

## Keeping the Fire Alive: Filipino Teachers' Motivations for Staying in the Profession

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### ABSTRACT

Teachers' motivation to stay in the profession is pivotal to making teachers effective conduits for students' future success. Studies demonstrate that educators play a crucial role in student achievement (e.g., Darling Hammond, 2000; Palardy and Rumberger, 2008; and Blazar and Kraft, 2017). In the Philippines, perceptions about the status of teachers and the teaching profession vary. While teaching is generally considered an honorable profession, it is also beset by woes, such as perceptions of inadequate salaries, and poor working conditions. Through in-depth interviews with 18 teachers from three major island groups in the Philippines and a survey accessed by 1,255 teachers, this study endeavored to answer the general question, "What motivates teachers to remain in the Philippine education system?" Amidst various challenges teachers face, the study found that the teachers' motivation to stay in the profession revolves around different intrinsic and extrinsic drivers of motivation. The factors within the intrinsic drivers are individual interest, commitment to the profession, and belief in divine providence, while the factors within the extrinsic drivers are economic considerations and enabling environment. Further, a factor, classified as both intrinsic and extrinsic, is the teaching-profession-related advantages. The voices of teachers in this study serve as impetuses for responsive and sustainable action for pre-service and in-service professional development, working environment, compensation, and benefits; hence, a set of policy recommendations was developed.

**Keywords:** Teachers, Motivation, Pre-service Training

### INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognized that teacher welfare and quality should be improved in promoting equitable access to education. According to the World Youth Report, adequately trained teachers aid in establishing crucial foundations in literacy and numeracy skills among children (UN, 2018). Furthermore, in framing the rights-based approach to education, the concepts of availability and accessibility do not only underscore the provision of adequate learning facilities and resources—governments and states should also be able to support appropriate training and education, including the institutionalization of necessary mechanisms to support teacher welfare (UNICEF, 2007; United Nations, 2016). It is amidst this backdrop that research on **Understanding Motivation among Teachers in the Philippines** (from here on referred to as Teacher Motivation Research) was developed to understand what motivates teachers to join and remain teaching in the Philippines, the results of which can hopefully inform future policies that improve their overall well-being and welfare.

Motivation is defined simply as “the driving force behind human action” (Schunk et al., 2008, p.4). Foundational theories on human behavior conclude that actions individuals take are influenced by various factors that may come from one’s own decision-making, influences from the environment and social contexts, and the response to or absence of incentives (Woolfolk, 2007; Schunk et al., 2008). More recent research paints a multidimensional picture of teacher motivation, explaining not only the choice to teach and the decision to stay but also the decline or absence of motivation. Current literature aptly terms this decline or lack of motivation as demotivation and has been seen to contribute to the decision to leave teaching altogether (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011). In addition, these factors that affect motivation may be described as either emanating from the self or intrinsic or influenced by external factors or extrinsic ones (Woolfolk, 2007).

Various factors influence teacher motivations in the Philippines. Though being a teacher is considered honorable, it is beset by woes, such as perceptions of inadequate salaries, poor working conditions, and challenging professional development (Cabato, 2019). Despite the implementation of policies, such as the Salary Standardization Law (SSL) that increased the salaries of government employees in the country, including public school teachers, and the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Law that further increased take-home pay, there is a continued impression that the salaries of teachers are still inadequate. In addition, there are reports of teachers amassing large amounts of debt from government and private lending institutions (PLI) (Mateo, 2017; Mercene, 2018). A study by the Philippine Institute of Development Studies (PIDS) (Hernando-Malipot, 2017) revealed that public school teachers were 50% more likely than their civil servant counterparts to take loans from PLIs and government agencies such as the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) and the PAG-IBIG Home Development Mutual Fund. This practice resulted in teachers bringing home pay lower than the mandated PhP 4,000 limit. In response, the Department of Education issued a policy ensuring teachers take at least PhP 5,000 of their salary. Likewise, the Department of Finance called on government and private lending institutions to provide easy-to-pay and low-interest refinancing programs for public school teachers (Department of Finance, 2017).

Aside from the issue of salary sufficiency, PIDS (David et al., 2019) brought to light concerns over the heavy workload of teachers. A regular full-time teacher must lend a maximum of six hours per day of classroom instruction under the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers. However, teachers also perform administrative and support tasks, ranging from student guidance to disaster response and school health, such as feeding, deworming, and immunizations. The teachers in the PIDS study expressed the desire to spend more time with their learners and focus on teaching. They recognized time as an important resource that is often inadequate given their heavy workload.

An article by Cabato (2019) highlighted issues in professional development. Teachers need to earn 45 units of continuing professional development (CPD) within three years. As a result, some teachers need to pay for training as division-led seminars are insufficient to reach the required CPD units. This dramatically affects their take-home pay. In addition, getting promoted to the next level is often an arduous process, with teachers at the lower levels needing to achieve requirements based on an intricate point system. There are eight levels between Teacher I, II and II. On the other hand, Head Teachers have six levels per position, while Master Teachers have four levels within each position.

Given this milieu of challenges, it is worthwhile to determine what keeps teachers from continuing in their service. Though many studies have investigated the Philippine working conditions of teachers (Bonior, 2019; David et al., 2019), including policies and processes that affect them, such as their deployment (Albert, 2012), professional development (Siena, 2019), performance-based

incentive system (Monje, 2019), little evidence has been provided on Filipino teachers' motivations. As such, from 2018 to 2020, SEAMEO INNOTECH conducted research on Filipino teachers' motivation in choosing, staying, and leaving the profession. This paper focused on teachers' motivation to stay in the profession, addressing the following questions: (1) what are teachers' motivations for remaining in the Philippine basic education system? and (2) what concrete recommendations could inform policy initiatives toward improving teacher motivation in the basic education system?

This paper describes the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that make teachers decide to stay in teaching, as well as the challenges they face in their profession. Several policy recommendations are also provided based on the findings of the study.

## METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a sequential exploratory mixed methods design. A maximum variation purposive sampling strategy was used to select teacher informants. Several categories were considered, such as the three major island groupings, school categories (i.e., public and private), contexts (i.e., teachers handling monograde, multigrade, alternative learning, and Madrasah classes), locales (i.e., urban, rural, and conflict areas), assigned grade levels, teaching positions, education backgrounds, and tenures. The teacher informants came from personal and professional contacts of the research team or were identified through referrals. To understand the context, experiences, and nuances of motivation among teachers in the Philippines, in-depth interviews were conducted with informants from regions belonging to the Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao Island groups. A total of 18 teachers were interviewed, seven males and 11 females. The median age of the respondents is 34, with a maximum of 55, while the median number of teaching years is 13 years, with a maximum of 32 years. A summary of the number of key informants per region is found in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Number of Teacher-Informants per Region*

	Region	No. of teachers
Luzon	• Northern Luzon (CAR)	10
	• Southern Luzon (CALABARZON and MIMAROPA)	
	• National Capital Region (NCR)	
Visayas	• Eastern Visayas (Region 8)	4
Mindanao	• Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)	4
Total		18

Among the categories of teachers interviewed were: Teacher I (4), Teacher III (4), Master Teacher (MT) I (3), Alternative Learning System/ Mobile teacher (1), Multi-grade teachers (2), private school teachers (4), and a Madrasah teacher (1).

Thematic analysis was employed in analyzing the qualitative data. Themes around motivation

surfaced based on a thorough analysis of the interview transcripts and informed by the existing literature on motivation. The interview responses were coded and grouped for similarity using NVivo, a research software for organizing and analyzing qualitative data. Based on the initial categories, the responses were again thoroughly reviewed, and the categories were further refined to develop themes on motivation.

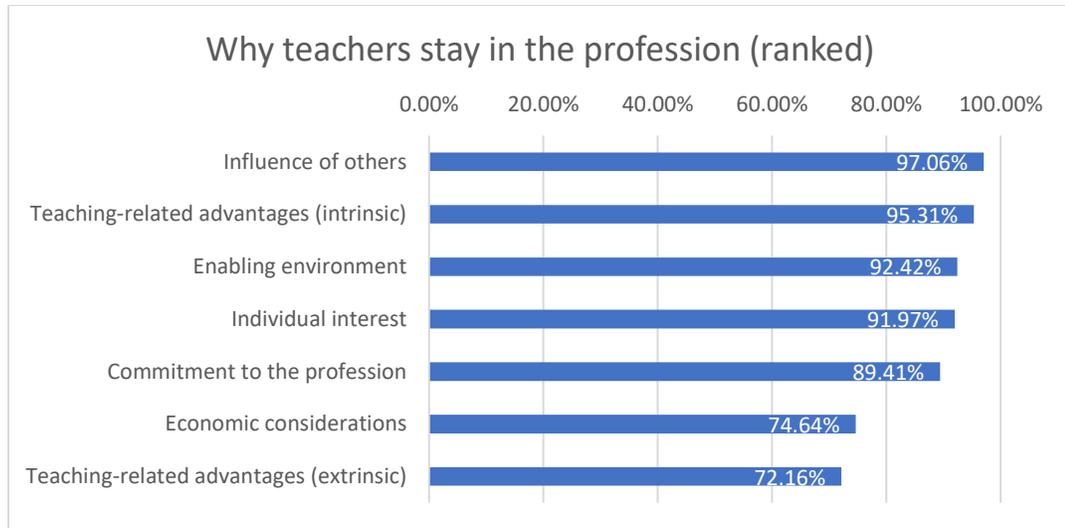
In addition, the Teacher Motivation Research also collected quantitative data, where teachers were randomly sampled from a dataset of public-school teachers provided by the Philippine Department of Education. The survey yielded 1,255 respondents from 65 schools across 14 of the 17 regions as of 28 November 2019. The survey collected demographic information, including public school teachers' conditions, experiences, and motivations for teaching—through a mixture of categorical and open-ended questions. The survey was pilot-tested and administered through Qualtrics, an online survey platform. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Statements that utilized the Likert scale were clustered around the themes that surfaced from the qualitative methods employed. The statements were grouped under themes. Frequency and percentage were likewise computed to surface top-ranked statements on teacher motivations.

Informed consents were acquired from the teacher-informants prior to the in-depth interviews. Courtesy protocols were followed to inform school administrators about the study and data collection activities. These, however, did not identify the teacher respondents. For the survey, responses were anonymized. Also, the research report was run through Urkund, a plagiarism detection software.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Why teachers keep on teaching: Motivations to stay in the profession**

Seven significant themes surfaced in the study regarding why teachers stay in the profession. In ranking the average positive responses (Strongly Agree and Agree), the results of the survey (see Figure 1) show that the influence of others (97.06%) has the highest rank in the reasons for why teachers stay, followed by intrinsic teaching-related advantages (95.31%), extrinsic enabling environment (92.42%), individual interest (91.97%), commitment to the profession (89.41%), economic considerations (74.64%), and lastly, teaching-related benefits (72.16%).



**Figure 1:** Ranking of Average Positive Responses for Teachers' Motivations to Stay in the Profession

### ***Influence of Others: God's Will (97.06%)***

The sole statement under the theme of influence of others in the motivations for teachers to stay in the profession is, "It is god's will that I continue to teach." Almost all respondents, or 97.06%, answered both Strongly Agree and Agree with this statement.

While this theme is not very prevalent in Western literature on motivation, this result is consistent with the quantitative and qualitative findings, cutting across the dimensions of joining, staying, and leaving the profession. Responses often show that teachers feel that it is God's will that they enter the profession, especially during difficult circumstances where they are forced to shift careers, as well as when they are looking for reasons to stay despite the hardships, and also when contemplating whether or not they are still fit to stay in an oftentimes demanding profession.

### ***Intrinsic Teaching-related Advantages: Meaning, Fulfillment, Passion (95.31%)***

Most respondents also answered teaching-related advantages as one of the reasons for continuing to teach, receiving 95.31% positive responses (Strongly Agree and Agree). Specifically, teachers continue to stay because they believe they have a vital role in improving the country's future, and they find meaning, fulfillment, and passion for teaching—nonmonetary rewards that they believe they could not find in any other profession.

While being a teacher is challenging, respondents consider these challenges positive and somehow motivating. The respondents also mention how they love being surrounded by students and see it as a reason for staying—some teachers even cite that they treat these children as their own. They see their students as an inspiration to hone and improve their craft.

The classroom also allows teachers to try out new ideas and techniques—to express their creativity and show their skills. For others, teaching is an opportunity to continuously learn, whether through attending seminars and training or taking further studies in the big city or abroad. The respect they receive as teachers also contributes to why they stay in the profession. The people they know value teaching as a high-status profession, contributing to their motivation to stay.

These findings are aligned with Howes and Goodman-Delahunty's (2015) study, wherein they identified fulfillment as a key reason for teachers staying in the profession. Teachers in Australia remain in their teaching career because they enjoy the work and feel it is "stimulating" and a job they can excel in. They also find meaning in what they do.

***Enabling Environment: Support Systems that Contribute to Decision to Stay (92.42%)***

Teachers responded that a generally enabling environment, consisting of support systems from colleagues, family, and friends, professional opportunities, and teaching as a venue of self-expression encouraged them to remain teaching despite its challenges.

Recognition from the school administration, support from supervisors and co-teachers, and students who love to learn all contribute to an enabling environment that encourages teachers to stay teaching. This finding aligns with McKenzie et al.'s work (2014, as cited in Howes and Goodman-Delahunty, 2015), which also saw the importance of positive interpersonal relationships with colleagues and students as reasons for staying in the profession. In addition, having the freedom to try new ideas and techniques, and having the space for opportunities to grow professionally and continuously learn, are likewise important reasons for remaining in the profession. Similarly, several studies emphasized the need to develop school cultures that foster collegial relationships among school actors and facilitate "communities of professional learning" that make the teaching environment a pleasurable one (Cochran-Smith et al., 2012; Lovett & Cameron, 2011; Ward, 2011, as cited in Howes and Goodman-Delahunty, 2015).

Further, Packard and Dereshiwsky (1990) also recognized the need to satisfy teachers' needs for professional growth and development. The interviews surfaced that teachers continue to teach, with the prospect of getting promoted or at least getting job reclassifications that would earn them higher pay and a wider sphere of influence. However, not all teachers share that they stay in teaching in order to climb the career ladder. Some value their influence within the four walls of the classroom, making a difference in the lives of one child at a time. It is clear, however, that the actors and environment surrounding teachers contribute to their motivation to stay.

***Individual Interest: Teaching is the Best Job for Me (91.97%)***

Interviews with teachers are often not without statements such as: "Teaching is the best job for me." "—the only job for me." "—the best fit for my skills." As one informant shared, teaching is a path that she would recommend others to take if they possessed three things: *hilig* (interest in teaching), *galing* (skill), and *kabuluhan* (finding meaning) in teaching. Teachers see teaching as their best job because they are interested in it and have the necessary skills to be good teachers. Some mentioned that they have always known they could be good teachers because they are *madaldal* (talkative) and have good interpersonal relationship skills. Teachers also find the profession to be meaningful—a job that allows them to serve a greater interest other than practical gains. As such, teachers shared how they don't see themselves in any profession other than teaching, sharing that they will likely stay as teachers until they retire.

Interest in teaching is recognized as a critical component of teacher motivation in Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2011) literature review, along with social contextual influences, temporal dimensions, and demotivating factors.

***Commitment to the Profession: Serving the Community through Teaching (89.41%)***

In a study looking into the motivation of language teachers, Dörnyei (1996) acknowledged teachers' commitment and enthusiasm as the most crucial factor in motivating learners. In a similar manner, teachers continue to teach because of their commitment to the profession. They are motivated to stay because they believe that their community needs teachers, and teaching is a way for them to give back to their community. Moreover, teachers are concerned about the future of their students and hope that the education they receive will propel them to success or even inspire them to become teachers like themselves.

One informant notably expressed how being a teacher holds power because of one's ability to shape the mindset of students, making them see the world and themselves through a different perspective. Working with students is an integral part of why teachers are intrinsically motivated to teach. Seeing their students graduate and succeed outside the four walls of the classroom is, for them, a source of contentment and gratification, knowing that they may not be rich financially, but they contribute to another's life in immeasurable ways.

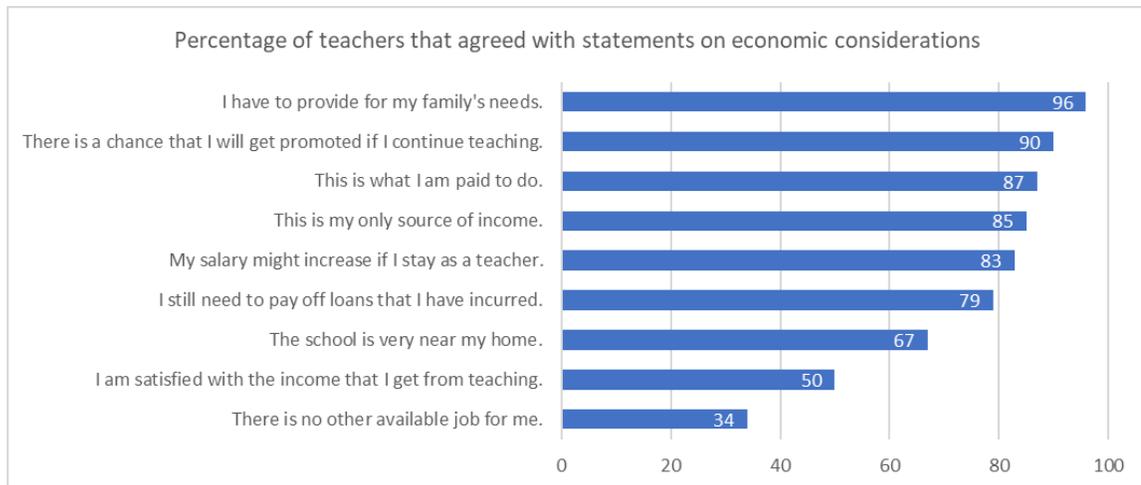
Some respondents get emotional when entertaining the idea of leaving their students behind. When grappling with their struggles as a teacher, thinking about their students gives them a sense of hope and purpose for staying in teaching. In fact, 44.26% of the teachers responded that they continue to stay because they are still training other teachers to replace them, showing their commitment to ensuring that the students and the school are not left behind without a teacher.

***Economic Considerations: Providing for my Family's Needs (74.64%)***

While meaning, fulfillment, and passion are some of the core reasons for staying in the profession, there is also a practical side to why they stay. Almost all of the respondents (96.35%) say that they stay in teaching because they need to provide for their families' needs, and this job is what they are paid to do (87.13%). The teachers see the profession as secure and permanent, especially in the context of being the primary providers in the family or as first-generation college graduates and professionals from their families. Moreover, some respondents find it inevitable and practical that they enter the line of work they trained for as an education graduate, while others see teaching as the only available profession that matches their skill sets and personal interests.

For most teachers, teaching is their only source of income (85.13%). However, half of the teachers are not satisfied with the income they receive from teaching (50.58%), while the other half are. Among the respondents, 78.74% accessed loans to augment their income and are still paying them off—stating this as a reason for continuing to stay in the profession. On the other hand, most teachers are hopeful and continue to teach because their salary might increase if they stay (83.03%), or they might get promoted if they continue to teach (90.12%). When asked to contemplate leaving or switching professions, only a few teachers answered that there are no other available jobs for them (33.86%).

Figure 2 presents the statements related to economic considerations from the highest to the lowest agreement ratings (i.e., Strongly Agree or Agree).



**Figure 2:** Percentage of Teacher Respondents who Strongly Agreed or Agreed with Statements on Economic Considerations

Practical consideration, such as salary and job stability, is a major theme in Howes and Goodman-Delahunty's research (2015), though less prioritized in the Australian setting after personal fulfillment. Han and Hongbiao (2016) theorized that these economic factors may be at the forefront in low and middle-income countries. This, however, seems not to be the case in the Philippine context, where other intrinsic factors are ranked higher in terms of teacher motivation.

#### ***Extrinsic Teaching-related Advantages: Finding Time (72.16%)***

The sole statement under the theme of extrinsic-related teaching advantages is, "The teaching schedule allows me to make time for other priorities in my life," to which most of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed (72.16%). While the majority of the teachers agree with this statement, narratives from the field also depict teachers who are struggling to manage the demands of the profession. For instance, while public school teachers, similar to their counterparts in government service, have Service Incentive Leaves (SILs), because of their workload and schedules, they find it difficult to take time off even when they are sick, have to attend to other important matters, or simply when they are tired and feel the need to rest. In addition, PIDS (David et al., 2019) pointed out that, aside from the teachers' time rendered in instruction, they perform other ancillary tasks related to administration, training, students' well-being and health, and various projects that significantly affect their workload.

In addition, while teachers are allowed and encouraged to pursue learning opportunities, finishing their Master's or Doctorate degrees becomes very daunting for many because of the heavy volume of teaching and administrative assignments, as well as responsibilities in the household that they usually prioritize. Hence, most of the postgraduate students interviewed have taken leaves from their coursework to fulfill their primary obligations as teachers and family members while constantly hoping for a reasonable workload that can allow them to focus on completing their academic requirements.

## Challenges Faced by Teachers in the Philippines

Despite being motivated to stay in the teaching profession, Filipino teachers encounter shared challenges. These include inadequate salaries, difficulty making ends meet, and heavy workloads. These predicaments push educators to consider greener pastures and continue to advocate for salary increases.

### *Trapped in a System of Inadequate Salaries*

Teachers interviewed often remark how their current salaries' inadequacy has triggered them to ponder leaving the profession—a theme constant in the narratives and the prominent body of work on teacher motivation and attrition. For example, Ortega-Dela Cruz (2016) identified pay and benefits as critical factors that explain teacher attrition, aside from school administration and policy, job security, interpersonal relations, work conditions, and work assignments. Likewise, salary is a motivating and demotivating factor in studies done by Aydin (2012) among English language teachers and Kim (2013) among tertiary teachers in Cambodia. Podolsky et al. (2016) also pointed out that teachers consider higher-paying jobs outside of their school, district, or profession. In the same report, a study from the Center for American Progress (CAP) revealed that the salary of teachers in the United States cannot support the needs of a middle-class family. As such, teachers had to engage in additional jobs for subsistence.

Public school teachers deem their salaries inadequate, especially with the rising cost of living brought about by inflation. Those in Teacher I positions, for example, earn PhP 21,000.00, which is usually allocated for social services deductions and everyday expenses, such as food, household bills, and their children's education. It is also common for many teachers to help extended family members during emergencies. Because of their low salaries, many note how they incur loans out of need, or else they could not even afford to cover the basics.

Also common with the narratives are teachers investing in businesses aside from their teaching work to keep up with their families' basic expenditures, such as farming, poultry, fishing, or setting up a lending business. Some have noted that these side businesses keep them surviving, especially those with several deductions from loans incurred. This situation, however, is not isolated, with some research depicting that low salaries often lead teachers to engage in part-time work, contributing to their low motivation (Menyhart, 2008; Iline, 2013; Kim, 2013; Podolsky et al., 2016). While their expenses are only getting more unaffordable, career promotion, which teachers consider as a ticket to self-growth and a higher salary, becomes even more difficult to attain. Given the lack of time and finances to accomplish school requirements for finishing their postgraduate degrees, some have set aside these plans to prioritize immediate basic needs. Hence, many teachers expressed how "*mag reretire na lang yata akong Teacher I*" ("I'll probably retire just as a Teacher I"), expecting that given the circumstances, they will not be surprised to retire as a Teacher I.

### *Greener Pastures*

While they enjoy the practical benefits they derive from teaching, such as summer vacation leaves and working near their homes, aspects of the profession, such as salary, make it less practical for them in the long term. In the interviews, the teachers shared how much of a struggle it is to make ends meet to support their families—making them explore the possibility of going overseas to seek greener pastures. Hence, teaching is seen as practical in the short term, but in the long run, sustaining teaching as their only source of income is challenging, especially with the rising cost of living, even

in rural areas. Hence, aside from teaching full-time, some teachers also take on small businesses such as farming, managing a sari-sari store, or renting out a space to supplement their income.

In the narratives, some private school teachers aspire to migrate to public schools for the promise of better salaries and more regular benefits. Reports show that wages for private school teachers equivalent in rank to public school Teachers I-III are significantly less, ranging from PHP 8,000.00 to 13,135. This is much lower than public school teachers' salaries in 2012, which ranged from PhP 18,000 to 21,000 (DBM, 2015; Mateo, 2018; Montemayor, 2018). Reports show that this disparity in pay has led to the migration of teachers from private to public schools and the closing of small private schools in cities and provinces in the Philippines (Alcober, 2015; Mateo, 2018; Hernando-Malipot, 2018). Groups lobbying for the welfare of private school teachers, such as the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP), Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), and Coordinating Council of Private Educational Associations (COCOPEA), have called for the salary increase of teachers working in private educational institutions, noting that public and private school teachers do not differ in function when it comes to providing education for learners in the Philippines. Apart from this perceived inequality between the salaries of public and private school teachers, interviews with teachers were able to surface an underlying problem faced by public school teachers – the inadequacy of their existing salaries that often pushes them into debt to make ends meet.

### ***Making Ends Meet***

Teachers interviewed in public and private schools have experienced loaning their automated teller machine (ATM) cards, especially during emergencies when they need to come up with cash immediately. The ATM *Sangla* (ATM loaning), as the teacher informants call it, is an informal lending business owned by an individual or group, which usually operates locally to cater to clients within the community. In exchange for loaning a lump sum of cash, teachers would give their ATM cards, including access to their personal identification numbers (PINs), and the operator would manually deduct their monthly payment. Every month, the teachers would collect from the operator the net remainder from their accounts in cash, if there is any. One teacher recounted how she “had no choice” but to loan her ATM card when her mother was diagnosed with a terminal disease because she had no one else to go to. Her salary was just exact, sometimes insufficient, to provide for the basic needs of her own immediate family, much more save for emergencies. It is to be noted that because of its informal nature, these private lenders seek no requirements, making it easier and faster for them to provide loans.

Teacher indebtedness is a phenomenon increasingly being documented by media and research (Mercene, 2018; Mateo, 2017). For instance, a study by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) (Hernando-Malipot, 2017) found that public school teachers tend to borrow 50% more compared to government employee counterparts through private lending institutions (PLIs), the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS), and the Pag-IBIG Home Development Mutual Fund. In fact, a report by the GSIS reveals that the Department of Education employees have a high default rate of almost 40% on GSIS loans (DOF, 2017). While the DepEd (2018) has issued Department Order No. 5 series of 2018 implementing a cap of PhP 5,000 for the net take-home pay for DepEd personnel, some teachers are still receiving even below this amount because of additional deductions from unregulated loans through the ATM *Sangla*.

In addition, several studies have investigated teachers' financial literacy. In one of the first studies on the topic, Imelda et al. (2017) administered the Financial Literacy Survey of Lusardi and

Mitchell among 1,924 randomly selected pre-service and in-service teachers nationwide. Their research uncovered that both groups of educators have low basic and low sophisticated financial literacy, which hinders them from correctly assessing and availing financial products and instruments. However, Tilan and Cabal's research (2021) suggests otherwise. Using a Likert scale-type survey questionnaire among 90 teachers in Central Luzon, teachers were classified as "literate" in all financial literacy indicators. Similarly, Jabar and Delayco's research (2021) revealed that teachers in selected public schools in Metro Manila have low levels of impulse buying. They presented a model in which two factors - possession of financial instruments and utilization of financial records and record-keeping - can influence impulse buying. Furthermore, Casingal and Ancho (2022) suggested the need for financial literacy programs for teachers due to many educators struggling with economic issues, leading them to tighten their belts and avail of informal loans, further exacerbating their debt burdens.

### *The Promise of Future Salary Increases*

Salary inadequacy is a demotivating factor in several studies (Aydin, 2012; Iline, 2013; Kim, 2013), causing educators to engage in sideline jobs to supplement their income. This statement is partially applicable in the Philippine scenario. Teachers who participated in the survey in this study have differing views on salary. About half (51%) felt they were rightly compensated given their workload, while less than half (44%) were satisfied with their income. Despite this, 56% of teacher respondents were inclined to transfer to non-teaching jobs if offered higher salaries, and 47% also entertained thoughts of finding jobs abroad. These findings indicate that salary concerns are worth looking into.

Salary increases for public school teachers are slowly being implemented through Executive Order No. 76 (2019), which amends Executive Order No. 201 series of 2016, a measure aimed at resolving the funding requirement for releasing the fourth tranche of the compensation adjustment of government personnel, including teachers. Through the salary adjustment scheme, teachers' salaries have increased by a minimum of 12% with the passage of the 2019 General Appropriations Act (GAA) (DBM, 2019). Public school teachers' take-home pay is also expected to increase significantly since the passage of the 2017 Tax Reform and Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Law, especially for those receiving annual salaries below PhP 250,000.00, who are exempt from paying taxes (DBM, 2018).

While former President Rodrigo Duterte was very vocal about his support for improving the condition and welfare of teachers, especially with his pronouncement during the State of the Nation Address in 2019, there is no final statement made by the budget department regarding the matter (DBM 2018; Montemayor, 2018; PCOO, 2019). In addition, while President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. promised to increase public school teachers' salaries during his election campaign, pay raises are excluded from the 2023 government budget (Chi, 2023; Bañaga, 2022).

Despite the low salaries of teachers in the Philippines, this somehow does not reflect concretely in the number of teachers leaving the profession—an interesting observation that the national survey of teachers revealed wherein only 18% of teachers had actually applied for non-teaching positions within the past twelve months. In the Philippines, the latest teacher attrition data for the primary level (2019) is considered low, with females at 4.40% and males at 1.44%, and high attrition is defined as above 5% (UIS, 2023). Under the Sustainable Development Goal indicator 4.c.6, teacher attrition is defined as the "Percentage of teachers at a given level of education leaving the profession in a given school year" (UNESCO, n.d.). According to UNESCO, a high attrition

value indicates high levels of teacher turnover that can be disruptive to student learning. Attrition rates of 5% and below (such as that of the Philippines) indicate 30-40 years teaching range, while attrition rates above 10% show that the average teaching career lasts only ten years. While more data is needed to describe teacher attrition in the country, this snapshot can supplement the themes that surfaced in this qualitative portion of the study on how teachers still value the practicality of staying to provide for their families even in the face of financial challenges.

Indeed, teachers' remuneration packages should be able to reflect their status in society. VSO stresses the importance of salaries reflecting the teacher's value, noting that "teaching is a profession and teachers' remuneration packages must reflect their proper status and contribution to society" (2002, p. 32). Hence, these increases are welcome upgrades for teachers' salaries in the years to come.

### ***Heavy Workload***

According to research conducted by PIDS (David et al., 2019), teachers tend to be overworked because of the plethora of teaching and administrative tasks they are required to accomplish within the school year. Moreover, the administrative support provided for the schools is not enough to lighten their load, hence keeping them from devoting their attention to teaching. This phenomenon, experienced throughout the country, creates considerable concern for the quality of education learners receive. The same is true for some of the narratives of the teachers interviewed, more notably the multi-grade teachers. Multi-grade teachers recount how demanding it can be when handling multiple grade levels, especially when administrative and teaching deadlines coincide. They recount not having free hours in the day since their lunch breaks would be used to finish their deadlines. Hence, they need to be resourceful and manage their time well to complete all their tasks. One teacher recalls how she needs to deal with Kinder and Grade 1 students in one class and another separate class for Grade 2 students. For her, the pressure is too much to bear at times because she knows there is a need to give them unique attention in their formative years.

Heavy workload also surfaced from the interviews with teachers from conflict areas. One teacher expressed how she used to teach 80 students in a monograde class. She recalls how their classroom was not yet fully constructed during that time, with the flooring uncemented so that some of the children had to sit on fresh ground because of the lack of chairs. The teacher explained that when it rains, the children get covered in mud ("*nag ka-klase po kami sa putikan*"; "we hold classes in the mud"). But now, she expresses how her workload of 50 students is more manageable and better than her previous load of 80 students. In Philippine primary and secondary education, current student-teacher ratio is higher compared to the world average, with public school teachers handling 1-2 more pupils than the world average—25.19 Philippine versus 23.44 world average; while in the secondary level, teachers handle around 4-5 more pupils than the world average—24.64 Philippine versus 17.00 world average (UIS 2023; World Bank, 2023a; World Bank, 2023b).

## CONCLUSION

While teachers in the Philippines are motivated by various factors to stay in the profession, such as the influence of others, intrinsic rewards, and an enabling environment, they also face significant challenges, primarily related to inadequate salaries, financial pressures, and heavy workloads. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring the well-being and retention of teachers and providing quality education for students. Efforts to improve salary structures, provide better support systems, and create opportunities for professional growth are essential to attract and retain competent educators in the Philippines.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following policy recommendations on pre-service and in-service professional development, working environment, compensation, and benefits are suggested based on the findings of the study:

- Ensure that Teacher Education Institutions, pre-service and in-service training institutions continuously review and update teacher training curricula to ascertain teacher readiness to face the demands of the teaching profession and the evolving education landscape. Some possible areas could involve understanding and adapting strategies to address learners' diverse contexts and demographic characteristics; mental health awareness and management, both for their students and themselves; classroom management/workload management tools; digital literacy tools and resources; distance and other remote learning modalities; life skills such as financial literacy and financial management; and socio-emotional skills.
- Institute school-based systems to affirm and recognize teachers' contributions, such as career progression initiatives and options for fast-tracking advancements.
- Explore support mechanisms for teaching (e.g., tapping learner partners such as parents, community volunteers, para teachers, teacher-aides, and other administrative personnel) to allow teachers to focus more on their teaching activities than on ancillary tasks.
- Consider increasing the budgetary support maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) and seeking other funding sources to more adequately finance teaching and learning resources so that teachers do not have to use their money to pay for teaching and learning facilities and activities.
- Continue to review and examine sustainable options to enhance teachers' salaries and benefit schemes that acknowledge teachers' work and value in society.
- Explore sustainable options to fund benefits for teachers' families, such as family health cards, education support for children, and provision of childcare services.
- Explore ways to provide non-monetary incentives that recognize the importance of families in teachers' lives, such as by allowing teachers to take leaves of absence when there are significant family milestones.
- Continue to partner with the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS), financial institutions, and teachers' associations to explore mechanisms for rationalizing, restructuring, and/or reducing teachers' loan burdens, facilitating more favorable loan conditions/payment schedules and loan interest rates.
- Continue to partner with relevant institutions that can provide teachers with guidance and advice on personal financial management.

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