



NURTURING THE DREAM WEAVERS: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON TEACHER RETENTION

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Abstract

This study examined teachers' perceptions of school subsystems in a Philippine public school using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected from 106 permanent teachers through a validated questionnaire, while qualitative data were gathered from 20 purposively selected participants through structured written interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using the mean and standard deviation, while Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Looking Glass Self Theory guided the qualitative analysis. The social subsystem received the highest rating, whereas the economic subsystem received the lowest. Teacher retention was supported by a healthy work environment, supportive leadership, personal fulfillment, passion for teaching, compensation, benefits, and workplace proximity. Challenges included student discipline, unfair policies, and excessive workloads. Participants emphasized fair workload distribution, work-life balance, teamwork, professional development, career advancement, incentives, and recognition. Participants recommended improving workplace relationships, communication, student evaluation, and discipline while reducing financial burdens. The study recommends strengthening positive school practices, addressing workplace challenges through localized strategies, implementing Department of Education policies, and establishing strategic partnerships. Future research should explore teacher attrition, and examine how school subsystems influence teacher mobility.

Keywords: Cultural subsystem, economic subsystem, social subsystem, teacher retention.

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Introduction

Educational systems face challenges with maintaining an experienced and stable teacher workforce because teacher attrition and teacher turnover are two issues common to all education systems. Teacher retention is critical for sustaining educational quality, ensuring instructional continuity, and supporting the long-term effectiveness of educational systems, as retaining qualified teachers remains central to global education reform efforts (Shaoan et al., 2025)

Globally, teacher retention has become a major concern due to increasing teacher shortages and high attrition rates. According to the 2023 report of the UNESCO International Task Force, 44 million more teachers will be needed worldwide by 2030 to achieve the objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 for Quality Education (UNESCO, 2023). There is evidence that professional development opportunities, supportive leadership and collegial relationships impact teachers' decisions about whether or not to stay in the profession (Arthur and Bradley, 2023; Cells et al., 2022).

The issue of teacher retention remains a growing problem throughout the Philippines. The Department of Education (2022) states that there were over 876,000 public school teachers nationwide in 2022; however, teacher stability is still affected by transfers, migration, and heavy workloads (Department of Education 2022), which continues to negatively impact the overall number of teachers within the educational system. Additionally, at Bambang National High School (2017-2024), teacher turnover due to resignation, transfer, and early retirement has created additional workload and potential disruption to the delivery of instruction.

While there are many studies that have looked at teacher retention, there are still several important gaps in the research. There is a contextual gap because the majority of the studies are done nationally or regionally with very few studies focusing on a specific location. Additionally, there is a theoretical gap because most of the studies utilize a traditional framework when discussing teacher retention and neglect to use other perspectives, such as the Looking Glass Self Theory. Third, most of the research is quantitative in nature and there are very few studies that use mixed methods or hermeneutic phenomenology to understand the lived

experience of teachers. Fourth, the limited number of studies that examine how different social, cultural, and economic subsystems within schools interact with one another to shape the experiences of teachers creates an empirical gap. Finally, there is a practical gap as there are no context-specific and actionable recommendations in the literature to improve teacher retention. Therefore, this study focused on identifying the factors that contribute to teacher retention, specifically regarding how social, cultural, and economic subsystems shape teachers' decisions to remain in the teaching profession.

Questions

This study determined the respondents' perspectives on teacher retention. Specifically, the research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the respondents' perception of the social, cultural, and economic subsystems?
2. How do teachers' perceptions of school subsystems influence their intention to stay?
3. What are the teachers' expressed needs, suggestions, and insights to strengthen retention?

Literature Review

Teacher retention has become a key global issue as educational systems strive for a stable/t and skilled teaching force. Retention is the ability of schools to keep qualified teachers employed for an extended period. Schools gain instructional continuity, successful student performance, and decreased hiring/training costs by having teachers remain in their positions. However, different countries continue to experience teacher shortages/high attrition rates due to lack of understanding around the reasons teachers choose to leave the profession as opposed to staying in the profession.

Globally, recent studies show that teacher retention is affected by many factors, including professional, social, and organizational. The UNESCO (2023) states that the education sector is still experiencing major shortages of qualified teachers, showing that there is still a need to improve working conditions/professional development opportunities and recognition for teachers. In addition, Arthur and Bradley (2023) found that strong supportive leadership, positive relationships with students, and

collaborative partnerships with colleagues enhanced teachers' willingness to stay in the profession.

A critical component of teacher retention is motivation and professional fulfillment. According to Casely-Hayford, et al. (2022), the motivation to teach, and institutional support all play an important role in teachers' commitment to the profession. According to Onyefulu et al. (2023), intrinsic motivations such as passion for teaching and commitment to students are among the most influential factors in teachers' decisions to remain teaching.

Improvement of school leadership and workplace relationships will also enhance teachers' working experience. Mitchell (2022) indicates that teachers' retention is positively influenced by effective leadership, professional guidance, and open communication. Similarly, Shuls and Flores (2022) find that schools with collaborative cultures and high levels of professional trust experience lower rates of teacher turnover.

Collaborative relationships influence teachers' professional experiences in the context of social and cultural conditions that exist within the school. Wilson (2024) finds that having collaborative relationships decreases the level of professional isolation experienced by teachers and can thus enhance the level of professional growth. According to Fang and Qi (2023), positive school climates provide an environment conducive to enhancing the overall well-being of the teacher and increased student engagement. Similarly, Bahtilla and Hui (2022) found that a supportive school culture and participative style of leadership strengthens a teacher's sense of belonging and commitment. Teacher retention is also affected by economic aspects. Anwar et al. (2023) found that a low salary along with heavy workloads increases a teacher's intent to leave the profession.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (2024) highlights policies designed to increase teacher support in areas such as improved working conditions and workload management, along with continuing education and professional development.

Hence, recent literature has established that teachers' retention is influenced by various interconnected factors, including social, cultural, and economic subsystems. However, these aspects are usually studied separately as well as at an overall level, indicating a need to have a locally cohesive and integrated examination of the experiences of teachers.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, as the qualitative data provided further explanation and depth to the quantitative findings. Quantitative data were used to determine the teachers' perceptions of the school subsystems, while the qualitative data provided in-depth insights into teachers' experiences of retention. Qualitative analysis was guided by Hermeneutic Phenomenology, which examines the interpretation of individuals' experience (Suddick et al., 2020), complemented by Looking-Glass Self Theory.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study consisted of 106 permanent teachers from a target population of 145 in a public school in the Philippines during the School Year 2024–2025, determined using Cochran's Formula. Stratified random sampling was applied to ensure representation across Junior and Senior High School departments and subject areas, with each teacher assigned a unique code (R1, R2, etc.) for confidentiality.

For the qualitative phase, 20 participants were purposively selected using extreme case sampling, representing the top ten and bottom ten teachers in terms of intention to remain, and were assigned separate identifiers (P1, P2, etc.) to maintain anonymity.

Data-Gathering Procedure

The researcher adapted a 60-item subsystems questionnaire from Apostol (2008), covering the social, cultural, and economic subsystems. It was reviewed by experts from the Schools Division Office and the research panel for clarity, content, and alignment with the study objectives. The instrument was then pilot-tested with 15 teachers from a nearby school through Google Forms. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha yielded coefficients of .97 (social), .96 (cultural), and .92 (economic), indicating strong internal consistency.

After establishing the validity and reliability of the instrument used to collect data, the researcher obtained the necessary permission to conduct the study. In the quantitative phase of the study, teachers completed the survey using Google Forms, which facilitated efficient and confidential data

collection. The data were tabulated and computed using Google Sheets and were then analyzed.

Based on the computed Mean Percentage Scores, the top ten and bottom ten teachers in terms of intent to remain were identified and invited to participate in the qualitative phase. They provided written responses to open-ended questions, offering deeper insights into their experiences and perceptions of teacher retention.

Data Analysis

The mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the average and variability of teachers' responses across the social, cultural, and economic subsystems.

The Mean Percentage Score (MPS) was computed to assess teachers' intention to remain, which served as the basis for selecting participants for the qualitative phase.

Qualitative data were analyzed using Hermeneutic Phenomenology, following Alsaigh and Coyne's (2021) stages: immersion through repeated reading, interpretation and coding (with Filipino responses translated into English), abstraction into categories, theme development through the hermeneutic circle, and integration of qualitative and quantitative findings.

The interpretation of results was further guided by the Looking-Glass Self Theory, explaining how teachers' perceptions of their professional environment influence their decision to stay.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed, ensuring the protection and welfare of all participants. Informed consent was given to the participants, outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and participants' right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Participants' identities were concealed confidentiality by using coded identifiers (R1, R2 for quantitative), (P1, P2 for qualitative) and no identifying information were included in the report. All data were securely stored and made available only to the researcher.

The researcher ensured that no question asked caused any discomfort to the participant; and the researcher presented the study's findings in an accurate

manner, preserving the integrity of the research by providing truthful representations of the study's results without distortion or misrepresentation of the findings.

Results and Discussions

Respondents’ perception of the social, cultural and the economic subsystems

To determine the respondents’ perceptions on the social, cultural, and economic subsystems, the mean and standard deviation were computed and presented Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents’ Perception of the Social, Cultural, and Economic Subsystems

Subsystems	Mean	Qualitative Description
Social Subsystem	4.04	Probably has No Plan/Intention to Leave
Cultural Subsystem	3.93	Probably Has No Plan/Intention to Leave
Economic Subsystem	3.75	Probably Has No Plan/Intention to Leave

Data in Table 1 reveals that the respondents had no plan or intention to leave based on their perceptions of the three main subsystems. The respondents perceived the social subsystem positively ($\bar{x}$ =4.04), with little variability (SD =0.45), indicating that they agree upon how they feel about the school's social environment. Respondents also positively viewed the cultural subsystem ($\bar{x}$ =3.93), but the variability (SD =0.56) indicates less agreement among them in how they perceive the school's values, norms, and traditions. Finally, respondents perceived the economic subsystem least favorably ($\bar{x}$ =3.7, SD =0.55), indicating that they are less satisfied with financial conditions.

Social Subsystem

Table 1 showed that respondents generally have no plan or intention to leave, as the social subsystem obtained the highest mean, indicating a positive school environment. To note, the statements *“I like my students and enjoy working with them.”* and *“I have a good relationship with the parents of my students.”* both had the highest mean (4.41), reflecting strong connections

with parents and students. For instance, Participant 9 shared, "*Masaya magturo kapag interested ang mga bata at cooperative sila sa klase,*" (Teaching brings happiness when students are interested and cooperative in class.). In the lens of the Looking-Glass Self, when a teacher sees "gratitude" in the eyes of a student, they internalize an identity of "competence and worth." This positive reflection acts as a primary driver for staying. These findings show that positive relationships enhance teachers' satisfaction and retention (Wilson, 2024).

On the other hand, "*Gossiping and backstabbing is done very little.*" had the lowest mean ($\bar{x}=3.58$, $SD = 0.82$), indicating existing workplace gossip. Similarly, Participant 6 mentioned "*crab mentality,*" This implies that teachers might develop their sense of self from their perspective of what other people think about them, where "gossiping", or "crab mentality," can foster feelings of insecurity and might lead to lessen teacher intention to stay. Therefore, gossip increases workplace stress and reduces positive work behavior, which may indirectly affect retention (Gao et al., 2024).

Cultural Subsystem

The obtained mean of cultural subsystem obtained suggests that respondents have no plan or intention to leave, reflecting positive perceptions of shared values and practices. Specifically, the highest-rated item, "*I speak the dialect of the community.,*" ($\bar{x}=4.35$, $SD = 0.83$) indicates strong cultural connection. However, "*I was born and brought up in this town.*" had the lowest mean ($\bar{x}=3.60$, $SD = 1.57$), showing that some teachers are not native of the locality.

Furthermore, qualitative responses revealed that proximity to the workplace contributes to convenience and satisfaction, (Participants 5, 13, and 4 said, "*Malapit sa bahay / reduced travel stress*" (Close to home / reduced travel stress), suggesting that teachers will continue working in the community if they feel accepted and valued, and being near to the school will promote help create a sense of social acceptance, which improves self-image and encourages longer retention rates. This could mean that cultural compatibility and community integration influence teachers' retention (Blaushild et al., 2023).

Economic Subsystem

The economic subsystem garnered the lowest mean revealing lower satisfaction with compensation and benefits, although respondents still generally indicated no intention to leave. Moreover, this highlights the influence of financial factors on teacher retention.

The statement "*I receive my entire salary on time*" had the highest mean ($\bar{x}=4.52$, $SD = 0.62$), showing that timely salary supports financial stability. On the other hand, "*I am paid for non-teaching jobs assigned to me*" received the lowest mean ($\bar{x}=2.62$, $SD = 1.23$), reflecting dissatisfaction with compensation for extra tasks.

Additionally, participants highlighted the need for promotion opportunities, (Participant 3 stated, "*... promotion opportunities para sa mga guro*" (... promotion chances for teachers). This implies that if teachers are given administrative duties but not promoted or compensated accordingly, they feel devalued by the school system, leading them to feel less professionally valued and potentially lowering motivation and retention. Thus, fair compensation, and promotion are critical to retention (Anwar et al., 2023).

Participants' perception of the subsystems and their impact on their intention to stay

To determine the impact of the social, cultural, and economic subsystems on teachers' retention, the participants' written responses were analyzed using a Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach to capture the underlying and implicit meaning. The Looking Glass-Self was used to analyze the implication. The written responses were categorized into positive and negative responses, coded to themes and subthemes, and the impact.

Theme 1: Positive Perceptions of the Subsystems

Positive perceptions of school subsystems influence participants' intention to stay. The social subsystem fosters belongingness, job satisfaction, and stability through a healthy work environment, while leadership support provides sense of value. The cultural subsystem promotes commitment and resilience through personal fulfillment and passion. The economic subsystem enhances job satisfaction and motivation through compensation and benefits, and proximity reduces stress and provides work-life balance

Subtheme 1. Social Subsystem

1.1 Healthy Working Environment

The participants' written responses revealed that a healthy working environment within the social subsystem fosters sense of belongingness, and job satisfaction and stability, which positively influences teachers' intention to stay.

Sense of Belongingness

Many participants emphasized that positive relationships with colleagues contribute significantly to their sense of belonging. Participant 5 shared, *Participant 5 said, "Kasundo ang mga kasamahan, kaya hindi mabigat ang trabaho"* (Getting along well with colleagues makes work less burdensome), indicating that harmonious relationships reduce workplace stress. Similarly, Participant 14 mentioned, *"Mga kasamang guro na nagiging kaibigan na rin"* (Fellow teachers who become friends too). These responses highlight how camaraderie, teamwork, and mutual respect create a supportive environment that strengthens teachers' emotional connection to the school.

Such supportive interactions reinforce teachers' professional identity and self-esteem. When teachers feel respected and valued by colleagues, they develop stronger commitment and loyalty to their institution. Research supports this finding, emphasizing that collaborative professional relationships and peer support significantly improve job satisfaction and teacher retention (Fang and Qi, 2023).

Job Satisfaction and Sense of Stability

Participants also described how positive classroom experiences and career stability contribute to job satisfaction. Response of participant 1 was that *"Masaya magturo kapag interested ang mga bata at cooperative sila sa klase"* (Teaching brings happiness when students are interested and cooperative in class). Participant 17 answered, *"Kontento na ako sa kung anong meron ako"* (I'm already contented with what I have), and participant 13 supplemented, *"Naka-establish na ako ng career dito"* (I've established already a career here), which expresses a feeling of stability and contentment.

These responses suggest that positive student interactions and long-term professional stability strengthen teachers' sense of accomplishment and

commitment to teaching. Studies indicate that supportive classroom environments and positive school climate significantly influence teacher satisfaction and retention (Onyefulu et al., 2023).

1.2 Support from School Leaders

Sense of Value

Participants also highlighted the importance of leadership support in strengthening their intention to stay. Participant 9 emphasized the necessity of ongoing support by saying, "*Mahalaga rin para saakin ang suporta mula sa punong-guro at ang pagkakaroon ng maayos na sistema sa pagtuturo to stay.*" (Having support from the principal and an efficient teaching system is also important for staying.), and participant 10 said, "*Maayos na pakikitungo ng school head at suportang natatanggap mula sa kasamahan.*" (Good relations with the school head and the support received from colleagues) emphasize the significance of support in possessing a valuable and safe working experience.

These imply that supportive leadership reinforces teachers' sense of value and security within the organization. Effective leaders provide guidance, encouragement, and fair treatment, which fosters trust and organizational commitment. Supportive school leadership significantly improves teacher motivation, performance, and retention (Olasiman and Torreón, 2024; Arthur and Bradley, 2023).

Subtheme 2: Cultural Subsystem

2.1. Personal Fulfillment and Passion

Unwavering Dedication and Resilience

Under the cultural subsystem, participants emphasized personal fulfillment and passion for teaching as key factors influencing their decision to remain in the profession. Many teachers described teaching as a calling rather than simply a job. Participant 20 expressed this by stating, "*Ito ang calling ko, teaching / Masaya na ako dito.*" (This is my calling/I am already happy here.)," highlights the intrinsic motivation required for teacher retention.

Despite the adversity of teaching, these participants were highly resilient and unbending in dedication. Participant 16 affirmed, "*Difficult but still passionate about teaching,*" despite adversity and remaining strong in his

passion. Participant 18 confirmed this resilience after having said, "*Ayaw kong iwan ang family ko kahit mahirap ang buhay rito. Not financially ngunit yong trabaho, ambigat*" (I don't want to leave behind my family even if life here is hard. Not financially but the job itself is draining), showing that their commitment remains even in difficult times.

These findings suggest that intrinsic motivation, personal fulfillment, and passion for teaching play significant roles in sustaining teachers' commitment to their profession. When teachers perceive their work as meaningful and impactful, they are more likely to remain dedicated despite challenges. Studies have similarly found that teachers' sense of vocation and professional purpose strongly influence their persistence and resilience in the teaching profession (Onyefulu et al., 2023).

Subtheme 3: Economic Subsystem

3.1. Compensation and Benefits

Job Satisfaction

Participants highlighted the importance of compensation, job security, and financial stability in sustaining their commitment to the school. Participant 7 wrote, "*Maayos na suweldo at promosyon*" (Decent salary and promotion), stressing that accurate compensation and the ability to move up in one's profession assure success.

These findings suggest that job security reinforce teachers' sense of professional value and institutional trust. When teachers perceive fair compensation and career stability, they are more likely to experience job satisfaction and long-term commitment. Rotich et al. (2024) found a significant positive relationship between remuneration and job satisfaction, reinforcing teacher commitment.

Motivation

Financial incentives and opportunities for career advancement also serve as strong motivational factors. Participant 17 stated, "*May hanggang T-7 na plantilla position*" (Up to T-7 plantilla (permanent) position), highlighting being well-placed in the system as permanent.

This indicate that financial growth and professional advancement reinforce teachers' sense of recognition and motivation. When teachers see

opportunities for professional development and career progression, they are more likely to remain committed to their institutions. Studies highlight that financial security and career development opportunities play key roles in sustaining teacher motivation and performance (Anwar et al., 2023).

3.2. Proximity and Convenience

Reduced Stress and Work-Life Balance

The findings highlight the role of proximity in reducing stress and improving work-life balance. In particular, Participants 5, 13, and 4 noted, "*Malapit sa bahay / reduced travel stress*," emphasizing that living close to work lessens daily strain. Furthermore, Participant 5 stated, "*Participant 5 further stated, 'May time pa para sa sideline at personal na bagay'*" (There is still time for side jobs and personal matters), showing that proximity allows time for side jobs and personal matters.

This implies that teachers' proximity to schools reduces stress and provides an opportunity to balance work and home life by helping teachers complete professional tasks and personal tasks. Montazer and Young (2024) claimed that longer commutes increase a person's level of psychological discomfort while a shorter commute improves job satisfaction and psychological health.

Theme 2. Negative Perceptions of the Subsystems

Negative perceptions of the subsystems influence teachers' intention to remain in the institution. Issues related to student discipline and lack of support within the social subsystem generate emotional strain, while concerns in the cultural subsystem such as unfair practices and excessive workload lead to discouragement, helplessness; while excessive/redundant workload promotes laziness and demotivation among teachers.

Subtheme 1. Social Subsystem

1.1. Student Behavior and Discipline

Disheartened

Student behavior significantly influences teachers' daily experiences and long-term commitment. Participant 11 highlighted, "Participant 11 highlighted the issue of "*Disiplina ng mga bata, lalo na kapag hindi sila sumusunod at wala masyadong suporta mula sa magulang*" (Discipline for children, especially when they don't obey and lack support from their

parents),” indicating that poor discipline and limited parental support create stressful teaching conditions. Similarly, Participant 16 shared feeling “Disheartened by ‘lulubog-lilitaw’ students,” showing how inconsistent attendance disrupts learning and reduces professional satisfaction.

These suggest that students' behavior has a significant impact on how teachers perceive their own professional worth. To note, common student issues such as being distracted, arriving late, and/or not attending classes regularly has been shown to be affected by their peers, the media, and whether or not their parents tolerate this kind of behavior (Oestar and Oestar, 2022).

Subtheme 2. Cultural Subsystem

2.1. Unfair Practices and Policies

Discouragement, Helplessness and Feeling undervalued

Professional development opportunities were also a source of dissatisfaction among participants. In particular, Participant 12 stated, “*Hindi patas ang pagpili ng guro sa seminars*” (The selection of teachers for seminars is not fair)” highlighting unequal access to training.

This suggests that inequitable access to providing PD or biased selection processes can breed participant’s resentment and create a perception of dissatisfaction with oneself; and a lack of monitoring can decrease motivation and trust. As stated by Harrison et al. (2022), limited access to PD, inadequate/weak support, and poorly implemented and designed PD may affect job satisfaction and potentially influence retention.

2.2. Excessive or Redundant Workload

Participants also highlighted the negative effects of excessive administrative workload within the cultural subsystem.

Laziness

Repetitive administrative work was a common concern among participants. In particular, Participant 11 stated, “*Pagsubmit ng maraming reports na madalas ay pare-pareho, nakakatamad*” (Submitting many reports that are often the same. It makes me lazy), highlighting how redundant reporting tasks become exhausting and demotivating.

The repeated performance of administrative tasks causes teachers to may feel as though their time and knowledge are not valued by the organization they are working for. Self-esteem and professional identity are negatively impacted when they feel this way. Tarraya (2023) claimed that the large volume of paperwork that teachers must complete takes away a significant amount of time from their focus and growth in terms of teaching.

Demotivation

The voluminous workload, combined with repetitive tasks, strongly demotivates teachers. In particular, Participant 3 stated, *"Overwhelming work affects motivation,"* showing how excessive and monotonous responsibilities reduce enthusiasm and passion for teaching.

As a result, excessive workloads create obstacles for teachers to continue being committed to their work; therefore, they may have less job satisfaction and more intention to quit or leave teaching. This aligns to the study of Zhao et al. (2024) that teachers' intentions to leave are significantly affected by high workloads and conflicts with family/job responsibilities which contribute greatly to burnout.

Teachers' expressed needs, suggestions, and insights to strengthen retention

To determine the teachers' expressed needs, suggestions, and insights to strengthen retention, the written responses were categorized into themes and subthemes and were interpreted using Hermeneutic Phenomenology. The Looking Glass Self was used to give the implication followed by the integration of the related studies that support or negate the findings.

Needs

The analysis shows that teacher retention is shaped by key cultural and economic needs. Culturally, teachers emphasized fair workload distribution, reduced paperwork, flexible schedules, strong peer support through mentoring and teamwork, and access to professional development opportunities. Economically, they highlighted the importance of incentives and recognition programs to sustain motivation and commitment.

Theme 1. Cultural Subsystem

Several themes emerged under the cultural subsystem, highlighting teachers' needs related workload distribution and organization, work-life

balance, peer mentoring and teamwork, and, professional development and growth opportunities. These factors influence teachers' job satisfaction and intention to remain in the school.

Subtheme 1.1. Workload Distribution and Organization

Participants emphasized the need for fair and well-organized workload distribution to prevent burnout and improve efficiency. Many teachers expressed concern about excessive paperwork and uneven task allocation. Participant 10 stated, *"Mas okay if maayos at pantay yong pagbibigay ng workload sa mga teachers"* (It would be better if the workload distribution among teachers is fair and organized). Similarly, Participant 1 expressed, *"Sana magkaroon ng mas maayos na workload distribution para hindi kami ma-burnout"* (It would be great to have a more organized workload distribution to prevent burnout).

The responses indicate that teachers' perceptions of their worth in a school setting are influenced by how equitably distributed the total workload is. Teachers feel they are being recognized and respected when they are assigned their share of an equitable distribution; but when the workload is uneven, teachers perceive their worth to be less leading to less motivated and committed. Tarraya (2023) have shown that both high levels of administrative work and responsibilities that do not match the teaching role as a profession significantly increase a teacher's likelihood of burning out from teaching and/or dissatisfaction with their job as a professional educator.

Subtheme 1.2. Work-Life Balance

Teachers also expressed the importance of maintaining a balance between professional responsibilities and personal life. Participant 5 explained, *"Bigyan ng mas flexible na schedule para may oras din sa personal na buhay at sideline"* (Provide a more flexible schedule so teachers have time for personal life and side jobs). This response reflects teachers' need for flexibility to manage both professional and personal responsibilities.

This implies that flexible scheduling affects teachers' perspectives on their self-worth and identity in relation to the school. Fostering an environment where the school respects the teacher's time indicates to teachers that the school cares about them and values them. In turn, teachers develop a positive self-image and become more satisfied and committed. Work-life

balance is an important factor for teacher retention. Inadequate flexibility in the workplace and a high workload can lead to teacher burnout which may cause teachers to leave the profession (Sheppard, 2023).

Subtheme 1.3. Peer Mentoring and Teamwork

Participants also emphasized the value of peer mentoring, teamwork, and collaborative activities in creating a supportive work environment. Participant 4 stated, *"More peer mentoring and teamwork initiatives to support knowledge sharing,"* highlighting the importance of collaboration in professional growth. Similarly, Participant 5 suggested, *"Mas maraming team-building at bonding activities para mas lalong magaan ang trabaho"* (More team-building and bonding activities to make work easier).

The responses show that collegial support helps decrease stress levels relating to one's job, as well as helping to develop teachers' feelings of belonging to their school. Researchers have found that teacher job satisfaction and retention are greatly affected by collaborative school settings and an overall positive climate in their place of work, along with professional relationships and organization support leading to ongoing teacher engagement as a professional educator (Eryilmaz et al., 2025).

Subtheme 1.4. Professional Development and Growth Opportunities

Teachers also emphasized the need for continuous professional development and career advancement opportunities. Participant 3 stated, *"Magbigay ng mas maraming scholarships, training, at promotion opportunities para sa mga guro"* (Provide more scholarships, training, and promotion opportunities for teachers). This reflects teachers' desire for institutional support that enables professional growth. Additionally, Participant 5 reinforced this concern by stating, *"Dagdagan ang suporta sa teachers – puwedeng financial assistance o mas maraming resources"* (Increase support for teachers-this could include financial assistance or more resources).

The results suggest that teachers place a high value on skill development, having access to materials, and clear pathways for advancing their careers as educators. When organizations put money toward developing professionals through ongoing education and professional growth opportunities, teachers feel appreciated by their employer. Domnena et al. (2024) claimed that supportive organizational structure, and clear options

for advancing one's career play a role in teacher satisfaction and retention within education systems.

Theme 2. Economic Subsystem

Subtheme 2.1 Incentives and Recognition for Teachers

Under the economic subsystem, participants highlighted the importance of incentives and recognition programs as sources of motivation and appreciation. Participant 4 suggested the need for *“regular incentives or recognition programs to appreciate long-serving teachers.”* This response reflects teachers’ desire for meaningful recognition of their dedication and years of service.

Recognition provides teachers with both financial compensation as well as reaffirming their feelings of value and inclusion in an organization. Teacher recognition for their efforts strengthens teacher motivation and commitment. Mutesasira and Marongwe (2024) mentioned that positive relationship between teacher appreciation and psychological support, lead to enhanced well-being and job satisfaction.

Suggestions

Participants’ suggestions to strengthen retention focus on key improvements across school subsystems. The social subsystem focuses on enhancing workplace environment and relationships through a supportive atmosphere, reduced gossip, and sustained collegial support was emphasized. Under the cultural subsystem, suggestions include improving workload distribution, ensuring fairness in student evaluation and discipline, and providing equitable access to professional development and scholarships. In the economic subsystem, participants highlighted the need to reduce financial burdens by reviewing and minimizing compulsory school contributions.

Theme 1. Social Subsystem

Subtheme 1.1. Workplace Environment and Relationships

Participants highlighted the importance of a respectful and supportive workplace environment in sustaining teachers’ motivation and commitment. Participant 6 emphasized the need to maintain a healthy work culture, stating, *“Hikayatin ang mas magandang work environment upang*

maiwasan ang tsismisan" (Encourage a better work environment to prevent gossip). This reflects the concern that workplace gossip and negativity may damage collegial relationships and reduce job satisfaction. Similarly, Participant 2 shared, *"Continue a positive and supportive work environment,"* indicating appreciation for an already supportive environment that contributes to teacher commitment.

This implies that when teachers believe they are appreciated and supported by those around them, as well as from their supervisors, they tend to be more likely to stay in education as their primary career choice. A positive relational climate enhances feelings of belonging and job satisfaction. Similarly, Gao et al. (2024) concluded that gossip and/or negativity in the workplace contributes to feelings of stress and discourages proactive workplace behavior; therefore, it is critical for leaders to develop a healthy work environment.

Theme 2. Cultural Subsystem

Subtheme 2.1. Workload Distribution

Participants highlighted excessive paperwork and unrelated responsibilities as major concerns affecting their ability to focus on teaching. Participant 11 explained, *"Dapat bawasan ang labis na paperwork at bigyan ng mas mahabang oras para sa aktwal na pagtuturo"* (Excessive paperwork should be reduced and more time should be given for actual teaching). This response reflects the tension between administrative tasks and instructional responsibilities. Similarly, Participant 7 suggested, *"Bawasan ang mga advisory role na hindi naman konektado sa major ng guro"* (Reduce advisory roles not related to the teacher's specialization). Assigning teachers tasks outside their expertise may reduce efficiency and job satisfaction.

The responses suggest that if teachers' duties correspond with their professional competencies, then the teachers will feel empowerment through their teaching effectiveness and will likely remain satisfied in their current positions. This is consistent with what Embang et al. (2022) reported that non-instructional duties have an impact on teachers' instructional time.

Subtheme 2.2. Fairness in Student Evaluation and Discipline

Participants also emphasized the need for institutional support in student discipline and fair evaluation systems. Participant 11 stated, *"Bigyan ng sapat na suporta ang mga guro sa pagpapatupad ng disiplina sa loob ng klase"*

(Provide sufficient support to teachers in implementing discipline in the classroom). This highlights the need for administrative backing when managing student behavior. The same participant also noted, *“Magkaroon ng malinaw at patas na sistema sa pagpapasa ng estudyante upang hindi laging guro ang sinisisi”* (There should be a clear and fair system in passing students so teachers are not always blamed).

Responses from the teachers suggest that they may feel disheartened if they are being held solely responsible for their students' poor performance or if the school has no clear rules regarding discipline. Providing institutional support and establishing fair policies can build teachers' professional confidence and increase their motivation to remain in the teaching field. Longmuir et al. (2022) illustrate how criticism and blame without adequate institutional policy affects teacher morale, which may influence retention decisions.

Subtheme 2.3. Professional Development and Scholarships

Participants also emphasized the importance of fair and meaningful professional development opportunities. Participant 12 suggested, *“Dapat maging patas sa pagpili ng guro na ipadadala sa seminars at tiyaking may kinalaman ito sa kanilang specialization”* (The selection of teachers for seminars should be fair and related to their specialization). This reflects teachers' desire for equitable opportunities for professional growth. Participant 14 added, *“Siguraduhin na ang mga seminar ay may malinaw na monitoring sa implementation upang maging kapaki-pakinabang”* (Ensure seminars have clear monitoring of implementation so they become useful). This suggests that teachers prefer professional development that leads to practical classroom improvements.

These mean that teachers regard providing opportunities for further development as an important factor in sustaining their commitment to the profession through enhancing their skills and ultimately enhancing their future in the profession. Kraft et al. (2023) indicates that through high-quality and relevant professional development, motivation and engagement will increase, indicating that relevant and well-implemented training will increase commitment.

Theme 3. Economic Subsystem

Subtheme 3.1. Financial Burdens and School Contributions

Participants also highlighted financial concerns related to school contributions and compulsory expenses. Participant 18 simply stated, *"Bawasan ang school contributions"* (Reduce school contributions), reflecting the financial burden experienced by teachers. Similarly, Participant 7 explained, *"Dapat pag-aralan ang mga compulsory contributions tulad ng pagbabayad ng tickets"* (Compulsory contributions such as ticket payments should be reviewed). This indicates that teachers sometimes feel obligated to pay for school-related expenses.

This can be surmise that one factor contributing toward the dissatisfaction of teachers is due to financial stress. If the unnecessary contributions are reduced and transparency in the financial administration of schools are made available, it may enhance teachers' morale and create some stability in their profession. Even though policies are being put into place, like DepEd's No Collection Policy (DepEd Order No 49, s. 2022), to help prevent teachers from making illegal contributions, this current research shows that there continue to be discrepancies within the implementation of these policies when compared to how they are being practiced.

Insights

The participants' insights on teacher retention focus on social and cultural subsystem. In the social subsystem, participants discussed peer support and collaboration, communication and support, and the workplace atmosphere and motivation. In the cultural subsystem, positive attitude and stress management, and personal balance were identified.

Theme 1. Social Subsystem

Subtheme 1.1. Peer Support and Collaboration

Supportive relationships among colleagues play a significant role in sustaining teachers' motivation and professional growth. Participant 2 highlighted the importance of emotional and practical support, stating, *"They give emotional and practical support."* This reflects a strong sense of collegial care within the workplace. The participant also noted, *"My colleagues share their knowledge when needed,"* indicating a culture of mentorship and collaborative learning.

It can be concluded that teachers build their professional identities when they have good relationships with their coworkers/colleagues. Working collaboratively with other teachers helps to increase the commitment of a teacher to their profession. This finding is consistent with the work of Casely et al. (2022), who found that teacher support and workplace motivation were important determinants in teachers' decisions to continue working in education.

Subtheme 1.2. Communication and Support

The role of effective communication and administrative support in shaping teachers' experiences within the school is important. Participant 2 stated, *"They provide clear and timely information regarding every activity in the school,"* highlighting the value of transparency and structured communication. Additionally, the participant shared, *"They actively support ongoing professional development for teachers,"* indicating that institutional support for professional growth contributes to teacher empowerment.

However, the participant also pointed out challenges, explaining, *"There are times they (school head and head teachers) are one-sided and just react without proof."* This reflects frustrations related to perceived inconsistencies in leadership decisions.

The way teachers perceive leadership, communication and fairness affects their levels of motivation. Feeling competent in their job duties with an established channel for clear communication and access to professional support increases teacher motivation; if experienced, otherwise, motivation declines. This is supported by Öqvist and Malmström (2025) indicating social support, leadership style, and communication from school administrators have a strong effect on teacher motivational behaviors.

Subtheme 1.3. Workplace Atmosphere and Motivation

Participant 16 provided insights into how workplace atmosphere influences teacher motivation and resilience. The participant stated, *"Finding joy in small achievements..."* *"Trying to stay motivated despite the challenges,"* highlighting how recognizing small successes helps teachers maintain a positive outlook and reflecting teachers' commitment to their work even when facing difficulties.

This implies that developing emotional resilience and achieving accomplishments will help teachers continue to be motivated in their profession. This is consistent with the study of Maas et al. (2022), identifying emotional support and social validation as key contributors to job satisfaction.

Theme 2. Cultural Subsystem

Subtheme 2.1. Positive Attitude

Participants emphasized that maintaining a positive attitude, is essential for sustaining a teaching career. Participant 1 explained, *"Hindi na bago ang biglaang pagbabago sa education system, kaya natutunan ko nang maging open-minded at mabilis mag-adjust"* (Sudden changes in the education system are no longer new, so I have learned to be open-minded and adjust quickly). This reflects the development of resilience as teachers adapt to continuous educational reforms. Similarly, Participant 3 stated, *"Pagiging open-minded sa mga pagbabago at paghahanap ng mga paraan para mas mapadali ang transition"* (Being open to changes and finding ways to ease the transition). This response highlights teachers' proactive efforts to manage change rather than simply responding to it.

The results indicate that teachers' perceptions about their positive attitude and adaptability affect how they develop their self-images and ultimately support or discourage them from staying at a job. According to Amanat et al. (2022), although many teachers experience an environmental situation that promotes retention, some teachers will also leave due to their own personal aspirations and wanting to achieve their goals.

Subtheme 2.2. Stress Management and Personal Balance

Participants also highlighted the importance of managing stress and maintaining work-life balance to sustain their commitment to teaching. Participant 5 shared, *"Hindi masyadong ini-stress ang sarili, go with the flow lang... May sideline rin, kaya may extra income para sa personal needs."* (I try not to stress myself too much-just go with the flow. I also have a sideline job for additional income.) This reflects strategies for maintaining emotional balance and financial stability. Participant 6 noted, *"Mahirap minsan pagsabayin, pero tinatry ko mag-manage ng oras nang maayos... Binibigyan ko ng oras ang sarili ko habang ginagampanan pa rin nang maayos ang trabaho."* (It is sometimes difficult to balance everything, but I try to manage my time well

while still doing my job properly.) Participant 9 emphasized setting boundaries between work and personal life, stating, *"Tinatapos ko ang mga gawain sa paaralan sa loob ng takdang oras upang hindi na ito maging pabigat sa aking personal na buhay."* (I finish school tasks during official hours so they do not affect my personal life.)

It can be concluded that the way teachers manage stress and balance between work and home depends on what they think others perceive about their ability to cope and be effective. When teachers believe they are respected for maintaining a healthy balance and well-being, they see themselves as competent, confident, and thus have a greater chance of remaining in the profession. According to Education Support (2021), flexible work arrangements significantly improve teachers' work-life balance and help retain staff; however, some schools have not yet embraced this form of teaching practice.

Conclusions

Teacher's perceptions of the school subsystems were found to be generally positive, with teachers rating the social subsystem as highest and the economic subsystem as lowest. Teachers also indicated that they were not planning on leaving the school in the near future. Both positive and negative experiences in these subsystems had a significant impact on a teacher's intention to remain. Supportive leadership, collegial relationships, and personal satisfaction were seen as contributing to retention; on the other hand, the presence of student misbehavior, a negative working environment, the feeling of perceived unfairness, and stress related to workload were seen as contributing to dissatisfaction. Teachers also identified the need for equitable workload, reduced paper work, professional development opportunities and performance-based incentives. Factors that were identified by teachers as contributing to long-term retention included having a positive working environment, feeling respected, having a sense of camaraderie, and having open communication.

It is recommended that through team-building activities, and addressing cultural concerns like workplace gossip, with a Positive Communication Workshop led by the Guidance Counselor, the school can enhance their social subsystem. They may work with the Parent-Teacher Association to assist teachers with economic needs by providing

scholarships for their children, and providing additional incentives to teachers who take on leadership role(s). Department Heads may quarterly offer Professional Learning and Wellness Sessions that are supportive of their teacher's collaboration, reflection and overall well-being following Department of Education (DepEd) Order No. 42, s. 2017 and No. 11, s. 2019. Likewise, the school may institutionalize a quarterly Teacher Support and Development Forum aligning to the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) and the Revised Performance Management System (RPMS) to provide support and mentorship to teachers, recognize teacher achievements, and monitor the equitable distribution of workload among teachers in compliance with DepEd Order No. 005, s. 2024, and the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers (RA 4670). Future researchers may teacher attrition and the economic and cultural influences affecting teacher retention.

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