill their teaching responsibilities effectively (CCCSE, 2009, 2014b). Recognizing the importance of these resources, some institutions have initiated efforts to support adjunct faculty by providing needed resources and spaces. For instance, as part of the Achieving the Dream (ATD) initiative, Patrick and Henry Community College offered adjunct faculty basic office supply packages, while the Community College of Philadelphia transformed underutilized spaces to create an adjunct center dedicated to workspace and faculty collaboration (ATD, 2019).

Addressing these conditions is seen as essential for equitable treatment and for helping institutions achieve their broader goals. Zhu (2021) examined student transcript data from two- and four-year institutions in Arkansas and found that "teaching quality is sensitive to institutional treatment of instructors" (p. 3), suggesting that disparities in adjunct working conditions, pay, and benefits can negatively impact teaching quality relative to full-time faculty. Zitko and Schultz (2020) argued that policies tailored to the needs of both adjunct and full-time faculty could foster supportive environments that promote adjunct engagement and enhance student success.

Yet, even with some advances in resources and benefits, adjunct faculty often continue to face significant challenges with contract stability. According to the CCCSE (2014a), about 75% of adjunct faculty have employment security for only one term at a time, with limited notice of future assignments, contributing to financial and job-related insecurity. Moreover, only 5% of adjunct faculty have access to tenure or tenure-track positions, compared to 86% of full-time faculty, placing most adjuncts in a precarious employment situation. In response to these challenges, some institutions have begun exploring longer-term solutions to improve contract

stability and employment conditions. The two-year Engaging Adjunct Faculty in the Student Success Movement project by ATD (2019) led six colleges to implement initiatives aimed at enhancing adjunct support and promoting student success. Some participating institutions offered longer-term contracts to adjunct faculty and granted them priority in course selection.

For example, Harper College developed a two-tier contract system in which adjunct faculty could advance by engaging in professional development and institutional service. This advancement brought increased compensation and guaranteed an interview for full-time roles if qualifications were met, providing a pathway to greater stability. These changes represent initial, yet meaningful, steps toward addressing adjunct faculty employment challenges and recognizing their contributions, aligning with institutional goals for increased engagement and educational quality. This section of literature underlines the need for sustained institutional commitment to addressing adjunct faculty's unique employment conditions. Without such efforts, adjunct faculty will likely continue to face marginalization and exclusion within higher education, limiting both their engagement and the potential for improved student outcomes.

Job Insecurity and Employment Status

One of the primary challenges facing adjunct faculty is employment insecurity. Unlike tenured or full-time faculty, adjuncts are typically hired on a semester-by-semester basis, often with little to no guarantee of continued employment (Kezar et al., 2019). This lack of job stability creates financial uncertainty and can lead to stress, which, in turn, affects job satisfaction and commitment. Research by Maynard and Joseph (2008) highlights that employment insecurity contributes to adjuncts feeling marginalized and less committed to their institutions, as they often perceive themselves as temporary or expendable members of the academic workforce. Employment instability can also impact teaching quality, as adjuncts may

be forced to work multiple jobs, reducing the time they can dedicate to course preparation and student engagement (Halcrow & Olson, 2008).

The temporary and often part-time nature of adjunct faculty positions intensifies job insecurity. Studies reveal that adjuncts frequently work on semester-by-semester contracts with limited assurances of future employment, placing them in a precarious financial and professional situation (Kezar, 2013). This insecurity often results in stress and a diminished sense of commitment to the institution, as adjuncts balance multiple teaching positions across various institutions or engage in other forms of employment to make ends meet (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011). The lack of job stability affects not only faculty morale but also the continuity and quality of student instruction. Adjuncts, under these conditions, are often unable to fully engage with the academic community or invest in long-term course development, which can negatively impact student learning experiences (Street et al., 2012).

Limited Access to Institutional Support and Resources

A second major challenge for adjunct faculty is their limited access to institutional resources. Many adjuncts are denied essential teaching tools such as office space, administrative support, and technological resources, which are fundamental for effective teaching and student engagement (Kezar & Sam, 2010). At many institutions, adjunct faculty lack access to essential faculty resources, including office space, technology, and instructional support (Bolitzer, 2019; Burleigh et al., 2021). This lack of resources not only hinders their ability to engage with students effectively but also restricts their opportunities for professional development. For instance, part-time faculty often face difficulties accessing research databases or attending faculty meetings, impacting their integration into the academic community and reducing collaborative opportunities (Street, Maisto, Merves, & Rhoades, 2012). Such disparities place

adjuncts at a disadvantage relative to their full-time colleagues, ultimately affecting the quality of education they can provide.

Additionally, restricted access to institutional support, including office space, technology, administrative assistance, and instructional materials, further limits adjuncts' effectiveness (Kezar & Sam, 2010). Research indicates that adjuncts often lack the basic resources needed to fulfill their teaching responsibilities adequately, with some even covering costs out-of-pocket for teaching materials or using personal equipment to deliver instruction (Hoyt et al., 2008). This lack of support can compromise educational quality by limiting adjuncts' ability to prepare thoroughly for classes, meet with students, and participate actively in departmental activities (Wallin, 2005).

Exclusion from Governance and Decision-Making

Without faculty involvement in decision making, universities may choose to overinvest in non-academic quality (e.g. athletics, recreational activities) relative to academic quality. Ott and Dippold (2018) found that autonomy and decision-making are limited for adjuncts once it extends to concerns outside the classroom. There has been little progress in involving adjunct faculty members in academic governance (Tiede, 2021). According to the 2021 American Association of University Professors shared governance survey, 66.5% of institutions do not allow part-time faculty members to vote, and 72.2% restrict them from serving on senates or councils (Tiede, 2021). Similarly, adjunct voices are missing from college-wide goals and policies as well as program and college budgeting (Ott & Dippold, 2018).

Adjunct faculty members frequently face exclusion from institutional governance and decision-making processes, a practice that reinforces their sense of marginalization within academia. Adjuncts are seldom given a voice in departmental or institutional matters that directly

impact their work, leading to a lack of representation in critical decisions (Kezar & Maxey, 2013). Studies by Waltman et al. (2012) and Eagan, Jaeger, and Grantham (2015) indicate that limited participation in governance can result in diminished morale and engagement among adjuncts, who often feel they lack influence over policies that affect their teaching conditions and employment stability. This exclusion can also lead to a disconnection between adjunct faculty and their institutions' missions and goals, reducing their alignment with institutional priorities (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011).

Further research highlights that adjunct faculty are often excluded from faculty meetings, curriculum development, and policy-making processes, which exacerbates feelings of isolation and disenfranchisement (Maynard & Joseph, 2008). Without representation, policies may fail to address the specific needs and perspectives of adjunct faculty, creating a sense of detachment and marginalization within the institutional structure (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001). This governance gap not only undermines adjuncts' connection to their institutions but may also impact their overall job satisfaction and effectiveness.

Need for Policy Reform to Support Adjunct Inclusion

Policymakers address socioeconomic and technological disruptions by developing new visions or revitalizing existing ones. Reform efforts are driven by the expectation that higher education institutes should enhance national economic productivity, and that public education funding should prioritize maximizing economic returns (Molla & Cuthbert, 2023). Policies and practices in higher education create both explicit and implicit hierarchies among faculty that often deprofessionalize non-tenure-track faculty, including adjuncts (Kezar, 2013). These policies frequently reflect a lack of respect for adjunct faculty as professionals, evidenced by their exclusion from faculty governance and limited opportunities for professional development.

Adjuncts are commonly excluded from participating in decision-making processes, assigned standardized syllabi that restrict their autonomy, and often lack even basic resources such as office space and inclusion in department meetings, which further diminishes their sense of belonging and connection (Kezar & Sam, 2013). Moreover, adjuncts often experience inconsistency in compensation policies, with fewer than half of part-time faculty receiving raises based on performance (Hollenshead et al., 2007). This lack of clear policies on pay increases, alongside arbitrary titling across departments, adds to the ambiguity surrounding job responsibilities and potential pathways for promotion (Bergom et al., 2010).

Research highlights a strong desire among adjunct faculty for reforms that would address their marginalization and establish greater equity in higher education institutions. Zitko and Schultz (2020) identified three main areas where adjuncts sought policy change: pay equity (73%), pathways to full-time employment (41%), and enhanced remuneration (82%). Many advocated for the removal of the “two-tiered system” that perpetuates disparities in pay, job security, and benefits between full-time and adjunct faculty. Adjuncts also expressed a need for greater job security, calling for tenure or rehire rights (36%), the elimination of course load restrictions (41%), and the inclusion of benefits (45%). Notably, inadequate compensation remained a primary concern, with adjuncts underscoring the necessity of salary parity with their full-time counterparts. These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive policy reforms that promote adjunct inclusion, job stability, and professional growth.

Despite adjunct faculty's critical role in fulfilling instructional demands, higher education institutions have yet to establish inclusive policies that adequately support adjunct integration and advancement. The literature consistently points to the need for institutional reforms to mitigate adjunct faculty's exclusion from governance, equitable resource distribution, and

increased access to professional development (Kezar & Maxey, 2016; Villanueva et al., 2023).

Addressing these support gaps can foster job satisfaction, enhance teaching quality, and improve educational outcomes.

Institutional Support Deficits and Professional Development

In 2014, the U.S. House of Representatives published survey results highlighting major challenges facing adjunct faculty, spanning from those with a single semester of experience to those with over thirty years across both public and private two- and four-year institutions. The findings underscored systemic obstacles to career growth faced by adjuncts, largely due to their need to teach multiple classes to make a living, leaving little time for research, publishing, or further career development (U.S. House of Representatives, 2014). This lack of institutional support restricts not only their immediate job performance but also their long-term professional growth. Research emphasizes that adjunct faculty would benefit from more structured institutional support (Danaei, 2019).

Unlike full-time faculty, adjuncts are generally excluded from funding for conferences, which often serve as platforms for networking and career advancement (Danaei, 2019). As Danaei (2019) noted, some adjuncts report teaching at multiple institutions while independently funding their attendance at conferences and engaging in professional development, all in hopes of securing a full-time role. This added burden highlights the gap in support and professional resources available to adjunct faculty. Institutions and administrators should prioritize providing resources, recognition, and professional development opportunities to adjuncts to reduce turnover and enhance academic outcomes (Wallin, 2004, 2005; Ziegler & Reiff, 2006). Boylan and Saxon (2012) emphasized that providing training to adjuncts, particularly those teaching

developmental courses, represents a highly cost-effective investment for community college administrators.

Studies consistently show that adjuncts receive fewer opportunities for professional growth, such as access to development workshops, research funding, and networking opportunities, compared to full-time faculty (Sramek, 2023; Waltman et al., 2012). These deficits in support reinforce their peripheral status within academic institutions, leading to lower job satisfaction and increased turnover rates. A Gallup analysis in 2022 further underscored the link between employee engagement and reduced absenteeism, enhanced well-being, and overall performance, all of which impact institutional effectiveness (Sramek, 2023). For adjunct faculty, however, engagement often remains limited due to inadequate institutional support and exclusion from critical decision-making processes. Addressing these support gaps could foster a more inclusive academic environment, enhancing adjunct faculty's engagement, teaching quality, and contributions to institutional goals.

Limited Opportunities for Professional Development

Adjunct faculty often enter teaching roles with minimal preparation or institutional support, which can lead to feelings of isolation and a lack of guidance in their early teaching experiences (Danaei, 2019). Unlike full-time faculty, who regularly benefit from professional development programs, adjuncts are typically excluded from these opportunities, limiting their access to essential instructional training and contributing to low morale, high turnover rates, and a continuous cycle of recruitment each term (Eddy, 2005; Kezar, Maxey & Badke, 2014; Mazurek, 2011; Spaniel & Scott, 2013).

Efforts to provide instructional training, such as new faculty seminars and workshops, have been inconsistent and often insufficient (American Association of University Professors,

2003). Research suggests that structured professional development, particularly for adjuncts teaching developmental courses, could enhance teaching quality and reduce turnover, especially in community colleges (Boylan & Saxon, 2012; Wallin, 2004, 2005; Ziegler & Reiff, 2006). However, systemic barriers remain prevalent, as evidenced by a 2014 survey from the U.S. House of Representatives, which reported that 89% of adjuncts received no professional support, thus limiting their career growth and teaching effectiveness (U.S. House of Representatives, 2014).

This exclusion from professional development resources reinforces a sense of marginalization, as adjuncts may feel like “second-class” faculty members due to their limited access to workshops, training, and development programs regularly available to full-time faculty (Kezar & Gehrke, 2014). Adjuncts with fewer professional development opportunities tend to experience lower job satisfaction, which can adversely affect their teaching effectiveness and, consequently, student outcomes (Umbach, 2007). Moreover, adjuncts face specific obstacles in accessing professional development, including lack of funding, scheduling conflicts, and institutional priorities that favor full-time faculty (Kezar & Maxey, 2016). These constraints limit adjuncts’ capacity to innovate in the classroom, update curricula, and grow as educators, directly impacting student learning outcomes and job satisfaction (Cross & Goldenberg, 2011).

Adjunct faculty also frequently balance teaching assignments across multiple institutions, often pursuing training at their own expense in the hope of securing a full-time role (Kezar, Scott & Yang, 2018). Without institutional funding for professional development or access to resources for career advancement, adjuncts are further isolated from professional networking opportunities, which stifles both their professional growth and academic contributions (Pons et al., 2017). Additionally, limited professional development opportunities restrict adjuncts’ ability

to stay current with advances in their fields, making it difficult for them to provide students with relevant and comprehensive learning experiences (Hoyt, 2012).

These limitations create a sense of professional stagnation for adjuncts, underscoring the need for more inclusive policies that recognize and support their contributions within the academic community (Sramek, 2023). Institutional investment in adjunct professional development has shown promise in enhancing faculty engagement, which can positively influence both student satisfaction and retention (Kezar & Maxey, 2016). Addressing these professional development gaps is crucial for fostering a supportive academic environment that promotes the success of both faculty and students.

Adjunct Faculty Job Satisfaction

The job satisfaction of adjunct faculty members has been explored within diverse institutional contexts, but a standardized understanding across all faculty types is lacking. Research often focuses on college instructors as a general group rather than on specific subsets, which can limit the applicability of findings to distinct populations like adjunct faculty (Ambrose et al., 2005). For instance, sources of satisfaction for full-time faculty, such as tenure, promotion, and research opportunities, may not be relevant to non-tenured, non-research-focused adjunct instructors (Ambrose et al., 2005). Significant research attention has been given to the job satisfaction of adjunct faculty at community colleges, where adjuncts teach a substantial proportion of classes and comprise most new instructional hires (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014).

This emphasis on community colleges aligns with the high presence of adjunct instructors there, who often come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and represent a diverse racial demographic (Valadez, 2001). Factors affecting job satisfaction among community college

adjuncts include student interactions, which studies have found to be a primary source of satisfaction, enhanced by reducing barriers to faculty-student engagement (Cohen, 1974; Townsend & LaPaglia, 2000). However, adjunct faculty members at these institutions may experience a sense of marginalization, perceiving themselves as peripheral within the broader higher education landscape (Townsend & LaPaglia, 2000).

Community college adjuncts often choose to teach as a means of working in their academic fields, with personal satisfaction and student engagement serving as key motivators (Pons et al., 2017). Despite their satisfaction with this role, nearly half express a preference for full-time positions elsewhere, though some are content with part-time work due to other personal or professional obligations (Kramer et al., 2014). This variability highlights the importance of examining how different institutional contexts shape job satisfaction among adjunct faculty, particularly regarding autonomy, equity, and institutional support. Equity and institutional support are critical to job satisfaction for adjuncts at community colleges. Adjunct faculty report higher satisfaction levels when they perceive equal treatment with other faculty, and favoritism or nepotism can erode this satisfaction (Lyons & Akroyd, 2014). Faculty autonomy is another significant factor; adjuncts value the independence they experience within the community college environment (Kim et al., 2007).

However, administrative priorities focused on income generation rather than knowledge production can negatively impact job satisfaction, as these shifts often increase enrollment pressures, reduce teaching costs, and limit professional development resources (Dimaria, 2012; Kim et al., 2007). In sum, job satisfaction traits for adjunct faculty vary widely across institutional types, with community colleges presenting unique challenges and supports. The emergence of online and for-profit institutions further complicates adjunct job satisfaction by

introducing additional pressures and environmental factors that influence adjunct faculty experiences. Understanding the job satisfaction of adjuncts thus requires a contextual approach that considers institutional missions, structures, and support mechanisms.

Impact of Institutional Support on Faculty Morale, Engagement, and Student Outcomes

The cumulative impact of institutional challenges facing adjunct faculty has notable implications for both faculty well-being and student outcomes. Research highlights that adjunct faculty often face job insecurity, insufficient compensation, limited resources, and restricted access to professional development, contributing to their marginalization within academic institutions (Pons et al., 2017). This sense of being temporary or replaceable can erode adjuncts' sense of value and connection to their institutions, negatively affecting their job satisfaction, mental health, and commitment to teaching (Sramek, 2023). Hoyt (2012) and Jaeger and Eagan (2009) suggested that such marginalization diminishes adjunct faculty morale, causing disengagement and burnout, leading to lower motivation to engage fully in their roles.

When adjuncts feel undervalued or unsupported, their engagement with students may diminish, impacting student outcomes. Studies indicate that students taught by engaged and supported instructors tend to perform better and demonstrate higher retention rates (Umbach, 2007). Conversely, adjunct faculty who lack institutional support are less likely to be available on campus for mentorship and informal interactions, which are vital to students' academic development (Zhu, 2021). Research shows that students who have primarily adjunct instructors may experience reduced access to feedback and guidance, leading to lower academic engagement and satisfaction (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008; Kezar et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the lack of institutional support has broader consequences for student learning outcomes and institutional effectiveness. Students taught by disengaged or unsupported

adjunct faculty often exhibit lower academic success, retention, and satisfaction with their educational experiences (Zhu, 2021). This reduced engagement on the part of adjunct faculty, resulting from insufficient institutional support, hinders students' access to mentorship, consistent guidance, and long-term academic relationships, which are crucial for academic growth and confidence. Addressing these challenges through increased institutional support can therefore benefit both adjunct faculty and students, enhancing overall academic outcomes and creating a more cohesive educational environment (Kezar & Maxey, 2012; Street et al., 2012).

Impact on Student Outcomes

The consequences of adjunct faculty marginalization extend beyond the faculty's professional well-being to directly affect student outcomes. Studies indicate that students who are predominantly taught by adjunct instructors especially in introductory or foundational courses are less likely to advance to higher-level courses or persist in their academic programs (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008; Kezar et al., 2014). Studies over the years apparently reveal that the use of adjunct faculty negatively affects student success (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005; Mueller et al., 2013). Research by Zhu (2021) reveals that students taught by adjuncts may be less inclined to pursue further studies in the same subject, impacting overall academic engagement and retention. For example, a study conducted at public colleges in Arkansas found that students of adjunct instructors exhibited lower performance across various academic measures compared to those taught by full-time faculty, highlighting the significant impact of adjuncts limited institutional support on students' educational experiences and trajectories (Danaei, 2019; Eagan & Jaeger, 2008; Kezar, Maxey & Badke, 2014).

Adjuncts' marginalization is compounded by their limited campus presence, often due to the necessity of working multiple jobs to supplement their income (Zhu, 2021). Despite teaching

a substantial portion of courses, adjunct faculty frequently receive low compensation, inadequate office space, minimal clerical support, and few professional development opportunities, and are sometimes perceived as temporary and replaceable members of the academic community (Pons et al., 2017). This lack of access to essential resources, such as private offices, benefits, and institutional support systems, further limits their capacity to engage meaningfully with students, ultimately impacting the overall academic environment (Sramek, 2023).

The repercussions for students are multifaceted. Students taught by adjunct faculty who must navigate insufficient institutional support, and multiple external commitments may miss out on valuable mentorship opportunities, consistent feedback, and the long-term academic relationships that contribute to student development and retention (Pons et al., 2017; Zhu, 2021). Studies show that limited institutional support for adjunct faculty can directly translate into diminished student learning experiences:—faculty satisfaction. Lacking adequate resources may lead to lower student engagement and satisfaction levels. Students taking multiple courses with unsupported adjunct faculty report lower engagement and learning satisfaction, which can correlate with higher dropout rates and reduced graduation rates (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008; Kezar et al. 2014).

Furthermore, excluding adjunct faculty from institutional resources and decision-making processes disrupts their ability to build meaningful connections with students who rely on academic support and guidance. This disconnect may lead to a less cohesive and supportive learning environment, adversely affecting student engagement, confidence, and future academic performance. Without policies that integrate adjunct faculty into institutional frameworks—granting them equitable access to resources and professional growth opportunities—students may continue to experience a fragmented academic environment with lower rates of persistence

and achievement (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008; Kezar et al., 2014). In summary, addressing the institutional challenges facing adjunct faculty is essential to improving both faculty and student outcomes, underscoring the importance of inclusive policies that support adjunct faculty's engagement and effectiveness within the academic community.

Policy Implications and Institutional Recommendations

In response to the persistent challenges facing adjunct faculty, numerous scholars have advocated for policy reforms to enhance adjunct working conditions and foster a more inclusive environment within academic institutions. Kezar and Maxey (2013) recommend creating pathways for adjunct faculty to participate in governance and decision-making processes, positing that such inclusion can significantly boost job satisfaction and institutional loyalty. Additionally, they suggest that institutions address issues of job security and professional growth by offering multiyear contracts, equitable access to resources, and professional development opportunities (Street et al., 2012).

Addressing these challenges requires higher education institutions to make a concerted effort to support adjunct faculty equitably. Scholars call for policies that enhance job security, provide access to essential resources, and ensure opportunities for professional development while actively involving adjuncts in governance processes (Street et al., 2012; Kezar, 2013). Implementing these policy changes can lead to greater job satisfaction and engagement among adjunct faculty, which in turn benefits student outcomes and fosters a more inclusive academic community. By recognizing and valuing the contributions of adjunct faculty, institutions can promote a supportive work environment that aligns with broader institutional goals of academic excellence and inclusivity.

Impact of Institutional Support on Faculty and Student Outcomes

This section explores the impact of institutional support on both faculty and student outcomes, emphasizing research that links faculty satisfaction with student success. It examines how the exclusion of adjunct faculty can adversely affect educational quality, reducing the effectiveness of instruction and overall learning outcomes. Additionally, studies demonstrating the positive effects of supportive work environments on instructional quality underscores the importance of addressing the challenges faced by adjunct faculty. By connecting these insights, this section establishes the necessity for institutions to prioritize supportive measures that can enhance educational outcomes.

Despite being often excluded from research development opportunities, data from the National Education Association Higher Education Research Center (2001) reveals that up to one-third of adjunct faculty in four-year colleges and universities publish research within two years. Institutional support plays a crucial role in shaping the experiences and outcomes of faculty members, directly influencing student success and institutional performance. The literature consistently shows that supportive environments enhance instructional quality, improving student outcomes (Zhu, 2021; Kezar & Maxey, 2016).

Studies reveal that when faculty members receive sufficient support through resources, professional development, and inclusion in governance, they experience higher job satisfaction, stronger, more substantial, more robust engagement, and increased teaching effectiveness (Eagan et al., 2015; Waltman et al., 2012). Conversely, inadequate support can diminish faculty commitment and reduce instructional quality, ultimately impacting student success and institutional performance (Kezar & Maxey, 2016). This synthesis of existing research highlights the broader repercussions of adjunct exclusion on educational quality, reinforcing the need for

this study by underscoring the link between adjunct faculty support and institutional performance.

Faculty Job Satisfaction and Commitment

Low compensation is one of the most pronounced inequities faced by adjunct faculty in higher education, underscoring a broader issue of institutional support disparities (AFT, 2002). Institutional support, which encompasses fair compensation, access to resources, and opportunities for professional growth, is a critical determinant of faculty job satisfaction and commitment. Research consistently demonstrates that faculty who perceive themselves as supported by their institutions are more likely to experience job satisfaction and a stronger sense of commitment. This support translates into increased effort in teaching and mentoring roles, which positively impacts student engagement and academic success (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005).

Conversely, a lack of institutional support often results in dissatisfaction, reduced teaching quality, and lower student engagement. Kezar and Gehrke (2014) highlight how the absence of fair compensation and adequate resources diminishes faculty morale, leading to disengagement and compromised educational outcomes. This challenge is particularly acute for adjunct faculty, who often experience systemic inequities, such as compensation gaps, limited access to professional development, and exclusion from institutional governance. These inequities exacerbate feelings of marginalization and hinder their ability to contribute meaningfully to academic and institutional goals.

Addressing compensation and support disparities is critical to fostering a committed and effective faculty body, which ultimately enhances educational outcomes. Although existing studies link faculty satisfaction to institutional support (Dame & Inan, 2021; Elshami et al.,

2021), research specifically examining how adjunct faculty's compensation gaps and inequities affect their long-term commitment and professional growth remains limited. By prioritizing equitable compensation and comprehensive support for adjunct faculty, institutions can create environments where faculty feel valued and motivated to excel. Such efforts are essential for improving not only faculty satisfaction and retention but also the overall quality of education provided to students. A commitment to addressing these disparities can foster a more inclusive and effective academic community, benefiting both faculty and students alike.

Professional Development and Teaching Effectiveness

Professional development serves as a cornerstone of faculty effectiveness, enabling instructors to refine their teaching practices, stay updated in their fields, and innovate in their instructional methods. Institutions that invest in training programs, workshops, and access to academic resources create environments where faculty can adopt modern teaching approaches and remain engaged with their disciplines (Cross & Goldenberg, 2011). This investment fosters continuous improvement, which is critical for enhancing teaching quality and student outcomes. Research consistently highlights the positive impact of professional development on teaching effectiveness.

Faculty who regularly engage in professional development opportunities demonstrate improved teaching techniques, which translate to higher levels of student satisfaction, engagement, and learning outcomes (Street et al., 2012). Moreover, such opportunities signal institutional recognition of faculty contributions, promoting a culture of continuous improvement and professional growth. By prioritizing professional development, institutions not only enhance faculty skills but also cultivate a learning environment that benefits students' educational experiences (Purvis et al., 2023; Hayes, 2023).

However, adjunct faculty often face significant barriers to accessing professional development opportunities, which limits their ability to grow professionally and impacts their classroom effectiveness. Unlike their full-time counterparts, adjunct faculty frequently encounter institutional constraints such as lack of funding, limited access to workshops and resources, and scheduling conflicts that hinder their participation in training programs (Purvis et al., 2023). These barriers create inequities in professional development access, reinforcing a sense of marginalization among adjuncts and restricting their ability to implement innovative teaching practices effectively. Addressing these barriers is critical for promoting equity in professional development and enhancing instructional quality across all faculty ranks.

Institutions must recognize the unique challenges faced by adjunct faculty and develop inclusive policies and practices that ensure equitable access to professional development opportunities. Doing so will not only improve adjunct faculty's teaching effectiveness but also contribute to creating a more inclusive and supportive academic environment that prioritizes high-quality educational experiences for students. By removing obstacles to professional development and fostering a culture of continuous learning, institutions can empower all faculty members, particularly adjuncts, to maximize their instructional impact and contribute meaningfully to student success and institutional goals.

Institutional Support and Faculty Engagement

Faculty engagement is inextricably linked to the level of institutional support provided, particularly through governance and decision-making opportunities. When faculty are included in governance processes, they develop a stronger sense of belonging and alignment with institutional goals, which fosters motivation and active participation in academic initiatives (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011). This inclusion not only enhances their sense of ownership but

also empowers them to contribute more effectively to mentoring, curriculum development, and academic advising. Engaged faculty, in turn, are better equipped to support student success, as their involvement positively influences course design, mentoring, and overall academic development (Maynard & Joseph, 2008).

However, exclusion from governance and institutional processes often leads to disengagement, diminished morale, and reduced job satisfaction. Waltman et al. (2012) highlights that such exclusion negatively impacts faculty experiences, creating a disconnect between faculty and institutional goals. For adjunct faculty, these challenges are even more pronounced. Adjuncts frequently face systemic barriers to inclusion in governance, which limits their ability to participate in decision-making processes, reducing their alignment with institutional priorities. This marginalization not only affects their morale but also diminishes their capacity to contribute meaningfully to institutional and student success.

Moreover, research consistently emphasizes the critical role of faculty engagement in achieving teaching effectiveness and maintaining educational quality. Faculty engagement has been identified as a key determinant of improved student learning outcomes (Artates, 2023), as engaged faculty foster collaboration, inclusivity, and high-quality educational experiences. Henkel and Haley (2020) underscore the importance of prioritizing faculty engagement to maintain a motivated and cohesive academic community. Despite the evident benefits, limited research has explored the unique challenges faced by adjunct faculty regarding governance exclusion and its impact on their contributions to institutional development. Addressing these gaps is essential for building a supportive and inclusive academic environment. By prioritizing governance inclusivity and actively involving all faculty members in institutional processes, higher education institutions can enhance faculty engagement, improve morale, and ultimately

foster a more cohesive and motivated academic community. Institutions must recognize the specific barriers faced by adjunct faculty and develop strategies to ensure their voices are heard and valued within governance structures, paving the way for more equitable and effective academic collaboration.

Impact on Student Outcomes

Institutional support plays a critical role in shaping both faculty effectiveness and student outcomes. The level of support extended to faculty has a direct and profound impact on their ability to create positive and inclusive learning environments, which in turn enhances student satisfaction, retention, and academic achievement. Umbach (2007) highlights that faculty who perceive institutional support are more effective educators and mentors, fostering improved student engagement, retention, and performance. Similarly, Eagan et al. (2015) emphasize that supportive environments encourage collaboration and inclusivity, both of which are essential for student success.

Conversely, inadequate institutional support can have detrimental effects, leading to faculty burnout and diminished instructional quality. Kezar and Maxey (2013) argue that such adverse conditions negatively affect students' educational experiences by limiting the ability of faculty to deliver high-quality instruction and mentorship. These challenges are particularly acute for adjunct faculty, who often experience marginalization within higher education institutions. Adjuncts face systemic barriers, such as limited access to resources, exclusion from governance, and inadequate professional development opportunities, all of which restrict their ability to provide consistent mentorship and guidance. This marginalization not only undermines their job satisfaction and teaching effectiveness but also directly impacts student engagement and academic success.

Addressing these deficits in institutional support is vital for optimizing outcomes at both the faculty and student levels. Institutions that invest in supporting faculty by maintaining high instructional standards and fostering an engaging and inclusive atmosphere create environments where students are more likely to succeed. However, while existing research establishes the critical link between faculty support and student outcomes, there remains insufficient exploration of how adjunct faculty's marginalization specifically affects their ability to contribute to these outcomes effectively. Recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by adjunct faculty is essential for ensuring a high-quality educational experience for all students.

Existing Gaps

The concluding section summarizes the key gaps identified in the existing literature, focusing on the need for institutional policies that foster adjunct faculty inclusion and support their professional development. By highlighting these areas, this section underscores the rationale for the current study, which aims to address the overlooked aspects of adjunct faculty support, ultimately advancing both faculty engagement and educational quality.

Based on insights from the previous sections, this final part summarized gaps in the literature, specifically regarding the need for policies that enhance adjunct inclusion and professional development. This gap underscores the present study's rationale and potential contributions to the field. The literature reveals significant gaps regarding policies that address adjunct faculty inclusion and professional development, particularly in creating supportive environments that promote equitable treatment alongside full-time faculty. While existing research emphasizes the adverse effects of limited institutional support on adjunct faculty's job satisfaction, engagement, and teaching quality (Kezar & Maxey, 2016; Eagan et al., 2015), there

is a lack of comprehensive policy frameworks that systematically incorporate adjuncts into the academic community.

Few studies explore actionable strategies for ensuring adjuncts have adequate access to resources, consistent opportunities for professional growth, and meaningful involvement in governance processes, all of which contribute to a supportive work environment and improved educational outcomes. This gap in the literature underscores the need for further research into institutional policies that foster inclusion and professional development for adjunct faculty. Addressing these gaps will not only support adjuncts in their teaching roles but also enhance student success and institutional performance, providing a rationale for the present study. By investigating effective strategies to improve adjunct inclusion and support, this study aims to contribute to the field by offering insights that can inform policy reforms and advance the equity and quality of higher education.

Summary

This chapter has explored the complex and multifaceted challenges faced by adjunct faculty in higher education, which include job insecurity, limited access to essential resources, exclusion from governance, and scarce opportunities for professional development. These issues collectively contribute to a widespread sense of marginalization, which has a detrimental impact on adjunct faculty's job satisfaction, well-being, and teaching effectiveness. The literature consistently highlights that such marginalization not only affects faculty morale but also harms student outcomes, as disengaged and unsupported faculty are less equipped to provide high-quality education (Kezar & Maxey, 2013; Street et al., 2012).

The review reveals both convergence and divergence within the literature. There is general agreement on the benefits of supportive institutional practices, such as access to

professional development, adequate resources, and inclusive governance, in improving faculty engagement and effectiveness. However, significant gaps persist, particularly in empirical studies detailing the specific mechanisms through which institutions can foster supportive environments for adjunct faculty. Moreover, while some studies advocate for incremental policy changes, others emphasize the need for comprehensive reforms to address institutional deficits adequately. Addressing these challenges through inclusive policies and strong support systems is crucial for enhancing both faculty and student outcomes.

Institutions that invest in professional development opportunities, fair governance practices, and accessible resources for adjunct faculty are likely to see improvements in faculty satisfaction and engagement, benefiting students and reinforcing institutional reputation (Kezar & Maxey, 2016; Street et al., 2012). Such measures promote a more inclusive academic environment, enabling adjunct faculty to engage fully and contribute meaningfully to the academic community. In conclusion, this chapter underscores the need for the present study by emphasizing the literature's critical gaps regarding institutional support for adjunct faculty. This discussion provides a foundation for Chapter 3, where the research methodology and design is outlined to investigate these gaps further and identify strategies that institutions can adopt to create a more supportive environment for adjunct faculty.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The problem addressed in this study was the marginalization, institutional support deficits, and exclusion of adjunct faculty from institutional support, shared governance, and involvement in decision-making at institutions (Bakley & Brodersen, 2018; Kezar & Sam, 2014; Liljegren, 2016; Rhoades, 2020) within higher education institutions, which undermine their professional efficacy, job satisfaction, and contributions to student success (Burleigh et al., 2021; Flaherty, 2022; Gelman et al., 2022; Zitko & Schultz, 2020). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of adjunct faculty regarding marginalization, institutional support deficits, and exclusion within higher education.

By examining these lived experiences, the research aimed to identify perceptions of systemic barriers that affect adjunct faculty's professional efficacy, job satisfaction, and contributions to student success. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the research methodology and design. It included descriptions of the research design and rationale, the study population, sampling methods, recruitment and participation procedures, and data collection techniques. The chapter also details the instrumentation, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as well as ethical considerations. It concluded with a summary.

Research Methodology and Design

This study employed a qualitative methodology with a phenomenological design to explore the experiences of adjunct faculty members, focusing on their perceptions of marginalization and institutional support. I used qualitative research as an interpretive and naturalistic approach to observe and interpret individuals' perceptions of events (Neuman, 2011). From Khan's (2014) perspective, qualitative research was valuable for exploring underlying

factors and antecedents that may not have been well-documented or fully understood. By leveraging qualitative inquiry, the study delved into individual experiences, meanings, and interpretations (Birchall, 2014). Mixed-methods research, which combines qualitative and quantitative approaches for corroboration and enhanced understanding (Harrison & Reilly, 2011), was not suitable for this study. The interpretive flexibility required to explore adjunct faculty's nuanced experiences was less feasible in a mixed-methods framework. Similarly, a quantitative method, which relies on numerical data and pre-defined variables (Chen, 2011; Slife & Melling, 2012), did not align with the study's focus on qualitative, experiential insights.

Phenomenological research specifically focused on understanding the essence of lived experiences as described by participants, offering a deep exploration of human perspectives and interactions (Van Manen, 1990). This approach was particularly suitable for capturing the shared experiences of adjunct faculty in higher education, especially their perceptions of marginalization, institutional support deficits, and exclusion. The phenomenological design allowed for a detailed examination of their lived experiences, providing valuable insights into the systemic and personal challenges they faced (Creswell, 2014; van Manen, 2014).

Unlike grounded theory, which aims to generate a theory, or ethnography, which explores cultural phenomena, phenomenological research was better suited for examining the subjective, lived experiences central to this study. Phenomenological research was distinct in its emphasis on uncovering the essence of experiences shared by participants rather than aiming for generalizable outcomes or statistical comparisons (Hyett et al., 2014; Thomas, 2011).

Participants for this study were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse and rich sample. The study included 10 adjunct faculty members from a variety of institutions and academic disciplines within New York City. This sampling approach was intentional, targeting

individuals who could offer detailed and specific insights into the research problem, thereby aligning with the study's objectives of uncovering both systemic and personal challenges (Patton, 2015; Suri, 2011).

To collect data, semi-structured interviews were conducted, focusing on participants' perceptions of institutional support, inclusion, and engagement. This method ensured that all key topics were addressed while allowing participants the flexibility to share their unique experiences in depth. The approach provided a balance between structured inquiry and open-ended discussion, resulting in comprehensive and nuanced data (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Kvale, 2007).

The findings were synthesized to develop actionable policy recommendations aimed at addressing the marginalization of adjunct faculty and improving institutional support. These recommendations were informed by the themes identified during data analysis and the insights gained through validation processes. By grounding the recommendations in participants' lived experiences and the research evidence, the study ensured that its findings were relevant, practical, and capable of driving meaningful change (Patton, 2015).

This structured and rigorous research process highlighted the importance of addressing challenges faced by adjunct faculty to foster a more inclusive and supportive academic environment. By leveraging phenomenological research, the study uncovered rich insights into the lived experiences of adjunct faculty, ultimately contributing to the development of policies and strategies to enhance their inclusion, support, and engagement within higher education institutions.

Population and Sample

This research explored the factors contributing to the marginalization, institutional support deficits, and exclusion of adjunct faculty in higher education through a qualitative phenomenological lens. The target population comprised adjunct faculty employed in higher educational institutions within New York City. These individuals were purposefully selected based on their ability to provide rich, detailed insights into the challenges and systemic issues they experienced in their academic roles (Suri, 2011).

The population included adjunct faculty with a minimum of three years of teaching experience in New York City-based higher education institutions. This criterion ensured that participants possessed the requisite knowledge and expertise to address the research problem comprehensively (Poulis et al., 2013). Faculty members with three or more years of teaching experience were better equipped to navigate classroom procedures and understand the institutional dynamics that impacted their work (Engida et al., 2024).

Participants Overview

Ten adjunct faculty members participated in this study, selected based on established qualitative research guidelines. Bernard (2013) recommended 10–20 interviews for exploring lived experiences, while Creswell (2023) suggested 5–25 for phenomenological research. Guest et al. (2006) found that 6–12 interviews often yield thematic saturation. All participants had at least three years of teaching experience in higher education institutions across New York City. Their academic backgrounds spanned the social sciences, humanities, and business, providing a well-rounded and diverse set of perspectives. According to the New York State Education Department (2024), three years or 540 full-time days of teaching is the minimum requirement for instructional competence, ensuring participants had adequate classroom exposure and professional insight to inform the study.

Sampling Method

Purposive sampling was the method used for identifying and selecting information-rich cases for an in-depth study. This technique aligned with Patton's (2015a) assertion that purposeful sampling is designed to locate cases with the most potential to inform the research questions. The selection of participants also considered data saturation, defined as the point at which no new insights emerged from the data, ensuring an adequate and justifiable sample size (Mason, 2010). The study included 10 participants, a number deemed sufficient to achieve saturation based on qualitative research principles (Mason, 2010). Creswell and Poth (2018) confirmed that a small sample size, such as this, is suitable for phenomenological studies, as it enables a detailed exploration of lived experiences.

The sample size was considered sufficient based on practical and theoretical considerations, including the narrow scope of the research problem and the homogeneity of the participant group. As Dworkin (2012) noted, smaller sample sizes in qualitative research are ideal for fostering nuanced understanding, particularly in studies that aim to explore systemic and personal dimensions of institutional challenges.

To ensure a rich and focused data set, participants in this study were required to meet several specific criteria. First, they were employed as adjunct faculty in New York City higher education institutions for at least three years. This requirement ensured that participants had sufficient experience and familiarity with the dynamics and challenges faced by adjunct faculty in these settings, providing valuable insights into the research problem (Creswell, 2014; Poulis et al., 2013).

Additionally, participants demonstrated the ability and willingness to engage in two interviews, each approximately 60 minutes in length. The second interview served as a follow-up

to delve deeper into the participant's lived experiences shared during the initial session. This was important for ensuring that participants provided in-depth responses and reflections on their experiences, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the challenges they faced in their academic roles (Patton, 2015).

Participants were also required to conduct the interviews in a distraction-free, private setting. This criterion was implemented to protect the confidentiality of the participants and to ensure that the interview process was conducted in an environment conducive to open, honest, and focused conversations (Javalgi et al., 2011). Participants who did not meet these criteria were excluded from the study.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom in a professional and non-threatening environment that facilitated open and honest discussions. Both participants and I ensured that the settings were private, quiet, and free from interruptions, with stable internet connections, functional webcams, and good audio quality. This approach maximized the quality of data collection while respecting participant convenience and confidentiality (Javalgi et al., 2011). The sampling approach and interview process were designed to ensure that the collected data were rich and meaningful, aligning with the study's objectives to explore the systemic factors influencing adjunct faculty's experiences in higher education institutions.

A purposive sampling method was used to select participants who had relevant experience working as adjunct faculty in higher education institutions. Participants were recruited through institutional directories, professional adjunct faculty networks, and social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook to ensure a diverse and information-rich sample. The estimated sample size for this study was 10 adjunct faculty members, ensuring diverse perspectives while allowing for in-depth qualitative analysis. The final sample size was

adjusted based on data saturation, where no new themes or insights emerged from additional interviews.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument for data collection in this study was a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix B), specifically developed to explore adjunct faculty perceptions of marginalization, institutional support deficits, and exclusion in higher education. The interview protocol was carefully designed based on a comprehensive review of existing literature on adjunct faculty experiences, focusing on relevant themes such as institutional policies, leadership support, and professional growth opportunities (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This development process ensured that the protocol was aligned with the study's purpose and research questions.

The protocol included open-ended questions to elicit detailed and personal responses, fostering rich and nuanced insights into participants lived experiences. This approach allowed me to maintain consistency across all interviews while giving participants the flexibility to elaborate on their unique perspectives (Seidman, 2019). The flexibility of the semi-structured format facilitated meaningful discussions, balancing structure with adaptability.

To validate the instrument, a rigorous field-testing process was conducted. Two adjunct faculty members who were not included in the final study sample participated in the field test. They were asked to review and respond to the interview questions, simulating the actual interview process. Their feedback highlighted areas of ambiguity, question flow, and potential gaps in coverage.

Based on their input, refinements were made to enhance the clarity, relevance, and sequence of the questions. For instance, some questions were rephrased for better comprehension, and additional prompts were added to encourage more in-depth responses.

Furthermore, an expert in qualitative research reviewed the revised interview protocol to ensure its dependability and credibility and that the findings would be rigorous and accurately represent the perspectives of participants.

This expert provided additional feedback to ensure that the protocol aligned with best practices in qualitative research and was capable of effectively capturing the data necessary to address the study's objectives (Maxwell, 2012). This development and validation process ensured that the interview protocol was robust, reliable, and aligned with the study's goals. All modifications resulting from field testing and expert review were documented. The finalized instrument provided a solid foundation for collecting meaningful data from participants while maintaining consistency and rigor in the research process.

Study Procedures

Participants for this study were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals with relevant experiences and knowledge regarding the study's research focus. Email invitations were sent to eligible adjunct faculty members identified through institutional directories, for which site permission was not required to ensure proper access and use. The email provided detailed information about the study's purpose, objectives, eligibility criteria, and expectations for participation (Kirkby et al., 2011). Recruitment continued until data saturation was achieved, ensuring the collection of comprehensive and diverse perspectives. Once participants consented to participate, I scheduled interviews at mutually convenient times. The interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom to accommodate participants' schedules and ensure accessibility.

Each participant engaged in two interview sessions, each lasting approximately 60 minutes. The first session began with a thorough review of the study's purpose, objectives, and

informed consent, while the second session served as a follow-up to explore and clarify emerging themes from the initial interview. Participants were reminded of their rights, including the ability to withdraw at any point without penalty, ensuring their comfort and voluntary participation throughout the process. During the interviews, open-ended questions guided the conversation, encouraging participants to share detailed accounts of their lived experiences and perceptions. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility, enabling me to explore topics in depth while ensuring consistency across all interviews. All sessions were audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure accurate data collection and transcription. To maintain confidentiality, participants' identities were anonymized through the use of pseudonyms.

The recorded data were securely stored on password-protected devices, and transcription was performed using Otter.ai software to ensure accuracy. Field notes were also taken during each session to capture non-verbal cues and additional contextual information. This comprehensive procedure ensured transparency and replicability, providing a clear roadmap for how data were collected, including what data were collected (participant interviews), how they were collected (semi-structured interviews via Zoom), when they were collected (scheduled at mutually convenient times), from where (adjunct faculty in higher education institutions), and from whom (eligible adjunct faculty members meeting the study criteria). These steps were implemented to ensure the study's rigor and alignment with ethical research practices.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed a systematic approach to ensure the findings were credible, accurate, and aligned with the research questions and objectives. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a common approach in phenomenological research, was employed to explore how participants made sense of their lived experiences. This method

involved a detailed, iterative process of examining transcripts to identify emergent themes, interpret their meanings, and understand how individuals constructed their realities (Rajasinghe et al., 2024; Smith et al., 2022). This method was well-suited for organizing and interpreting rich, qualitative data, allowing for an in-depth understanding of adjunct faculty experiences. The analysis began with manual initial coding to break down the data into meaningful units.

The transcribed interviews were carefully reviewed, with key phrases and statements relevant to the study's research questions highlighted. These codes were then refined and organized using NVivo 12 software, which facilitated the systematic categorization and visualization of data. The software's features enabled efficient management of large amounts of qualitative data and supported the development of themes through detailed comparisons and analysis.

Thematic analysis was applied to the collected data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the experiences of adjunct faculty members. This analytical method enabled the extraction of meaningful insights while remaining grounded in participants' narratives. By providing both depth and breadth, thematic analysis facilitated a nuanced understanding of the data and the issues under investigation (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To ensure the findings were credible and dependable, the study employed member checking and triangulation. Member checking involved sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations and ensure they genuinely reflected participants' experiences. Participants were given one week to review the transcripts before proceeding, regardless of their response (Harper & Cole, 2012). This step ensured that their perspectives were accurately represented and allowed them to verify the authenticity of the interpretations.

Triangulation, involving multiple data sources or perspectives, was used to validate and cross-check the findings and robustness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2014). This involved comparing the interview data with existing literature on adjunct faculty experiences to cross-validate insights and ensure that the findings were grounded in broader research.

Additionally, I played an active role throughout the data analysis process, striving to maintain objectivity while practicing reflexivity. I used reflexive journaling to document personal biases and reflections, which helped minimize the influence of my preconceptions on the analysis. Engaging in continuous self-reflection ensured that interpretations remained true to the data and aligned with the study's purpose.

This rigorous and transparent approach to data analysis—combining manual coding, software-assisted organization, thematic analysis, triangulation, and member checking—enhanced the credibility and depth of the study's findings, ultimately contributing meaningful insights to the identified problem.

Data Analysis Process

In this study, data analysis followed a structured and systematic approach grounded in qualitative research methodology. A key principle applied was *saturation*, a widely accepted criterion for determining when sufficient data have been collected. Saturation was reached when no new themes or insights emerged from the interviews, ensuring the findings were both rich and meaningful (Sharma et al., 2024). The process began with open coding, where each participant's interview response was reviewed in detail and segmented into small units or code categories. These initial codes captured specific ideas or lived experiences described by the adjunct faculty.

Following this, axial coding was applied to group related codes into broader categories or patterns. This step allowed for the identification of relationships among data points and provided

a framework for deeper analysis. Next, selective coding was used to refine these patterns and build overarching themes. These themes directly addressed the study's three research questions and captured the shared narratives of the participants. To enhance the organization and consistency of this process, NVivo software was employed. This tool assisted in the clustering of codes, visualization of themes, and refinement of relationships among data elements.

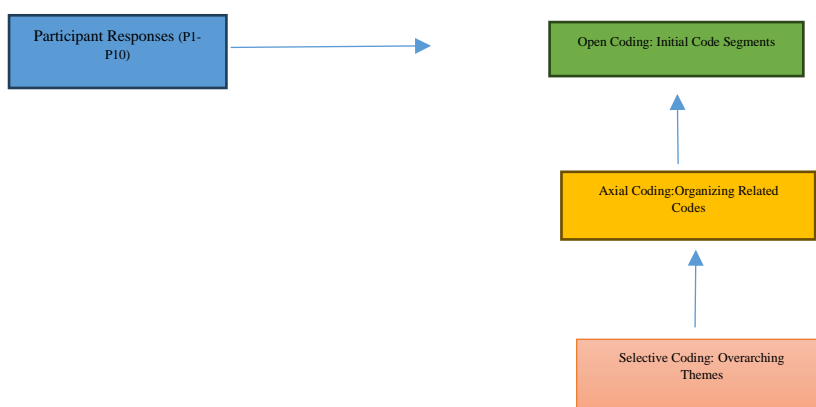
The data analysis process followed this logical sequence:

1. **Participant Responses (P1 to P10):** These served as the raw data sources.
2. **Open Coding:** Responses were broken down into initial code segments.
3. **Axial Coding:** Related codes were grouped into patterns or categories.
4. **Selective Coding:** Overarching themes were developed from these patterns.

Each stage flowed naturally into the next, resulting in a robust and well-structured thematic analysis grounded in the voices and experiences of the adjunct faculty participants (See Qualitative Data Coding Process in Figure. 1).

Figure. 1

Qualitative Data Coding Process



Assumptions

This study relied on the assumption that participants provided honest, thoughtful, and comprehensive responses during interviews. This aligned with the principle that qualitative research depends on participants' willingness to share their authentic experiences in a meaningful way (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, it was assumed that participants' experiences reflected broader systemic issues within higher education institutions, a premise supported by Maxwell's (2012) argument that purposive sampling enhances the transferability of qualitative findings. Finally, the assumption that the inclusion criteria and sampling approach ensured data sufficiency and saturation corresponded with Patton's (2015) assertion that purposive sampling allows researchers to identify information-rich cases relevant to the research problem.

Limitation

A primary limitation of this study was its focus on NYC-based adjunct faculty. This limitation was consistent with Bloomberg and Volpe's (2019) observation that qualitative research is often context-specific and not designed for generalization. Recall bias was a recognized issue in the qualitative study, as participants may have struggled to accurately recall past events or experiences (Alhubaiti, 2016).

Delimitation

This study was delimited to adjunct faculty with at least three years of teaching experience, ensuring that participants had adequate exposure to institutional dynamics. This aligned with Suri's (2011) recommendation that purposive sampling criteria should ensure participants possess significant knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. The focus on institutions employing at least 50 adjunct faculty members further narrowed the scope, as smaller institutions may face different challenges.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) noted that delimitations help researchers intentionally set boundaries for their studies, ensuring alignment with research questions and purpose. The emphasis on institutions known for issues related to marginalization and support deficits ensured the study's relevance to the research problem, aligning with Creswell and Poth's (2018) suggestion that delimitations guide researchers to focus on phenomena central to their research objectives.

Ethical Assurances

Ethical considerations were rigorously upheld throughout this study to protect participants and ensure adherence to research standards. The study received prior approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), confirming compliance with all ethical requirements for research involving human subjects. The IRB approval ensured that the study followed established protocols for safeguarding participants' rights and well-being. Participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits before giving their consent. Informed consent forms, which aligned with Jeong et al. (2012), emphasized that participation was voluntary and that individuals could withdraw at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study to protect participants' identities. Personal information was anonymized using pseudonyms to prevent identification. Data confidentiality was further ensured by securely storing all digital files in password-protected systems and physical materials in locked cabinets, accessible only to authorized personnel. As highlighted by Saunders et al. (2015), anonymization was essential in qualitative research to safeguard participants' privacy and prevent the disclosure of sensitive information. Data security measures aligned with best practices for safeguarding research data.

Digital files, including transcriptions and audio recordings, were encrypted, and physical materials, such as field notes, were stored in a secure location. These measures followed the recommendations of Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), who emphasized the importance of securely storing data to ensure participant confidentiality and compliance with ethical standards.

All data were retained for five years, as required by the institution, and were then securely destroyed using permanent deletion for digital files and shredding for physical documents. To minimize the influence of personal and professional experiences on the study, reflexivity was practiced through the use of a reflexive journal to critically assess potential bias and its impact on the analysis and findings. This approach was consistent with the guidance of Berger (2015), who highlighted reflexivity as a crucial tool for minimizing researcher bias in qualitative research.

Peer debriefing and regular consultation with colleagues further ensured objectivity and rigor in data interpretation. The IRB approval letter was included in the appendix of the final dissertation manuscript to provide formal documentation of ethical compliance. Including this letter aligned with institutional and ethical research standards, as noted by Kim (2012), who underscored the importance of transparency in ethical approvals to establish credibility and accountability in research. These comprehensive ethical assurances demonstrated a commitment to protecting participants' rights, ensuring data security, and maintaining the integrity of the research process.

Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the research methodology and design employed in this study. It detailed the phenomenological qualitative approach selected to explore the lived experiences of adjunct faculty, focusing on their perceptions of marginalization,

institutional support deficits, and exclusion. The study population comprised adjunct faculty members from higher education institutions in New York City, with participants purposefully selected to ensure diverse and rich insights. The chapter described the sampling methods, which included purposive sampling to achieve data saturation, and outlined the use of semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection tool. These interviews were designed to elicit in-depth responses, enabling the exploration of participants' unique experiences. The thematic analysis process, supported by NVivo 12 software, was described in detail, along with strategies such as member checking and triangulation to ensure the validity and credibility of the findings.

Ethical assurances were rigorously addressed, including obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, and implementing robust data security measures. Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations were identified and discussed to provide transparency and clarify the scope and boundaries of the research. Additionally, I acknowledged my role in the study and implemented strategies to mitigate potential biases. This chapter established the foundation for the findings presented in the subsequent chapter. The insights gained from the methodological rigor applied here provided actionable recommendations to enhance institutional support and engagement within higher education.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the analysis and findings from interviews with 10 adjunct faculty members employed in higher education institutions in New York City. Using phenomenological methodology, the study explored the lived experiences of adjunct faculty in relation to

marginalization, institutional support deficits, and exclusion. Thematic analysis was employed to identify emerging patterns, categories, and themes that reflect and capture the shared experiences described by participants.

Trustworthiness of the Data

In qualitative research, *trustworthiness* replaces the terms “validity” and “reliability” used in quantitative studies. Trustworthiness refers to the rigor with which a study is conducted and the degree to which its findings can be trusted to accurately represent participants’ experiences. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness is established through four main criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The following strategies were implemented to ensure that each of these criteria was addressed:

Credibility

Credibility refers to confidence in the truth of the findings and whether the study accurately captured the lived experiences of the participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To enhance credibility, the researcher engaged in prolonged interaction with participants during semi-structured interviews, allowing sufficient time for in-depth exploration of their perspectives (Dado et al., 2023). Open-ended questions were used to facilitate authentic responses without leading participants. Additionally, member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of the identified themes with participants to verify the accuracy of interpretations and ensure their voices were represented authentically. Triangulation of data sources was also used to support credibility. This included cross-checking interview data with reflective field notes and analytic memos written during and after each interview session to confirm consistency across observations. Furthermore, all credibility-enhancing activities were applied in direct alignment with the research questions, ensuring that the identified themes—such as marginalization, lack of

institutional support, and exclusion—were grounded in participants’ actual words and experiences rather than the researcher’s assumptions.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of data over time and across conditions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To achieve dependability, the researcher maintained a detailed audit trail, documenting all steps of the research process—from data collection to coding and thematic development (Wulandari, 2025). This included clearly labeled interview transcripts, NVivo project files, coding frameworks, and analytic memos. The use of NVivo software ensured that data organization and coding processes were systematic and replicable. Coding decisions were reviewed multiple times to ensure consistency and that emerging themes accurately reflected the raw data. An explicit step-by-step log was kept to demonstrate how raw interview transcripts moved through coding cycles to become the final thematic structure, allowing an external reviewer to verify the logical flow from evidence to conclusion. This thorough documentation allows future researchers to examine the research process and potentially replicate the study under similar conditions.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings are shaped by the participants’ responses and not researcher bias or personal agenda (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To enhance confirmability, the researcher maintained reflexive journals throughout the study (Adler, 2022). These journals captured thoughts, reactions, and evolving interpretations, allowing the researcher to remain conscious of personal biases and bracket assumptions. An external peer reviewer, experienced in qualitative analysis, was invited to review a subset of the data and coding structure. This provided objective feedback and helped ensure that the themes were grounded in

the data, rather than influenced by the researcher's perspectives. Audit trails also contributed to confirmability by making the research process transparent and traceable. Direct quotations from participants were systematically linked to each theme presented in the findings to further demonstrate that conclusions were data-driven and not shaped by preconceived notions.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the study's findings can be applied to other contexts or groups (Drisko, 2024). While generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research, transferability is supported by providing thick, rich descriptions of the research setting, participant characteristics, and findings (Younas et al., 2023). In this study, detailed narratives of adjunct faculty members' roles, teaching contexts, and institutional environments were included to help readers determine the extent to which the findings may resonate with or apply to other higher education settings with similar dynamics. By offering both demographic summaries and in-depth contextual details for each theme, the study equips readers and future researchers with the information necessary to judge applicability in other institutions facing similar structural and cultural challenges. By grounding the findings in contextually rich accounts and direct participant quotes, the study provides sufficient detail for others to make informed judgments about relevance to their own institutions or educational systems.

In summary, the trustworthiness of this study was established through deliberate, transparent, and rigorous application of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability strategies. These measures were not only theoretically aligned with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework but also practically integrated into every stage of the research process, from interview design to final thematic presentation—ensuring that the study's findings can be regarded as both authentic and methodologically sound.

Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study objectively and without interpretation. The results are structured according to the study's three research questions and are based on data collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 adjunct faculty members employed at higher education institutions in New York City. The overarching purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how adjunct faculty experience marginalization, deficits in institutional support, and exclusion from academic governance. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and experiences shared across participants. These themes are presented in detail under each corresponding research question.

Each section includes rich, thick descriptions and direct quotes from participants, allowing readers to hear the voices of the faculty themselves. These authentic narratives, along with clearly explained coding steps and theme development, provide readers with sufficient evidence to independently evaluate the credibility and meaning of the findings. To ensure transparency and support readers in making their own judgment about the study's conclusions, this chapter offers a full account of how the results were developed from the data. Findings are grounded in participant responses and supported by demographic context, which is summarized in the next section. Identifiable information is excluded to preserve confidentiality. This results chapter aims to provide a robust, detailed, and trustworthy foundation for the discussion that follows in Chapter 5. The themes that emerged from the data were: (1) feeling like "second-class" faculty, (2) professional identity undermined, (3) lack of professional development and resources, (4) financial and emotional stress, (5) exclusion from governance and decision-making, and (6) structural barriers to inclusion.

Research Question 1: How do adjunct faculty perceive and describe their experiences of marginalization within higher education institutions?

This question seeks to understand how part-time faculty members describe their feelings of being excluded or treated unfairly within universities.

Theme 1: Feeling like “second-class” faculty. Many adjuncts described being treated as less important than full-time faculty. This marginalization was evident in exclusion from faculty lounges, curriculum meetings, and student advising roles. Participant P2 shared, “I often feel invisible in departmental meetings—if I’m even invited,” highlighting a sense of exclusion from important discussions. Participant P5 expressed concern about how adjuncts are perceived, stating, “Adjunct faculty are often treated as temporary help rather than professional colleagues.” Similarly, P8 noted unequal treatment by both students and administrators, saying, “There is a noticeable difference in how students and administrators treat adjuncts compared to full-time faculty.”

These perspectives illustrate the ongoing struggles adjunct faculty face in being fully recognized and respected within academic environments. Numerous studies support the characterization of adjunct faculty as being treated like second-class members within academia. They are routinely excluded from institutional decision-making and often regarded as peripheral to the institution’s core academic mission. This exclusion contributes to persistent feelings of invisibility and diminished professional efficacy among adjuncts. Such marginalization negatively affects faculty morale and can also undermine student outcomes. These sentiments are supported by research, which shows that adjuncts are frequently excluded from key academic activities, leading to a sense of invisibility and reduced morale.

Theme 2: Professional identity undermined. Many adjuncts expressed a sense of disempowerment and that their credentials and input were undervalued. Several adjunct faculty members described feeling professionally sidelined despite their qualifications and experience. P4 shared, “Despite my credentials and experience, I am rarely consulted about academic matters.” P6 explained the limitations placed on them: “I can’t apply for research funding or be considered for internal roles because I’m not ‘core faculty.’” Similarly, P9 expressed concern over being left out of essential responsibilities, stating, “As an adjunct, I am excluded from important faculty responsibilities that impact students and curriculum.” These voices reflect a shared frustration with how institutional roles and opportunities are unequally distributed.

Existing literature highlights the diminished professional identity and lower status frequently experienced by contingent faculty. Compared to their tenured peers, adjuncts often find their expertise and input undervalued, leading to their exclusion from meaningful academic discourse and decision-making processes (Mason et al., 2022). This marginalization fosters feelings of isolation, illegitimacy, and underappreciation, which can discourage adjuncts from asserting their professional voice. In contrast, permanent faculties are more likely to be respected and included in institutional governance and planning. This aligns with literature noting that adjunct faculty often feel isolated and underappreciated.

Research Question 2: How do adjunct faculty perceive and describe their experiences regarding insufficient institutional support in higher education institutions?

This question sought to explore how part-time faculty members describe their experiences of receiving little or inadequate support from their universities.

Theme 3: Lack of professional development and resources. Adjuncts noted limited access to training, teaching tools, and office space. Many of them highlighted the lack of support

and access to professional development. P1 remarked, “We don’t get the same onboarding or tech support as full-timers. It’s like we are expected to figure everything out on our own.”

Pointing to the absence of structured guidance, P7 shared, “I contribute at seminars and workshops, but I had to find them on my own.” P3 added, “Professional development is rarely tailored for adjuncts, and opportunities are not regularly communicated to us.” Together, these statements reflect the systemic gap in institutional support provided to adjunct faculty.

Participants reported poor access to training, tools, and office space. These observations are consistent with literature showing that adjuncts are often left to navigate their roles with minimal institutional support (Ran & Sanders, 2020; Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 2012). Adjunct faculty often encounter systemic disparities in access to essential training and instructional resources. While expected to meet the same academic standards as full-time faculty, they are frequently excluded from professional development opportunities and receive minimal departmental engagement (Coalition on the Academic Workforce, 2012). Many adjuncts are assigned courses with minimal notice before the semester begins, restricting adequate preparation. Additionally, the lack of office space, onboarding support, and teaching tools leaves them feeling isolated and underprepared to meet students’ academic needs (Ran & Sanders, 2020). These constraints hinder instructional effectiveness and contribute to broader inequities in the learning environment.

Theme 4: Financial and emotional stress. Participants referenced the instability of semester-by-semester contracts and insufficient pay. Adjunct faculty members expressed how financial instability and lack of timely compensation affect their morale and well-being. Highlighting the emotional toll of job insecurity P4 shared, “It’s hard to stay motivated when you’re constantly uncertain about your job,” P10 added, “It’s discouraging to travel long

distances and not be paid what you're due," pointing to both logistical and financial burdens. P6 similarly recounted, "Non-payment of honorarium for one year—it's exhausting and humiliating," underscoring the deep frustration and sense of devaluation that stems from delayed or denied compensation. These experiences reflect broader concerns in the literature about adjunct job insecurity and its emotional toll (Witt & Gearin, 2020; Zhu, 2021).

Research shows that the precarious and unstable nature of adjunct faculty contracts significantly contributes to job stress and burnout. Witt and Gearin (2020) found that financial hardship caused by low and unpredictable compensation directly undermines job satisfaction among part-time faculty. Adjuncts often juggle multiple teaching positions across different institutions just to meet basic living needs (Belmonte, 2020; Zhu, 2021). Their income is frequently contingent upon last-minute course assignments and fluctuating enrollments, which adds layers of uncertainty. This contingent employment model creates chronic job insecurity and emotional fatigue, leading to long-term psychological and professional strain (Brennan & Magness, 2018; Ott & Dippold, 2018).

Research Question 3: How do adjunct faculty perceive and describe their experiences of exclusion from key activities and decision-making processes in higher education institutions?

This question examines how part-time faculty members describe their experiences of being left out of important activities and decision-making within universities.

Theme 5: Exclusion from governance and decision-making. A recurring theme was the lack of involvement in institutional planning or curriculum design. Adjunct faculty members often feel sidelined in institutional communication and decision-making processes. One adjunct, P3, emphasized how they are frequently the last to be informed, saying, "I hear about major policy changes from students before the administration communicates with us." Another

participant, P7, suggested that their input is only valued when it benefits institutional convenience, noting, “Adjunct faculty voices are rarely considered unless it’s about adding more teaching load.” Similarly, P8 noted being excluded from governance and decision-making processes, stating, “As an adjunct, I am rarely invited to participate in important meetings or policy discussions. Most of the time, I learn about changes to curriculum or institutional policies after they have already been decided, and my input is not sought.” P9 pointed to their limited influence in shaping academic policies, sharing, “As an adjunct, I may not always have a voice in faculty meetings or curriculum decisions.” These reflections reveal a need for more inclusive communication and shared governance that respects the professional contributions of adjuncts.

Adjuncts described being left out of planning and policy processes, where decisions impacting their work are often made without their input. The literature confirms this widespread exclusion. Adjunct faculty are often left out of important decisions about course goals, textbooks, teaching methods, and faculty evaluations (Danaei, 2019). Many do not have access to support systems unless the school provides one. In fact, a national survey found that 63% of adjuncts didn’t know about major academic projects like guided pathways at their own colleges (CCCSE, 2019). This lack of communication makes adjuncts feel isolated and disconnected from the campus community (Thirolf & Woods, 2017). According to the American Federation of Teachers (2020), poor working conditions—such as late notice for class assignments, low pay, no benefits, and no promise of future work—also reduce how engaged adjunct faculty feel at their institutions.

Theme 6: Structural barriers to inclusion. Many participants described rigid hierarchical systems that prevented their input. Adjunct faculty often experience exclusion when attempting to participate in institutional matters. P1 explained how systemic structures limit their

ability to participate in institutional matters, stating, “Even when I try to get involved in curriculum or policy discussions, there’s no established way for adjuncts to contribute, and by the time we’re informed, most decisions have already been made.” Highlighting how their efforts to contribute are dismissed outright, P5 shared, “Even when I try to get involved, I’m told it’s not for adjuncts to worry about.” Pointing to a systemic classification that automatically excludes them from meaningful involvement, P2 added, “Adjunct staff is not considered full-time faculty, so we’re left out by default.” Reinforcing this concern, P10 stated, “Adjuncts lack representation on governance boards, which limits our ability to advocate for ourselves.” These accounts reflect a broader pattern of structural marginalization that hinders adjuncts from influencing decisions that directly affect their roles and working conditions.

These systemic exclusions align with findings from Hofman et al. (2024) and Reichman (2021), which show how adjuncts are often locked out of participation and advocacy. Asimwe (2025) identified key barriers to inclusion, such as “economic disparities, cultural biases, and lack of representation among faculty and leadership.” Organizational structures within higher education institutions often restrict adjunct faculty from fully participating in institutional life and governance. These structures commonly assign adjuncts to the lowest tiers of the academic hierarchy, limiting their access to decision-making processes (Hofman et al., 2024). Job descriptions for adjuncts frequently exclude governance responsibilities or service roles, many of which are unpaid, thereby discouraging their involvement in academic committees or strategic planning activities (Reichman, 2021).

The design of shared governance models further compounds this issue by prioritizing tenured and tenure-track faculty, leaving adjuncts underrepresented in influential bodies such as faculty senates, search committees, and planning boards (Eagan et al., 2015). This

underrepresentation reduces their influence on policies that directly impact their teaching and professional development. Adjuncts also tend to work across multiple institutions, limiting the time and access required for deeper campus engagement (Zhu, 2021). Centralized decision-making practices within institutions exacerbate these challenges by reinforcing hierarchical boundaries and excluding adjunct voices. This marginalization is particularly acute for minoritized contingent faculty, who face compounded disadvantages due to both their employment status and intersecting social identities such as race and gender (Chun & Evans, 2023). These structural barriers ultimately stifle adjunct advocacy, weaken professional advancement pathways, and diminish the overall inclusivity of institutional governance (Zitko & Schultz, 2020; Hofman et al., 2024).

Evaluation of the Findings

This subsection critically evaluates the study's findings in the context of the conceptual framework OST and relevant empirical literature. The OST posits that employees' perceptions of institutional support, fairness, and inclusion influence their engagement, job satisfaction, and overall performance. The themes developed from participants' narratives are examined to determine how they align with or diverge from prior research. This evaluation is organized by research questions to ensure clarity and consistency with the study's design. Interpretations remain grounded in participant experiences and do not extend beyond the data presented in this chapter.

Research Question 1: How do adjunct faculty perceive and describe their experiences of marginalization within higher education institutions?

The findings revealed that adjunct faculty frequently perceive themselves as “second-class” academics, excluded not only from faculty meetings and decision-making processes but

also from informal social spaces that foster collegiality. This sense of exclusion reflects the core principle of Organizational Support Theory (OST), which posits that when employees perceive organizational indifference or unequal treatment, their sense of value and belonging diminishes. Such marginalization does not merely affect day-to-day interactions; it erodes adjuncts' professional identity and their ability to fully integrate into the academic community.

The literature substantiates these observations, highlighting how adjunct faculty are routinely excluded from academic integration, which undermines their legitimacy and professional worth (Hofman et al., 2024; Spaniel & Scott, 2013; Zitko & Schultz, 2020). The recurring theme of weakened professional identity is echoed by Hattam and Weiler (2022) and McComb et al. (2021), who argue that structural marginalization extends beyond feelings of exclusion to generate a persistent questioning of adjuncts' legitimacy as academics. Collectively, these findings point to a systemic pattern: exclusion and lack of institutional recognition create a cycle in which adjunct faculty are denied both symbolic and structural validation, further entrenching their marginal status within higher education.

Research Question 2: How do adjunct faculty perceive and describe their experiences regarding insufficient institutional support in higher education institutions?

Themes in this area highlighted a lack of access to professional development, inadequate instructional resources, and persistent financial and emotional stress. These experiences reinforce core assumptions of OST, which asserts that perceived lack of support leads to lower organizational commitment and engagement. Participants' testimonies about navigating teaching roles without proper tools or compensation mirror the concerns raised by Ran and Sanders (2020) and Brennan and Magness (2018), who found that insufficient institutional support undermines teaching effectiveness and morale. The instability of contingent contracts and

delayed pay cycles further support Witt and Gearin's (2020) findings that adjunct faculty endure chronic stress and job insecurity, diminishing their sense of belonging and efficacy.

Research Question 3: How do adjunct faculty perceive and describe their experiences of exclusion from key activities and decision-making processes in higher education institutions?

The data emphasized systemic exclusion from governance, curriculum design, and strategic planning. These findings are emblematic of OST's assertion that exclusion erodes perceptions of support and belonging. The participants' accounts of being omitted from communication loops and policy discussions reflect a broader pattern identified by CCCSE (2019), Hofman et al. (2024), and Reichman (2021), which documents how hierarchical governance models favor tenured faculty while sidelining adjuncts.

The structural barriers to inclusion, including the lack of representation on committees and advisory boards, also confirm previous research suggesting that adjuncts are institutionally constrained from participating in meaningful advocacy or decision-making (Chun & Evans, 2023; Zitko & Schultz, 2020). These findings suggest a need to redesign institutional structures to promote equitable engagement. Through this evaluation, the study affirms that adjunct faculty perceptions of marginalization, institutional neglect, and exclusion directly reflect OST's foundational concepts. These systemic inequities hinder adjunct engagement and undermine the broader mission of higher education. The next sections will outline the practical implications, limitations, and recommendations derived from these findings.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study based on interview responses from ten adjunct faculty members working in higher education institutions in New York City. The study sought to understand their lived experiences regarding marginalization, institutional support

deficits, and exclusion. The analysis was organized by the study's three research questions. Across all three research questions, participants consistently shared a narrative of systemic inequity. Under RQ1, adjunct faculty described experiences of being treated as “second-class” colleagues—excluded from departmental meetings, curriculum input, and faculty privileges. This marginalization contributed to feelings of invisibility and a diminished professional identity. Under RQ2, the participants highlighted a lack of institutional support, including limited access to professional development, essential teaching tools, and adequate compensation. These challenges were compounded by emotional and financial stress stemming from unstable contracts and delayed payments. Under RQ3, adjuncts described exclusion from decision-making processes and institutional governance. Rigid hierarchies and structural barriers prevented their full participation, leaving them underrepresented in strategic conversations and planning.

The results reflect key themes aligned with OST —namely, that when employees feel unsupported, excluded, and undervalued by their institution, their commitment, sense of belonging, and professional efficacy are negatively impacted. This chapter's findings provide insight into the persistent inequities faced by adjunct faculty and underscore the need for inclusive institutional practices. Chapter Five will further interpret these results in relation to the existing literature and conceptual framework, offering practical recommendations to improve adjunct faculty inclusion, support, and engagement within higher education.

Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

This chapter presents a comprehensive interpretation of the findings discussed in Chapter 4. It begins with a restatement of the research problem and purpose, followed by a concise

review of the study's methodology, design, key results, and limitations. The chapter interprets the findings through the lens of the conceptual framework of OST, linking them to relevant scholarly literature to deepen understanding. It also outlines practical implications for institutional leaders, academic policymakers, and adjunct faculty, addressing how the findings can inform strategies for inclusion and engagement.

The inequitable engagement of adjunct faculty members in higher education institutions presents a critical issue that undermines both faculty satisfaction and educational quality. Despite their essential role in the academic ecosystem, adjunct faculty frequently face significant disparities in institutional support, professional development opportunities, and participation in governance compared to full-time faculty (Matos, 2021; Yeager-Okosi et al., 2024). This study seeks to examine the lived experiences of adjunct faculty concerning marginalization, institutional support deficits, and exclusion within higher education, with the aim of generating insights that can inform strategies for fostering greater inclusion and engagement.

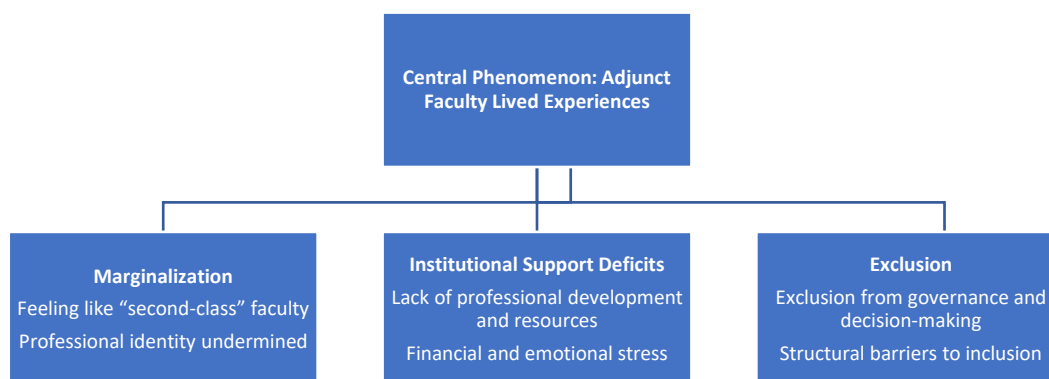
A qualitative research design was employed to investigate adjunct faculty experiences across institutions known for supportive environments. Ten adjunct faculty members from diverse academic disciplines were purposively selected. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify emergent themes aligned with the research questions. The findings highlighted six interconnected challenges faced by adjunct faculty: feeling like “second-class” faculty, experiencing an undermined professional identity, lacking access to professional development and resources, enduring financial and emotional stress, being excluded from governance and decision-making, and confronting structural barriers that limit their inclusion within higher education institutions. These themes

align with and extend prior research by highlighting how a lack of support and exclusion diminishes adjuncts' efficacy and commitment.

The study was limited to ten adjunct faculty members in New York City and may not reflect broader geographic or institutional contexts. Finally, the chapter presents specific recommendations for institutional practice and future research, concluding with a synthesis that reinforces the study's contributions to advancing equity, support, and engagement for adjunct faculty in higher education. The following sections address implications, recommendations for practice and future research, and the conclusion. As shown in Figure 2, the thematic summary highlights how adjunct faculty experiences of marginalization, institutional support deficits, and exclusion align with the principles of OST.

Figure 2

Thematic summary of Adjunct Faculty Experiences.



Note. The six themes are grouped under three broad areas—marginalization, institutional support deficits, and exclusion—and align with OST.

Implications

The findings presented in the previous sections highlight recurring challenges faced by adjunct faculty, including marginalization, limited institutional support, and exclusion from governance processes. While these results provide valuable insight into the lived experiences of

participants, their true significance lies in what they mean for higher education practice and policy. To bridge the gap between empirical evidence and real-world application, it is essential to examine the broader implications of these findings. The following section discusses the implications, outlining how the results inform organizational strategies, leadership practices, and future institutional reforms.

Research Question 1: How do adjunct faculty perceive and describe their experiences of marginalization in higher education institutions?

Participants' narratives revealed strong feelings of invisibility and exclusion, echoing existing literature on adjunct faculty marginalization (Rhoades, 2020). These perceptions reflect systemic organizational practices that diminish adjuncts' status, often treating them as "outsiders" or second-class contributors. Through the lens of OST, this lack of perceived support leads to disengagement, reduced job satisfaction, and weakened institutional commitment. Faculty engagement is a critical factor in teaching effectiveness and student success (Holliman & Daniels, 2018). When adjuncts are valued and supported, their instructional impact improves (Ridge & Ritt, 2017).

Compared to their tenured peers, adjuncts often find their expertise and input undervalued, leading to their exclusion from meaningful academic discourse and decision-making processes (Mason et al., 2022). This marginalization fosters feelings of isolation, illegitimacy, and underappreciation, which can discourage adjuncts from asserting their professional voice (Hattam & Weiler, 2022; McComb et al., 2021; Read & Leathwood, 2020). In contrast, permanent faculty are more likely to be respected and included in institutional governance and planning (Richardson et al., 2019). This aligns with literature noting that adjunct faculty often feel isolated and underappreciated (Mason et al., 2022; Read & Leathwood, 2020).

Such marginalization negatively affects faculty morale and can also undermine student outcomes (Hofman et al., 2024; Spaniel & Scott, 2013; Zitko & Schultz, 2020). These sentiments are supported by research, which shows that adjuncts are frequently excluded from key academic activities, leading to a sense of invisibility and reduced morale (Spaniel & Scott, 2013; Zitko & Schultz, 2020). However, this study found that adjuncts were routinely excluded from governance, lacked professional development opportunities, and had minimal access to resources. This undermines their ability to function as effective educators and mentors (Henkel & Haley, 2020). Even the most qualified adjuncts struggle to meet student needs due to these systemic limitations (Mangan, 2015; Brennan & Magness, 2016). The result is a cycle of disengagement where adjuncts feel undervalued, leading to lower morale and performance.

Research Question 2: How do adjunct faculty perceive the institutional support they receive and its impact on their professional roles and responsibilities?

Participants' reflections revealed a recurring concern: limited access to essential resources, training, and compensation. This aligns with findings by Burleigh et al. (2021), who emphasize that inadequate working conditions negatively affect adjuncts' professional efficacy and well-being. The lack of structured support—such as training for instructional design, access to teaching tools, and mentorship—reduces faculty members' confidence and hinders their instructional effectiveness. Kumar et al. (2022) found that institutions offering faculty access to course development support, technical assistance, and online teaching resources foster higher levels of instructional quality and engagement.

Similarly, Yeager-Okosi et al. (2024) suggested that when faculty feel supported through structured development opportunities, their teaching performance improves significantly. Redstone and Luo (2021) observed that effective online teaching requires awareness of

institutional norms, familiarity with available resources, and access to formal mentorship.

Without these supports, adjuncts struggle to meet expectations, affecting both their morale and the learning experience of their students. Overall, the lack of institutional investment in adjunct development perpetuates disengagement and reinforces a cycle of marginalization.

Research Question 3: How do adjunct faculty perceive and describe their experiences of exclusion from key activities and decision-making processes in higher education institutions?

Adjunct faculty are frequently excluded from participating in institutional governance, including faculty meetings, campus-wide initiatives, and decision-making processes (Kezar et al., 2014). This exclusion not only diminishes their sense of belonging but also threatens the foundational principle of shared governance in higher education (Bradley, 2004). Bolitzer (2019) found that such exclusion contributes to adjunct dissatisfaction, as they are often left out of conversations that shape institutional direction and faculty welfare. According to Simplicio (2006), one rationale for their exclusion is the perception that adjuncts lack sufficient knowledge about the institution's history, strategic needs, and long-term goals.

Adjuncts' exclusion from governance and strategic input is both a symptom and a cause of institutional disconnection. This is detrimental to both faculty morale and institutional cohesion, supporting findings by Zitko and Schultz (2020). In terms of academic freedom, adjunct faculty often have minimal control over course design or curricular decisions, restricting their ability to innovate or align their teaching with their expertise (Kezar, 2013; Alsunaydi, 2020). This lack of influence over instructional matters weakens their professional identity and commitment to the institution.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this study revealed three major challenges faced by adjunct faculty—marginalization, insufficient institutional support, and exclusion from governance and decision-making. Based on these findings, several practical recommendations are proposed to address these challenges and enhance institutional effectiveness.

1. Strengthen Adjunct Representation in Governance

To counter the pervasive sense of exclusion identified in the study, institutions should establish adjunct faculty committees with formal representation in governance structures. As participants described, being left out of key meetings and policy decisions perpetuates feelings of invisibility and marginalization. Therefore, ensuring adjunct presence in curriculum planning, workload discussions, and policy review processes can foster inclusion and institutional equity.

By formalizing advisory councils that include adjunct representatives, institutions affirm adjuncts as valued contributors to the academic mission. Alsunaydi (2020) emphasized that shared governance must “define faculty inclusively,” while the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) also recommends integrating adjuncts into governance to strengthen academic freedom and fairness. These steps respond directly to the study’s findings that adjuncts feel structurally excluded from decision-making and lack a professional voice.

2. Implement Equitable Support and Resource Policies

The study found that adjuncts frequently lack access to professional development, office space, and teaching tools, contributing to feelings of neglect and isolation. Institutions should therefore implement support equity policies to guarantee adjuncts the same access to instructional resources, training, and institutional benefits as full-time faculty. Baker and DiPiro (2019) emphasized the importance of integrating adjuncts into institutional culture, while Leslie (2019) linked professional development directly to teaching effectiveness. Similarly, Kumar et al.

(2022) found that instructional design training and mentorship improve instructional quality. Practical actions may include providing stipends for professional development, ensuring access to campus technology and workspaces, and inviting adjuncts to orientation sessions and faculty workshops. These steps address the lack of institutional support revealed in the findings and improve engagement, job satisfaction, and teaching outcomes.

3. Establish Fair and Sustainable Compensation Structures

Financial instability and emotional stress emerged as recurring themes in this study. Institutions must reexamine their compensation models to ensure adjunct faculty are fairly paid and provided with stable, predictable contracts. Zhu (2021) and Danaei (2019) emphasize that motivation and teaching quality are closely linked to equitable pay and recognition. Long-term or multi-year contracts, equitable per-course pay, and access to benefits such as healthcare and retirement contribute to adjunct stability and institutional continuity.

Such reforms directly respond to participants' accounts of delayed pay, inconsistent contracts, and emotional strain. They also align with the study's theoretical framework (the OST)—which asserts that fair treatment and institutional recognition foster stronger commitment and engagement.

4. Foster Inclusive Community Engagement

Participants in this study frequently expressed feelings of isolation and exclusion from departmental life. Institutions should therefore prioritize community-building initiatives that promote interaction between adjuncts and full-time faculty. Thirolf (2016) and Vance (2018) recommend creating mentorship programs, workshops, and communities of practice to encourage collaboration. Likewise, Zoë et al. (2024) found that inclusive faculty development initiatives strengthen professional identity and cohesion.

By including adjuncts in departmental meetings, research collaborations, and recognition events, institutions reinforce a sense of belonging and shared mission. This recommendation directly addresses the “second-class faculty” perception identified in the findings and promotes professional integration.

5. Train Administrators in Inclusive Leadership Practices

Consistent with the study’s findings of systemic exclusion and limited understanding of adjunct realities, institutions should provide leadership training focused on equity and inclusion. Vidman and Strömberg (2020) demonstrated that leadership behavior significantly influences faculty morale and satisfaction. Equipping academic leaders with the knowledge and tools to support adjunct faculty fairly can help shift institutional culture toward inclusiveness.

Administrators should undergo annual training on equitable supervision, adjunct support evaluation, and inclusive communication practices. These measures address the structural barriers and exclusionary hierarchies highlighted in the findings and promote an environment of trust and engagement.

In summary, these recommendations are derived directly from the study’s findings and guided by Organizational Support Theory. Implementing them will help reduce marginalization, improve support equity, and strengthen institutional cohesion. As Naz et al. (2020) and Riza et al. (2025) affirmed, when employees feel valued and supported, their engagement and performance increase, enhancing both faculty well-being and student success.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on adjunct faculty employed in higher education institutions in New York City, providing rich insight into their lived experiences. However, further research is

needed to expand and deepen understanding of these phenomena. The following recommendations are based on the limitations and findings of this study:

1. Conduct Comparative Multi-Context Studies

Future researchers should conduct comparative studies across regions, states, or institution types (e.g., community colleges, private universities, and research-intensive institutions). Such studies could reveal how different institutional structures and regional policies affect adjunct experiences of marginalization and support. This recommendation builds on findings showing structural exclusion and the need for contextual policy reform.

2. Explore Longitudinal Effects of Institutional Inclusion

The current study provides a snapshot of adjunct experiences at one point in time. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to examine how improved policies (e.g., inclusion in governance, professional development access, or compensation reform) influence adjunct engagement and teaching effectiveness over time. This aligns with Arevalo et al. (2025) and Zhu (2021), who link faculty support to improved student outcomes.

3. Include Multiple Stakeholder Perspectives

Future studies should include administrators, full-time faculty, and students to gain a more holistic understanding of the institutional culture and its impact on adjunct integration. The current study's participants frequently mentioned miscommunication and misunderstanding from leadership, suggesting the value of exploring these perspectives in depth.

4. Examine Equity and Intersectionality Among Adjunct Faculty

Future research should explore how adjunct faculty experiences differ by race, gender, and other identities, as these factors may intersect with employment status to produce unique barriers. This recommendation extends the findings that highlight structural inequities and supports Henkel and

Haley's (2020) argument that faculty marginalization undermines both equity and student outcomes.

5. Investigate Effective Models of Governance and Policy Reform

Case studies of institutions that have implemented adjunct advisory councils, equitable pay structures, or unionization can provide valuable insights into best practices for inclusion and fairness. Comparing unionized and non-unionized environments could clarify how collective action impacts adjunct working conditions and institutional accountability.

6. Analyze the Economic and Policy Implications of Adjunct Labor

Finally, researchers should examine how adjunct employment practices relate to institutional budgets, tuition trends, and state funding policies. Quantitative and policy-based research could uncover systemic financial drivers of adjunct dependence and inform effective legislative and institutional reforms.

In sum, future research should move beyond documenting adjunct challenges toward identifying evidence-based solutions that promote sustainability, inclusion, and academic excellence. Expanding the literature in these directions will provide actionable knowledge for policymakers and institutions committed to improving adjunct faculty engagement and success.

Conclusions

This study underscores the urgent and ongoing need for higher education institutions to confront and resolve systemic inequities experienced by adjunct faculty. Through the lens of Organizational Support Theory, the findings reveal that institutional neglect—manifesting as marginalization, insufficient support, and exclusion from decision-making—undermines adjuncts' professional identity, satisfaction, and engagement. Participants described being treated as “second-class” faculty, lacking access to professional development, financial stability, and

meaningful governance roles. These conditions erode morale, reduce teaching effectiveness, and threaten educational quality and sustainability. Meaningful inclusion, fair compensation, and equitable access to institutional resources are not merely ethical imperatives but essential strategies for achieving academic excellence. Institutions that support adjuncts effectively strengthen student success and institutional performance. Leadership and policy reforms must reflect this reality by investing in long-term strategies that foster integration, recognition, and engagement of adjunct faculty. Doing so affirms their essential role and ensures institutions thrive in a complex educational landscape.

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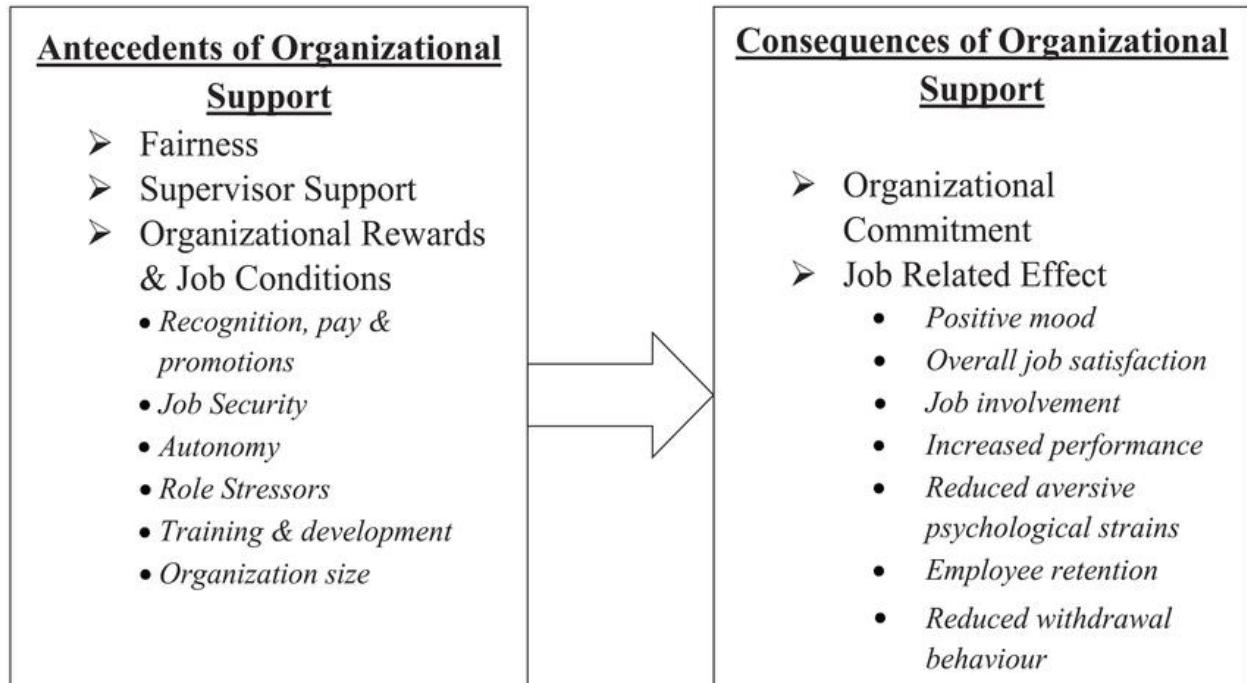
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Appendix A

Diagram of OST



Organizational support theory antecedents and consequences (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this interview is to explore your perceptions and experiences as an adjunct faculty member in higher education, particularly in relation to marginalization, institutional support, and exclusion. Your insights will help me understand adjunct faculty's challenges and how institutions can improve engagement and support.

This interview is confidential, and your responses will remain anonymous. You are free to skip any question or stop the interview anytime. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section 1: Background Information

1. How long have you been working as an adjunct faculty member?
2. In which academic discipline(s) do you teach?
3. What type of institution do you work for (e.g., public, private, community college, research university)?
4. How many different institutions have you worked for as an adjunct?

Section 2: Perceptions of Marginalization (RQ1)

5. Describe your experiences as an adjunct faculty member in your institution?
6. In what ways do you feel that adjunct faculty are treated differently from full-time faculty?
7. Have you ever experienced a sense of marginalization or exclusion in your institution? If so, can you describe those experiences?
8. Do you feel that your contributions to teaching and student success are recognized by your institution? Why or why not?

9. How does your employment status impact your sense of belonging within the academic community?

Section 3: Institutional Support Deficits (RQ2)

10. What types of institutional support (e.g., professional development, mentorship, access to resources) are available to adjunct faculty at your institution?
11. Do you feel that the level of institutional support provided to adjunct faculty is sufficient? Why or why not?
12. Describe any challenges you have faced in accessing resources such as office space, technology, library services, or research support?
13. Have you received any opportunities for professional growth, such as participation in faculty meetings, workshops, or training programs? If so, how effective have they been?
14. What specific changes in institutional policies or practices do you believe would enhance support for adjunct faculty?

Section 4: Exclusion from Key Activities and Decision-Making (RQ3)

15. Have you been involved in faculty meetings, curriculum development, or institutional decision-making processes? Why or why not?
16. How do you perceive the role of adjunct faculty in shaping institutional policies and academic programs?
17. Have you ever been invited or encouraged to participate in committees, academic governance, or professional development programs? If not, why do you think that is?
18. Do you feel that adjunct faculty voices are considered in institutional decision-making? Can you provide examples?

19. What strategies do you think institutions could implement to ensure greater inclusion of adjunct faculty in key activities and decision-making?

Section 5: Final Reflections

20. If you could change one thing about the way adjunct faculty are treated in higher education, what would it be?
21. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as an adjunct faculty member?

Closing Statement

Thank you for sharing your experiences and insights. Your participation is invaluable in understanding the challenges faced by adjunct faculty and identifying ways to improve institutional policies and practices.