Adaptive Human Resource Management under Persistent Constraint: Sustaining the Teaching Workforce in a Rural Private School

Nurdin[1], Siti Rubai'ah[2]*, Mochammad Devi Cahya Ruhimat[1]

[1]Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia
[2]Lathifa Cendikia Foundation, Cianjur, Indonesia
*Corresponding author, email: nurdin_adpen@upi.du

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Abstract
Rural private schools often face persistent financial scarcity and policy volatility, yet limited attention has been given to how such conditions shape teacher workforce sustainability through organizational processes. This study examines how a rural private school sustains its teaching workforce amid persistent financial constraints and changing educational policies. The qualitative approach with an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was conducted using semi-structured interviews with 14 participants comprizing the Foundation Chairman, Foundation Secretary, principal, and 11 teachers at one junior high school in Cianjur, West Java, Indonesia. The findings identified five interconnected themes emerged: scarcity as a shared organizational condition; policy volatility as organizational discontinuity; HRM reconfiguration around financial scarcity; retention through relational and professional exchange; and collective agency through foundation–principal–teacher collaboration. The findings indicate that adaptive HRM developed not because scarcity was resolved, but through organizational learning, professional support, relational leadership, and distributed responsibility. As implication and contribution, the study positions adaptive HRM as an organizational capability for working within persistent constraints, particularly where conventional financial incentives cannot fully secure recruitment, retention, and professional continuity, and introduces organizationally supported commitment to explain how teachers' moral and professional commitment can be sustained through supportive organizational conditions.

1. Introduction

Sustaining a stable and qualified teaching workforce has become one of the most pressing challenges confronting education systems worldwide (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Liu & Li, 2025). Across diverse educational contexts, schools increasingly struggle not only to recruit qualified teachers, but also to retain experienced personnel amid demographic change (Rahyasih et al., 2025), evolving professional expectations (Williams III et al., 2022), labour market and hiring competition (Edwards et al., 2025; McPherson & Lampert, 2025), and growing organizational uncertainty (Leithwood et al., 2026; Williams III et al., 2022). Consequently, teacher workforce sustainability has become a strategic organizational priority because educational quality ultimately depends on schools' capacity to attract, develop, and retain competent teachers over time rather than simply filling vacant positions.

These workforce challenges are increasingly shaped by changes in educational governance rather than labour market dynamics alone. Over the past several decades, many countries have adopted decentralized education systems to improve local responsiveness, accountability, and context-sensitive decision-making by redistributing authority from central governments to local administrations and schools (Lam, 2011; Matete, 2022). While decentralization expands organizational autonomy, it also creates increasingly complex governance environments in which schools must interpret national reforms through diverse local institutional capacities, political priorities, and administrative arrangements (Kushnir & Yazgan, 2023; Paananen & Pitkänen, 2021). Educational governance has therefore evolved beyond policy implementation into a continuous process of organizational adaptation in which school leaders are expected to reconcile changing external demands with local organizational realities.

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Indonesia provides a particularly informative context for examining these organizational challenges. During the past twenty-five years (2002–2026), educational governance has been characterized by persistent policy volatility, with successive ministerial administrations repeatedly introducing new curricula, accountability systems, digital governance initiatives, and national priorities before previous reforms became fully institutionalized. Rather than representing isolated episodes of reform, these continuous policy shifts have transformed governance into an enduring organizational condition requiring schools to repeatedly reinterpret evolving governmental expectations while maintaining institutional continuity (Berbecel, 2018; Kushnir & Yazgan, 2023; Paananen & Pitkänen, 2021). Within Indonesia's decentralized education system (Desimaria & Sri Rahayu, 2022; Siburian, 2024), the organizational consequences of policy volatility are further shaped by variations in local governance capacity, administrative support, and resource availability, resulting in substantially different implementation experiences across schools (Lam, 2011; Matete, 2022; Oduro et al., 2026).

The organizational implications of these governance conditions are particularly pronounced in rural private schools. Unlike publicly funded schools, many private schools rely predominantly on student tuition fees to finance daily operations, teacher salaries, and school development (Yizengaw & Agegnehu, 2021). Declining student enrolment therefore directly reduces institutional revenue, limiting schools' capacity to recruit qualified teachers, provide competitive compensation, and support long-term career development (Bennell, 2022). Consequently, rural private schools experience a dual organizational pressure in which persistent policy volatility coincides with chronic financial scarcity, requiring school leaders to simultaneously satisfy expanding governance expectations while sustaining their teaching workforce under severe resource constraints.

Existing scholarship has generated substantial insights into teacher retention, educational governance, and school leadership. Teacher retention research has predominantly explained teachers' decisions to remain in schools through individual motivation, organizational commitment, compensation, workload, and leadership support. Governance scholarship has examined how decentralization, policy reform, and institutional restructuring reshape educational organizations (Kushnir & Yazgan, 2023; Matete, 2022; Paananen & Pitkänen, 2021), while leadership research demonstrates that adaptive leadership enables school leaders to mobilise organizational capacity under conditions of uncertainty (Hallinger & Liu, 2016; Hardwick-Franco, 2019; Hayes et al., 2021). Nevertheless, these research traditions have largely evolved independently, providing limited understanding of how educational organizations strategically manage teacher recruitment, compensation, and career sustainability when persistent policy volatility intersects with prolonged financial constraints.

A further limitation concerns the organizational actors responsible for strategic human resource management in private schools. Existing educational leadership research overwhelmingly positions school principals as the principal organizational decision-makers. In private schools, however, strategic decisions regarding teacher recruitment (Raspatiningrum et al., 2025), salary determination (Williams III et al., 2022), career development, and workforce sustainability are typically negotiated jointly by school foundations and principals. This collaborative governance of educational human resources fundamentally shapes organizational responses to financial and policy pressures, yet it remains insufficiently examined in the educational management literature.

Responding to these gaps, this study investigates how a school foundation and principal collaboratively develop adaptive human resource strategies for recruiting teachers, determining compensation, and supporting teacher career sustainability in a rural private junior secondary school operating under conditions of persistent policy volatility and financial scarcity. By integrating educational governance and strategic human resource management, the study shifts analytical attention from individual teacher retention to organizational processes of workforce sustainability and seeks to advance understanding of how rural private schools preserve their human capital while navigating simultaneous governance and resource challenges.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Nizza et al., 2021) to examine how a rural private junior secondary school sustains its teaching workforce amid policy volatility and financial scarcity. A qualitative approach was appropriate for exploring participants' lived experiences, organizational decision-making, and meanings attributed to adaptive human resource management rather than predetermined variables or causal relationships (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021; Yin, 2014). IPA enabled an in-depth examination of this contemporary organizational phenomenon in its real-life context, focusing on how governance, financial constraints, and leadership shaped interconnected processes of teacher recruitment, compensation, career development, and workforce sustainability rather than statistical generalization. It also captured how organizational actors interpreted significant experiences and how these differed across roles involved in strategic decision-making and everyday educational practice (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021).

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2.2. Research Context and Participant Selection

The study was conducted at one of private junior secondary school named junior high school X at Sukaluyu, a rural area of Cianjur Regency, West Java, Indonesia which managed by foundation X. Foundation X oversees organizational governance, financial management, and strategic decisions, while the principal manages daily administration and academic affairs. Junior high school X was purposively selected as an information-rich case characterized by prolonged financial constraints, reliance on student tuition as the primary operational funding source, fluctuating enrollment, and continuous adaptation to national educational reforms.

Participants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in strategic HRM and organizational adaptation (Ahmed, 2024; Robinson, 2023). The 14 participants comprised the Foundation X Chairman and Secretary, the School Principal, and 11 teachers. The Foundation leaders contributed perspectives on governance, financial planning, and HR policies; the principal on teacher management and policy implementation; and teachers on recruitment, compensation, career development, and organizational adaptation. Together, they provided complementary perspectives on adaptive HRM and workforce sustainability. Data collection continued until interviews generated sufficiently rich experiential accounts for meaningful interpretative analysis.

2.3. Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with all participants. This approach provided flexibility to explore lived experiences while maintaining consistency across six domains derived from the conceptual framework and study objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018): (1) organizational context and school sustainability; (2) policy volatility; (3) teacher recruitment and workforce planning; (4) compensation, career development, and retention; (5) adaptive human resource management; and (6) organizational sustainability. A common protocol guided all interviews, while question sequence and follow-up probes remained flexible in accordance with the IPA orientation (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Each interview lasted approximately 30–40 minutes and was transcribed verbatim. Researchers also maintained reflexive field notes documenting contextual observations, organizational interactions, and preliminary analytical reflections.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) principles (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021), examining how participants experienced and interpreted adaptive human resource management amid policy volatility and financial scarcity. Interview transcripts were the primary analytical source, supported by documentary evidence and reflexive field notes for contextual interpretation. Following Smith and Fieldsend (2021) and Nizza et al. (2021), the procedure was operationalized through the six-phase workflow synthesized by Ahmed et al. (2025). Researchers repeatedly read transcripts, made exploratory notes, and conducted interpretative coding; related codes were organized into preliminary themes that were iteratively reviewed, refined, and interpreted through continued engagement with participants' narratives. Themes were thus developed reflexively rather than treated as objective categories emerging directly from the data. NVivo supported systematic data organization, coding, retrieval, and comparison as computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (Allsop et al., 2022). However, all interpretative decisions, thematic development, and conceptual synthesis remained the responsibility of the research team.

2.5. Trustworthiness and Research Ethics

Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Patton, 2014). Credibility was supported by prolonged engagement, iterative interpretation, triangulation, and researcher discussion (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016); dependability through a common protocol, systematic documentation, and an audit trail; confirmability through reflexive notes and collaborative interpretation; and transferability through rich contextual description. Ethical procedures included formal permission, written study information, and informed consent (Demirci, 2024). Participation was voluntary, with the right to decline questions or withdraw (Bredal et al., 2024). Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms C1, S1, P1, and T1–T11 and secure data storage accessible only to the research team.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

The findings show how organizational actors experienced and interpreted teacher workforce sustainability amid policy volatility and financial scarcity. Consistent with the IPA orientation, the analysis examined how the Foundation, principal, and teachers made sense of organizational challenges and responded to teacher management and sustainability. Across narratives, resource scarcity emerged not merely as a financial problem but as a shared organizational condition affecting teacher welfare, recruitment, professional practice, and continuity. At the same time, strong social and educational meaning attached to the junior high

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school X created tension between material limitations and commitment to its future. The analysis identified five interconnected themes and constituent sub-themes, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Themes, Sub-themes, and Representative Analytical Codes

Overarching theme	Sub-themes	Representative analytical codes
When Scarcity Becomes a Shared Organizational Condition	Mission under limited resources	limited institutional capital; community educational need; collective self-help
	Financial vulnerability and teacher welfare	fluctuating funding; salary insufficiency; salary delays; additional employment
	Meaning, commitment, and institutional hope	teaching as calling; student-centered commitment; belief in school's future
Experiencing Policy Volatility as Organizational Discontinuity	Recurrent policy change	curriculum shifts; changing teaching approaches; changing administrative requirements
	Acting under incomplete certainty	insufficient preparation; limited policy understanding; changing education basic data requirements
	Collective interpretation and local translation	policy discussion; training; stakeholder coordination; implementation support
Reconfiguring Human Resource Practices Around Financial Scarcity	Financially bounded recruitment	recruitment restraint; existing-teacher utilization; limited recruitment capacity
	Employment vulnerability and contractual reform	informal employment; teacher turnover; written contracts; employment commitments
	Compensation, attendance, and perceived fairness	differentiated employment arrangements; attendance-based accountability; salary fairness
Retaining Teachers through Relational and Professional Exchange	Professional development and career progression	teacher training; English-language practice; certification support; peer supervision
	Recognition and relational support	appreciation; empathy; communication; professional support
	Future-oriented reasons to stay	professional identity; career prospects; professional allowance; organizational belonging
Mobilizing Collective Agency through Foundation–Principal–Teacher Collaboration	Foundation–principal coordination	intensive communication; regular reporting; shared decision-making
	Relational leadership and accountability	guidance; reflection; second chances; firmness; written commitment
	Distributed problem-solving and community participation	teacher involvement; expenditure efficiency; parental participation; collective responsibility

The themes show that adaptive human resource management developed not because resource constraints had been resolved, but because organizational actors progressively learned to work within and respond to them. The following sections examine each theme and the experiential meanings through which it was constituted.

3.1.1. When Scarcity Becomes a Shared Organizational Condition

Participants consistently described junior high school X as an institution developed under persistent resource constraints. Scarcity was experienced not merely as financial insufficiency but as a condition affecting daily operations, teacher welfare, and organizational possibilities. junior high school X was established in 2015 despite foundation X's limited capital because the nearest secondary school was approximately six kilometers away and inaccessible by public transportation. As C1 recalled, foundation X "did not have sufficient capital," yet proceeded with support from the founder, his sons, and community self-help (C1; S1). Collective participation was thus embedded in the junior high school X's origins and remained central to coping with scarcity.

Financial constraints persisted as the junior high school X relied mainly on government school operational assistance funding and parental *infaq*, with only around 40% of parents contributing. Fluctuating enrollment and contributions produced unstable financial capacity, including a decline during 2020–2021 after improvement in 2016–2019. For leaders, this directly affected teacher welfare and learning continuity. C1 warned of potential "stagnation in both the quantity and quality of learning," while P1 described continuing financial instability despite teachers' support for junior high school X development.

Teachers experienced scarcity through limited learning resources, fluctuating salaries, and additional employment. Although digital attendance improved monitoring, P1 noted that teachers' other jobs continued to affect their focus. T3 similarly described maintaining commitment despite limited learning media and unstable salaries. T5 explained that salaries, while better than those of many honorary teachers, remained insufficient

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for family needs and therefore required additional work. Salary delays were also reported, including six months in 2015 (T1) and three months in 2023 while awaiting school operational assistance funds (T7).

Yet teachers' continued involvement was not explained solely by economic considerations. T5 described teaching as a source of happiness because of the opportunity to educate students, while T7 viewed teaching as a calling and connected his commitment to support from the Foundation and principal. This commitment was accompanied by hope for institutional development: T1 emphasized the need for "time, resources, and strong collective effort," while T9 expressed confidence that the junior high school X could become a model school.

Thus, participants experienced a tension between present scarcity and anticipated institutional possibility. Leaders viewed scarcity as a responsibility to sustain operations and teacher welfare, while teachers experienced it alongside professional calling, belonging, and hope. Workforce sustainability was therefore partly grounded in identification with a junior high school X perceived to have social purpose and future potential. Rather than overcoming scarcity, junior high school X developed a collective capacity to live with it while preserving its educational purpose, providing a foundation for subsequent adaptive practices in teacher management, professional development, relational leadership, clearer commitments, and resource mobilization.

3.1.2. Experiencing Policy Volatility as Organizational Discontinuity

Participants experienced educational policy change as recurring organizational uncertainty rather than isolated regulatory events. Changes in curriculum, teaching approaches, leadership requirements, and BOS funding repeatedly required adjustment, sometimes before previous policies were fully understood or evaluated. C1 recalled frequent changes following ministerial transitions, including curriculum, teaching methods, principal requirements, and BOS management, alongside occasional misalignment between local and national policies.

For P1, volatility meant responding despite incomplete understanding: policy changes required him "to be responsive, even when I do not yet fully understand the new policy". Insufficient teacher preparation and frequent Dapodik changes without corresponding operator training intensified this challenge. Volatility was therefore experienced not merely as administrative burden but as the need to act under uncertainty.

Teachers experienced this discontinuity in practice. T7 recalled that differentiated learning had improved student engagement and outcomes but was later replaced after a ministerial change. T8 similarly valued the school mover program, which strengthened resources, teachers' digital skills, learning media, and classroom interaction (Ruhimat et al., 2024), but noted its rapid discontinuation despite limited implementation evaluation. Such changes created uncertainty over whether organizational investments would remain relevant, disrupting professional learning and organizational development.

Rather than resisting change, however, junior high school X developed collective processes to interpret and translate new policies. C1 described studying policies "as early as possible," adjusting operations, and coordinating with stakeholders; S1 reported internal discussion and consultation with academic colleagues when necessary. P1 likewise coordinated with the Foundation and school supervisor and discussed changes with teachers. Teachers experienced these processes as practical support through training, policy socialization, implementation simulations, and stakeholder coordination (T7; T8).

Thus, the organization functioned as an interpretive buffer between policy volatility and everyday practice. Participants could not control the pace or direction of reform but could collectively interpret, translate, and implement changing expectations. Adaptive management therefore depended less on predicting policy change than on organizational capacity to respond, shaping subsequent teacher management, professional development, funding adaptation, and workforce planning.

3.1.3. Reconfiguring Human Resource Practices Around Financial Scarcity

Financial scarcity directly shaped teacher recruitment, employment, compensation, and workforce planning at junior high school X. Recruitment was constrained by the junior high school X's ability to sustain salaries. As C1 stated, "recruiting teachers without having sufficient funds to pay their salaries would be too great a risk for junior high school X". S1 similarly noted that reliance on school operational assistance funds and *infaq* influenced recruitment. When several teachers resigned and a mathematics teacher was needed, the Foundation relied on existing teachers because funding for an additional position was unavailable. P1 added that qualified candidates often expected salaries beyond the school's capacity, while willing candidates sometimes lived too far away, potentially requiring teacher housing.

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The organization subsequently formalized employment relationships. From 2015 to 2022, teachers worked without written contracts, complicating resignation and staffing management (S1). From 2023, written contracts and differentiated salary arrangements for full-time and part-time teachers were introduced. Full-time teachers were compensated for broader responsibilities, while part-time teachers were paid by teaching hours. Teachers perceived this system as more predictable and "Much fairer than it was in the past," as attendance and actual commitments were reflected in compensation (T7). T5 similarly viewed the arrangement as fair and recognized the Foundation and principal's efforts to meet salary needs.

Formalization did not eliminate financial hardship. Salary delays remained possible when cash flow was insufficient, requiring temporary alternatives such as parental infaq, personal donations, bridge funding, and occasional donors (C1). T1 recalled a six-month delay in 2015, while T7 experienced a three-month delay in 2023. Thus, scarcity generated organizational learning rather than limitation alone: earlier vulnerabilities prompted clearer employment expectations, differentiated arrangements, and greater perceived fairness. Although financial constraints persisted, the organization strengthened its capacity to manage their consequences. Adaptive HRM therefore emerged through continuous adjustment of employment structures to available resources while preserving fairness, predictability, and teacher commitment.

3.1.4. Retaining Teachers through Relational and Professional Exchange

Teacher retention at the junior high school X could not be explained by salary alone. Although compensation remained important, teachers also valued professional development, certification, recognition, relational support, and purpose. Retention thus emerged as a multidimensional exchange between organizational support and teachers' professional values. Within limited resources, the Foundation provided low-cost support through Saturday training, English-language practice, certification assistance, and peer instructional supervision.

C1 noted that training was largely voluntary; by 2026, six of 11 teachers had obtained professional certification and could receive government professional allowances. S1 highlighted training, English practice, and support for external competitions. Teachers valued these opportunities: T2 viewed training as guidance for overcoming teaching uncertainty; T9 valued English development for strengthening international communication competencies; and T10 appreciated training because it was free, relevant, and continuous.

Certification was particularly important for longer-term career prospects. T7 reported that Foundation and principal support enabled him to obtain professional educator status and a government allowance after four years of teaching, linking his continued employment to calling, gratitude, and appreciation. T3 and T11 similarly viewed certification support and professional allowances as meaningful career support. Relational support further strengthened retention. P1 encouraged teachers to remain hopeful about the junior high school X's future and permitted additional employment when professional responsibilities were maintained. C1 emphasized written commitments, teachers' rights, equality, professionalism, ethics, empathy, development, appreciation, and firmness. During salary delays, transparent communication and appeals to shared responsibility toward students helped teachers accept the situation: "Honesty, empathy, effective communication, and reflection on the students" (C1).

Teachers likewise described teaching as meaningful beyond financial compensation. T5 valued the happiness and purpose of teaching despite better-paid alternatives, while T7 described teaching as a calling connected to student commitment and career support. Retention therefore reflected a multidimensional relationship rather than a purely economic exchange. Although compensation remained limited, professional development, certification, recognition, relational support, and purpose enabled teachers to experience continued employment as professionally meaningful and worthwhile.

3.1.5. Mobilizing Collective Agency through Foundation-Principal-Teacher Collaboration

Adaptive HRM at the junior high school X was enacted through collaboration across organizational levels. Teacher management involved the Foundation, principal, teachers, and, when necessary, parents in interpreting problems, making decisions, and developing solutions. C1 described "Communication with the principal as very intensive," supported by monthly written reports that enabled rapid identification and resolution of teacher-related problems, with serious issues escalated for guidance or action. P1 similarly described an autonomous but highly coordinated relationship, regularly seeking guidance from the Foundation when difficulties exceeded his capacity. This collaboration combined support with accountability. When a teacher repeatedly resisted feedback, P1 sought Foundation intervention after three unsuccessful attempts. In another case, T3 recalled a serious mistake for which he expected dismissal; instead, the Chairman verified the evidence, encouraged reflection, offered a second chance, and required a written commitment to improve. T3 viewed this as combining professionalism, reflection, firmness, and wisdom.

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Collective agency also extended to resource management. When funds were unavailable to hire heavy equipment for a sports field, T1 and the principal developed an alternative involving voluntary parental labor. T5, serving as treasurer, worked with the Foundation Chairman and principal to prioritize expenditures and achieve savings. Teachers viewed such collective contribution as essential to continuity. T11 attributed the junior high school X's survival to "increasing community enthusiasm, the leadership of the Foundation Chairman and the principal, and the integrity of the teachers, especially the full-time teachers". These accounts show collective agency as an organizational resource. Adaptive HRM operated through intensive communication, distributed responsibility, relational guidance, and teacher and community involvement rather than managerial directives alone. The Foundation–principal relationship formed its organizational core, while teachers and the community extended this capacity into practice. Rather than eliminating constraints, the organization distributed responsibility for managing them, strengthening educational continuity and the relational and professional capacity underlying workforce sustainability.

3.1.6. An Emerging Pattern of Adaptive Human Resource Management under Constraint

The five themes show that adaptive HRM at the junior high school X emerged from the interaction of persistent scarcity, organizational learning, relational leadership, professional support, and collective agency. Rather than overcoming financial constraints, the junior high school X developed ways to manage their consequences while sustaining teacher commitment and educational continuity. Scarcity affected welfare, recruitment, attendance, and operations, while the junior high school X's educational mission sustained commitment. Policy volatility created organizational discontinuity, requiring collective interpretation, stakeholder coordination, and teacher support. These conditions prompted HR reconfiguration through financially feasible recruitment, written and differentiated employment arrangements, and non-monetary support including training, English-language development, certification, peer supervision, recognition, and relational leadership.

Collaborative governance enabled the junior high school X to mobilize resources beyond finances through Foundation–principal coordination, teacher participation, and community involvement. Thus, adaptive HRM involved converting relational, professional, and collective resources into organizational capacity without substituting for financial resources. As C1 reflected, "Entrepreneurial creativity was necessary to move the junior high school X from 'survival' towards 'growth, independence, welfare, and sustainability". Overall, adaptive HRM was an evolving process of clarifying employment, negotiating constraints, supporting professional growth, maintaining trust and accountability, and distributing responsibility. Teacher workforce sustainability therefore emerged as an ongoing process of collective adaptation under persistent constraint.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. From Policy Volatility to Local Organizational Adaptation

The findings suggest that policy volatility is experienced at the school level not simply as successive regulatory changes, but as a recurring demand to interpret, translate, and act under uncertainty. This broadly supports the argument of Arar et al. (2024), that educational policy in turbulent environments cannot be understood as a linear process of formulation, implementation, and evaluation. Their analysis of five MENA countries (Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Qatar) shows how turbulence exposes the limits of centralized decision-making and complicates policy translation into practice. At junior high school X, turbulence similarly became an organizational experience, requiring the principal and teachers to act despite incomplete understanding, preparation, or consolidation of previous reforms.

This finding complicates the assumption that policy implementation is primarily a matter of compliance. At junior high school X, implementation required interpretation and local translation. P1 described remaining responsive despite not fully understanding new policies, while C1 and S1 reported discussing policy changes internally and seeking additional expertise when necessary. Teachers were then supported through training, socialization, and practical coordination. The school therefore did not simply receive policy but worked on it locally, resonating with Lam (2011) and Matete (2022) on the importance of local institutional capacity in decentralized educational governance and extending Kushnir & Yazgan (2023) concern with the institutional relationships through which policy is interpreted and experienced.

The findings also support Paananen and Pitkänen's (2021) view that tensions are constitutive of educational policy experiences. At junior high school X, policy changes produced tensions between continuity and change, external expectations and local capacity, and rapid response and limited preparation. Rather than being fully resolved, these tensions were managed through organizational adaptation. This provides greater empirical specificity to Berbecel (2018) and Oduro et al. (2026) regarding the uneven consequences of policy reform across institutional settings: identical policy expectations can generate different practical demands depending on the resources, knowledge, and organizational relationships available at the school level.

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Pi et al. (2024) provide a complementary perspective, showing that rural educational adaptation depends on networks of guidance, information, emotional support, and collaboration rather than individual action alone. Although their study focuses on teacher support for students, the underlying mechanism is relevant here. At junior high school X, adaptation similarly depended on relationships among the Foundation, principal, teachers, supervisors, and external stakeholders. Local adaptation was therefore relational before procedural: policy became actionable when organizational actors had channels to discuss and interpret uncertainty and translate it into practical responses.

The findings consequently qualify an important assumption in policy implementation research: responsiveness does not necessarily require policy certainty. In resource-constrained rural schools, waiting for complete clarity may itself be impractical. What matters is the capacity to develop sufficient interpretive confidence to act while uncertainty persists. Intensive communication, collective discussion, and practical support thus enabled professional continuity amid policy change.

The contribution is therefore not another model of policy implementation but a closer account of the organizational work between policy and practice. Previous scholarship shows that turbulent policy environments are politically complex and difficult to implement (Arar et al., 2024; Paananen & Pitkänen, 2021). This case adds that, in a resource-constrained rural private school, navigating such turbulence depends partly on the capacity to interpret policy collectively while maintaining professional continuity. Policy volatility becomes consequential not only through what governments change, but through what schools are able or unable to do with those changes.

3.2.2. From Resource Scarcity to HRM Reconfiguration

The findings complicate the view of resource scarcity primarily as a constraint on human resource management. At junior high school X, limited and fluctuating funding constrained recruitment, compensation, and staffing flexibility, but also prompted revisions in how employment relationships were governed. This is significant because rural HRM research documents disadvantages related to limited compensation, professional development, recognition, and communication (Burhan et al., 2024). Similar challenges emerged at junior high school X through salary delays, teachers' need for additional employment, and limited financial capacity. Yet the case shows that resource-constrained HRM need not remain static or uniformly deficient.

Burhan et al. (2024) advocate HRM practices responsive to rural contexts through professional development, mentoring, communication, and recognition. The present findings support this approach while adding an organizational dimension: junior high school X reconfigured employment arrangements in response to accumulated vulnerabilities. Written contracts replacing informal arrangements and differentiated terms for full-time and part-time teachers sought to make workforce commitments more predictable within financial constraints. Teachers' perceptions of greater fairness indicate that formalization also helped restore organizational predictability.

This contrasts with the deficit-oriented account of Engdia and Berhanu (2026) in Ethiopia, where weaknesses in induction, appraisal, motivation, recognition, professional development, and supportive leadership constrained HRM effectiveness. While reinforcing the importance of context-specific and participatory HRM, the present case shows that constrained organizations can achieve incremental improvement by mobilizing existing resources and relationships. Scarcity itself is not beneficial; its effects depend partly on organizational learning and the capacity to redesign practices. The findings also align with the argument of Ingersoll and Tran (2023), that rural staffing problems are shaped not only by teacher supply but also by turnover and working conditions. At junior high school X, simultaneous teacher departures were addressed not simply through replacement but by mobilizing existing teachers while strengthening contractual and retention-oriented practices. The focus thus shifted from filling vacancies to governing workforce continuity.

Overall, financial scarcity remained a structural constraint, but organizational capacity shaped how its consequences were managed. HRM became adaptive through adjustments to contracts, workload, attendance, compensation, professional development, and teacher support. These practices could not substitute for adequate funding but reduced organizational vulnerability while scarcity persisted. The case therefore extends rural HRM scholarship by showing that organizational learning can turn persistent resource constraints into a stimulus for incremental HRM reconfiguration, while highlighting that the organization and communication of limited resources are as important as their availability.

3.2.3. Retention Beyond Compensation: Constructing Reasons to Stay

The findings challenge a narrow view of teacher retention as primarily a function of financial compensation. At junior high school X, salary remained consequential, as several teachers experienced delayed or insufficient payments and some undertook additional work. However, these constraints did not fully explain why teachers stayed. Their accounts pointed to professional development, certification, recognition, relational

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support, fairness, and purpose as interconnected organizational conditions that made staying meaningful and viable.

This finding is consistent with Ingersoll and Tran's (2023) organizational analysis of rural teacher shortages, which challenges supply-oriented approaches by showing that turnover is strongly associated with organizational conditions, including dissatisfaction with school administration and limited teacher influence in decision-making. The present study supports this organizational perspective while showing how retention can be actively constructed within a financially constrained school. When recruitment could not always expand, junior high school X invested in conditions that encouraged existing teachers to remain.

The findings also reinforce Leithwood et al.'s (2026) argument that retention is shaped by interconnected school-level conditions rather than salary alone, including leadership, working conditions, professional development, collegial relationships, and professional growth. At junior high school X, certification supported longer-term career recognition; training and English-language development strengthened professional capacity; peer supervision enabled learning; and recognition and communication helped teachers feel valued.

At the same time, the findings caution against assuming that non-monetary incentives can compensate for inadequate pay. Teachers continued to value salary, and some required additional employment because school income remained insufficient. Rather, retention was constructed through a broader organizational exchange in which professional development provided meaningful value alongside compensation without eliminating financial hardship. Burhan et al. (2024) similarly emphasize professional development, mentoring, recognition, communication, and locally relevant support in rural HRM. The present findings extend this proposition by showing how these practices become interconnected with retention: certification, training, and career support functioned not only as capacity-building mechanisms but also as reasons to remain. Kingsford-Smith et al. (2023) likewise identify professional and social resources, particularly relevant professional development and collaboration, as important for rural teachers. This study adds an organizational perspective by showing how such resources can be deliberately mobilized despite financial scarcity.

Professional certification particularly illustrates this dynamic. For some teachers, it represented not merely an additional qualification but evidence that the school supported a future professional trajectory. Retention therefore reflected not only assessments of present working conditions but also expectations about what continued employment might make possible. Overall, rural teacher retention may be better understood as the construction of reasons to stay than as the provision of a single incentive. At junior high school X, these reasons combined compensation, fairness, professional growth, recognition, relationships, and future prospects. Financial resources remained indispensable for long-term workforce stability, but their scarcity increased the importance of how the organization structured and communicated the non-financial value of staying.

The study therefore connects research on rural teacher turnover with scholarship on teacher working conditions. Retention emerges when teachers experience the organization not merely as a source of income but as a setting in which their professional identity, development, relationships, and future possibilities can be sustained. This offers a more nuanced explanation of why teachers remain despite unresolved financial constraints.

3.2.4. From Moral Commitment to Organizationally Supported Commitment

The findings indicate that teachers' decisions to remain were partly grounded in moral and professional commitment, particularly responsibility toward students, attachment to the school, and belief in its future. This supports Raspatiningrum et al.'s (2025) finding that moral commitment and community responsibility can anchor retention among rural Indonesian teachers when career development and institutional support are constrained. Similarly, teachers at junior high school X described teaching as a calling and expressed willingness to remain despite financial limitations.

However, moral commitment alone may not sustain retention. At junior high school X, commitment was supported by professional certification, training, English-language development, peer supervision, recognition, clearer employment arrangements, and relational support. This distinction between reasons to stay and conditions for sustainable staying suggests that organizational support helps translate commitment into continued professional participation. This extends Raspatiningrum et al.'s (2025) emphasis on moral commitment by highlighting organizational mechanisms. Although systemic imbalance, career disorientation, and limited developmental support can constrain teachers' trajectories, school-level developmental and relational resources can moderate these pressures. Commitment becomes more sustainable when it is recognized, supported, and linked to a credible professional future.

The findings also resonate with Pi et al. (2024), who conceptualize rural support as multidimensional and relational. At junior high school X, support operated across organizational levels through the Foundation, school

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leaders, teachers, and community. Burhan et al. (2024) similarly emphasize recognition, communication, mentoring, and professional development in rural HRM; here, these practices also signaled organizational investment in teachers' professional futures. Certification support, for example, was valued not only as a qualification but as evidence of longer-term professional investment. Leithwood et al. (2026) further show that retention reflects interconnected conditions including leadership, professional development, working conditions, collegial relationships, and growth opportunities. Consistent with this view, teachers' willingness to remain at junior high school X reflected the interaction between moral commitment and an organizational environment that recognized their professional and relational needs despite financial constraints.

The findings therefore suggest organizationally supported commitment: a reciprocal process in which teachers contribute loyalty, professional effort, and responsibility while the organization provides recognition, development, relational care, and advancement opportunities. Such commitment is neither purely intrinsic nor externally imposed; it is sustained through the interaction between teachers' values and what the organization can make possible. In resource-constrained rural schools, this interaction is critical because financial incentives alone cannot fully secure workforce continuity.

3.2.5. Adaptive Leadership as the Conversion Mechanism

The findings show that adaptive leadership at junior high school X operated through communication, relational support, accountability, professional guidance, and distributed problem-solving, enabling the organization to work within persistent constraints. This supports Hallinger and Liu (2016), Hardwick-Franco (2019), and Hayes et al. (2021), who emphasize adaptive leadership in mobilizing school capacity under changing and uncertain conditions. Coordination between the Foundation and the principal was central. C1 described intensive communication and reporting, while P1 retained managerial autonomy but sought Foundation guidance when needed. Adaptive leadership therefore combined distributed responsibility with accountability rather than relying on either centralized control or complete autonomy, consistent with Ingersoll and Tran's (2023) emphasis on balancing participation and accountability.

The findings also extend Arar et al.'s (2024) account of adaptive governance under turbulence. At junior high school X, responsiveness emerged through ongoing discussion, interpretation, guidance, and adjustment: the Foundation maintained strategic oversight, the principal translated expectations into practice, and teachers contributed to problem-solving. Adaptation thus connected different forms of authority and knowledge rather than simply redistributing formal authority.

Consistent with Engdia and Berhanu (2026), leadership support was participatory and relational, but it also involved corrective authority. Teachers were given opportunities to improve while being held accountable for serious mistakes or repeated resistance to feedback. Support therefore combined care with expectations and accountability. Collective problem-solving further enabled adaptation. Teachers contributed to resource mobilization and expenditure efficiency, while parents supported facility development when resources were insufficient. This resonates with Pi et al. (2024) and extends their perspective by showing that relationships can function as organizational resources, providing knowledge, labor, judgment, and practical solutions beyond financial capacity.

Adaptive leadership therefore functioned as a conversion mechanism rather than a substitute for HRM. It enabled recruitment, contracts, professional development, recognition, and retention practices to adapt through communication and collective negotiation. Its significance lies in converting constrained material resources and distributed commitment into relational, professional, and collective organizational capacity. Thus, effective adaptation meant maintaining direction while adjusting means, combining empathy with accountability, and distributing responsibility without abandoning strategic oversight.

3.2.6. Reframing Teacher Workforce Sustainability under Persistent Constraint

Taken together, the findings suggest that teacher workforce sustainability in resource-constrained rural schools cannot be explained through recruitment, compensation, or individual commitment alone. Existing scholarship emphasizes working conditions, professional development, leadership, recognition, and organizational support (Burhan et al., 2024; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Leithwood et al., 2026). The present findings bring these elements together by showing how they interact under simultaneous financial scarcity and policy volatility.

The contribution is not that junior high school X overcame scarcity; financial limitations continued to constrain recruitment, compensation, and operations. Rather, organizational actors learned to work within these constraints by reconfiguring HRM, collectively interpreting policy, supporting professional development, strengthening relational commitment, and distributing responsibility. Adaptive leadership connected these practices, while teachers' moral and professional commitment provided an important but insufficient

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foundation for continuity. This reframes workforce sustainability from an organizational outcome to an ongoing adaptive process. Sustainability emerged through collective interpretation, adaptive HRM and leadership, and organizationally supported commitment that sustained teacher continuity amid persistent constraints. What matters, therefore, is not simply resource availability but how actors interpret constraints and mobilize available resources, relationships, and capabilities.

The concept of organizationally supported commitment is central to this process, linking teachers' moral and professional reasons for staying with organizational conditions that make staying viable. Workforce sustainability is thus neither secured by financial incentives nor guaranteed by commitment alone but shaped by the interaction between what teachers contribute and what the organization can sustain and support. The study consequently extends rural HRM and teacher retention scholarship by positioning organizational capacity, rather than resource availability alone, as a critical condition of workforce sustainability under constraint. Scarcity remains consequential, but its effects depend on how organizational actors interpret, reorganize, and collectively manage available resources. In rural private schooling, continuity may therefore depend less on eliminating constraints than on developing the capacity to navigate them collectively.

3.3. Implications

The findings suggest that rural private schools need not only financial resources but also organizational capacity to interpret policy, adapt HRM, and sustain teacher commitment. Clear employment arrangements, professional development, recognition, relational communication, and teacher participation can strengthen this capacity but cannot replace adequate funding. Policymakers should therefore account for differences in institutional capacity and provide greater policy continuity and implementation support. Theoretically, the study connects rural teacher retention, adaptive leadership, and resource-constrained HRM by positioning organizationally supported commitment as a mechanism through which teacher commitment becomes sustainable and adaptive HRM functions as organizational capability.

3.4. Limitations and Future Research

Two limitations should be noted. First, the single-school case limits generalizability because findings are shaped by junior high school X's specific history, leadership, community, and mission. Second, reliance on participant accounts within a specific period limit understanding of longer-term organizational change. Future research should compare rural schools across governance and funding contexts, examine rural–urban and private–public differences, and employ longitudinal designs to examine how adaptive HRM, policy continuity, financial support, and organizational capacity jointly shape teacher workforce sustainability.

4. Conclusion

Workforce sustainability emerged as an ongoing organizational process in which the Foundation, principal, teachers, and community interpreted policy, reconfigured HR practices, and mobilized professional and relational resources. Despite financial constraints on recruitment and teacher welfare, clearer employment arrangements, professional development, recognition, relational support, and distributed problem-solving helped sustain teacher commitment and educational continuity. The study makes two contributions. First, it extends adaptive HRM by positioning organizational capacity, rather than HR adjustment alone, as central to operating under persistent constraints. Second, it identifies organizationally supported commitment as a mechanism linking teachers' moral and professional reasons for staying with organizational conditions that sustain commitment. Practically, rural private schools need to strengthen not only financial resources but also capacities for policy interpretation, employment management, professional growth, and meaningful participation. Sustainability ultimately depends on navigating persistent constraints while maintaining teacher commitment and educational continuity.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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The authors declare that Grammarly was used solely for proofreading and enhancing the linguistic accuracy and clarity of the English translation

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