

Making Ends Meet: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Financial Well-Being of Public School Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Financial well-being plays an important role in the personal and professional lives of teachers, yet many public-school teachers face financial pressures while striving to meet personal and family responsibilities. This study explored the lived experiences on the financial well-being of public-school teachers in one municipality in Misamis Occidental. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to understand the essence of teachers' financial experiences. Twelve public-school teachers from elementary and secondary schools in the district of Lopez Jaena, Division of Misamis Occidental, who were purposively chosen participated in the study. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews grounded in Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological framework. The interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Moustakas' phenomenological method of data analysis. NVivo software was used to assist in organizing and identifying patterns in the participants' responses. Five major themes emerged from the analysis: Shaping Present Financial Well-Being Through Past Experiences; Experiencing Financial Well-Being Across Household, Workplace, and Community Contexts; Experiencing the Embodied Effects of Financial Stress and Stability; Managing Financial Responsibilities Through Relational Influences and Balancing Financial Survival with Aspirations for Stability. The findings indicated that teachers' financial well-being is shaped by past financial decisions, environmental contexts, relational influences, and material realities. The administration may strengthen financial literacy programs, financial wellness initiatives, and institutional support systems to help teachers improve financial stability and overall well-being.

Keywords: Financial Literacy, Financial Stress, Financial Well-Being, Stability, Survival

INTRODUCTION

Public school teachers play a vital role in shaping the intellectual, social, and emotional development of learners across diverse communities (Martinez & Gomez, 2024). They work in environments that often require them to handle large class sizes, limited resources, and the varied learning needs of students. Despite these challenges, teachers remain committed to delivering quality education and nurturing positive learning outcomes (Van Pham, 2024). Their profession demands patience, creativity, and adaptability as they balance instructional duties with administrative responsibilities. As frontline agents of education, public school teachers serve as key pillars in building informed, skilled, and responsible future citizens. Moreover, their dedication and resilience often extend beyond the classroom, influencing community development and inspiring lifelong learning among their students (Rivera et al., 2024).

In the Philippines, public school teachers carry a particularly heavy burden due to systemic challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching materials, and growing administrative workloads (Tarraya, 2023). Many teachers extend their work beyond regular school hours to prepare lessons, accomplish reports, and support school activities. Although they receive various allowances, the financial demands of daily life often exceed their regular salaries, especially for those supporting extended families or managing debts (Tagapulot, 2024). The cultural expectation for Filipino teachers to contribute to community events and family obligations further adds to their financial strain. Consequently, their professional duties are intertwined with complex economic realities that influence their overall well-being (Casingal & Ancho, 2022).

The research by (Borres, 2023) consistently documents the financial challenges faced by public school teachers, particularly regarding debt, budgeting, and coping strategies. The study by (Leomar et al., 2022) also revealed that teachers frequently resort to loans from government agencies, cooperatives, or informal lenders to meet household expenses. The pressure of loan payments, coupled with modest salary increments, affects their ability to save and achieve financial security. Many teachers also engage in supplementary income activities such as tutoring, selling goods, or participating in community programs to augment their earnings (Lumapenet & Agarcio, 2025). These lived realities reflect the complex economic landscape that shapes their day-to-day financial well-being.

International researches on teachers' lived experiences highlights the interplay between financial pressures and professional responsibilities. Studies in countries such as the United States, India, and South Africa reveal that many teachers struggle with low wages relative to rising living costs (Ogujiuba et al., 2024). These financial limitations often affect their motivation, job satisfaction, and ability to access resources needed for effective teaching. Carranza & McKenzie (2024) have also noted that financial well-being influences teachers' mental health, work performance, and long-term career stability. These global findings underscore that financial strain among teachers is not an isolated phenomenon but a widespread concern affecting educational systems worldwide.

Empirical literature on financial well-being highlights that economic stress significantly influences teachers' emotional resilience, work-life balance, and social participation (Wei et al., 2025). A study by Khawda (2023) showed that financial strain often leads to anxiety, reduced productivity, and a sense of being overwhelmed by competing personal and professional demands. Teachers describe feeling pressured to make ends meet despite their commitment to their profession and students. At the same time, research emphasizes the important role of financial literacy and personal financial management in improving their financial stability. These narratives reveal a rich tapestry of experiences that illustrate how teachers navigate economic challenges while sustaining their passion for teaching.

While both local and international literature provide valuable insights into teachers' financial realities, there remains a need for a deeper understanding of how public school teachers personally interpret and make meaning of their financial situations. Existing studies often focus on quantitative indicators such as income levels, debt ratios, and expenditure patterns, leaving limited space for teachers' subjective experiences. A phenomenological approach allows researchers to explore the emotions, perceptions, and coping strategies that shape their daily financial journeys. By capturing their lived experiences, this study aims to illuminate the personal and contextual factors influencing their financial well-being. Ultimately, the research seeks to contribute to discussions on teacher welfare and inform policies that support their economic and professional sustainability.

This study holds significant value for multiple stakeholders, particularly in understanding the financial realities of public school teachers. By exploring their lived experiences, the research provides insights into the challenges and coping mechanisms that affect their economic well-being, job performance, and overall quality of life. The findings can inform school administrators and policymakers in designing programs, policies, and support systems that address teachers' financial needs and promote their welfare. Additionally, the study contributes to the academic discourse on teacher well-being, offering qualitative evidence that complements existing quantitative research. Ultimately, it empowers teachers by giving voice to their experiences, fostering awareness, and guiding interventions that help them achieve financial stability and professional fulfillment.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was anchored on three theories, namely: Financial Knowledge and Behavior Theory (OECD, 2015), Personal Financial Management Theory (Dave Ramsey, 2023), and Life Cycle Hypothesis (Modigliani & Brumberg, 1954)

The Financial Knowledge and Behavior Theory (OECD, 2015), emphasizes that financial literacy involves a combination of awareness, knowledge, skills, attitude, and behavior necessary to make sound financial decisions (Nogueira et al., 2025). It asserts that individuals with higher financial literacy are better equipped to budget, save, invest, and manage debt effectively. For teachers, understanding financial concepts such as interest rates,

inflation, and savings directly influences how they manage limited income sources (Özdemir, 2022). The theory guides the study in identifying how teachers' financial knowledge and decision-making skills contribute to their overall financial stability. Thus, it anchors the variable financial literacy as a critical foundation for achieving sustainable economic well-being (Shi et al., 2025).

In this study, the Financial Knowledge and Behavior Theory was used to examine how the teachers' financial understanding translates into practical behaviors that affect their well-being. It served as the basis for assessing whether knowledge of financial concepts is linked to their ability to make informed financial choices. By applying this theory, the study determined the degree to which financial literacy influences decision-making on savings, investments, and debt management. For instance, teachers with higher financial literacy are expected to display more responsible and goal-oriented financial behaviors. This helps establish the relationship between awareness and behavior in improving economic outcomes.

Recent studies affirm the link between financial knowledge, attitudes and behaviors, as described by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Financial Knowledge and Behaviour Theory (2015). Cris S. Saranza et al. (2022) found that teachers in Surigao del Norte displayed distinct savings, borrowing, investment and retirement-planning literacy levels, with higher knowledge scores correlating with better planned financial behavior. In a 2024 study by Variacion et al., among teachers in the Opol East District, the pillars of financial literacy (knowledge, attitude, behavior/practice) were significantly inter-related: those with higher knowledge and positive attitudes tended to display stronger financial practices. Meanwhile, Andallon & Pedroso (2025) found a significant positive correlation between financial literacy and financial well-being among teachers in a private sectarian school, further reinforcing that knowledge alone is not enough, it must translate into action. Together, these studies underscore that financial literacy, encompassing awareness, knowledge, attitude and behavior, serves as a foundational determinant of sound financial decision-making among teachers, thereby supporting the theory's role in anchoring the financial-literacy variable in the present study.

The Personal Financial Management Theory by Dave Ramsey (2023) emphasizes intentional money management through budgeting, debt elimination, saving, and responsible spending (Jessee, 2025). It highlights behavioral control and disciplined decision-making as key to achieving financial freedom and long-term stability (Laephuang, 2025). Applying this to teachers, effective financial management practices, such as systematic budgeting and prudent use of resources, reflect not just habits but conscious strategies to attain financial security. This framework helps the study analyze how the teachers' practical management of income and expenses affects their overall financial health. Hence, it supports the management practices variable by explaining how structured financial behavior leads to greater stability.

In this study, the Personal Financial Management Theory was applied to assess how public school teachers plan, allocate, and control their financial resources. It guided the analysis of how budgeting, saving, and spending habits influence their economic well-being. The theory was also used to determine how self-discipline and financial planning contribute to teachers' financial stability, despite limited income levels. It provided a behavioral foundation for understanding how teachers manage their earnings in alignment with their priorities. By linking theory to practice, the study evaluated how financial management decisions directly affect financial satisfaction and security.

Recent empirical work supports the behavioral discipline emphasis of Ramsey's Personal Financial Management framework when applied to teachers. Galapon and Bool (2022) found that teachers' financial behavior, more than knowledge alone, significantly predicted their financial well-being among higher-education personnel in Region 1, Philippines. Zerna (2024) similarly reported that teachers' financial skills and practical money-management practices (including systematic budgeting and emergency savings) were associated with higher levels of perceived financial security in a descriptive-correlational study in Siquijor. Case studies of money-management practices in Cebu and survey research in Iloilo likewise document that disciplined routines of expense tracking, saving, and debt control are the most consistent predictors of financial stability among public school teachers, even where investment activity remains low (Borres, 2023). Together these recent studies show that structured, intentional financial behaviors, the core of Ramsey's recommendations, more strongly explain

teachers' financial resilience than income level alone, thereby justifying the use of Ramsey's behavioral discipline lens to frame the study's management-practices variable.

The Life-Cycle Hypothesis (LCH) by Modigliani & Brumberg (1954) proposes that individuals plan consumption and saving over their entire lifetime so as to smooth consumption despite predictable changes in income at different life stages (Nikalje, 2022). People typically borrow or dissave when young, accumulate savings during peak earning years, and decumulate in retirement to maintain a relatively stable standard of living. The model treats lifetime resources (expected lifetime income plus initial wealth) as the budget constraint that guides intertemporal consumption choices (Ayka & Wsu, 2024). LCH assumes forward-looking, rational agents who form expectations about future income and plan accordingly, although empirical tests often reveal deviations from full foresight. The hypothesis has been highly influential both in microeconomic studies of household behavior and in macroeconomic models of aggregate saving. Extensions and critiques of the LCH examine liquidity constraints, uncertainty, behavioral biases, and institutional factors that alter the simple smoothing prediction (Muralidhar, 2024).

Applied to this study, the LCH provided a framework for understanding how teachers' lifetime earnings profiles and saving habits influence their present economic well-being: those who plan and save in mid-career can better smooth consumption and face fewer financial shocks later (Vahi & Kumar, 2025). Financial literacy acts as an enabler of the LCH mechanism because better financial knowledge improves the accuracy of lifetime income expectations and the effectiveness of saving and borrowing decisions (ArockiaDass & Nithya, 2025). Likewise, sound financial management practices (budgeting, emergency funds, debt control) reduce the distortions from liquidity constraints and behavioral biases that otherwise break the model's smoothing predictions. The study therefore tested whether higher financial literacy and stronger management practices are associated with patterns of saving and asset accumulation in ways predicted by LCH, and whether those patterns translate into higher measured economic well-being. It is also useful to consider heterogeneity (age cohorts, tenure, family responsibilities) since LCH predicts different saving/consumption stages across the life cycle. Finally, institutional features of teachers' employment (pension rules, salary schedules, access to credit) will condition how closely actual behavior follows LCH predictions (Ogonji, 2024).

More recent literature continues to apply the LCH to populations with structured salary systems, showing that economic well-being is strongly influenced by how individuals allocate resources across their career stages, Conroy & Morton (2024) found that saving behaviors across life stages are shaped not only by income but also by behavioral factors such as self-control and mental accounting, which influence how employees apply financial management strategies. A 2025 analysis of public school teachers who actively plan for long-term needs such as retirement, children's education, or debt reduction, display life-cycle saving patterns that contribute to stronger perceived economic well-being (D'agnese, 2023). These results are relevant for teachers, who often rely heavily on pensions and structured pay scales, making long-term financial planning essential for avoiding income shortfalls in later life stages. Studies also indicate that financial management practices, such as systematic saving and debt regulation, mediate the relationship between income stability and life-cycle financial outcomes (Baguio & Nemino, 2025). In the context of public school teachers, these mechanisms show how practical financial behaviors translate LCH principles into real improvements in economic well-being.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The following were the themes derived from the study:

Shaping Present Financial Well-Being Through Past Experiences: Past financial experiences play a critical role in shaping individuals' current financial well-being, as they influence attitudes, habits, and decision-making patterns over time. According to Fan and Chatterjee (2021), early financial socialization significantly affects individuals' financial literacy and behavior in adulthood. Similarly, Friedline et al. (2021) found that prior exposure to financial stress or stability shapes long-term financial resilience and coping mechanisms. Individuals who experienced financial instability in the past may develop cautious financial strategies or maladaptive behaviors such as avoidance, whereas those exposed to positive financial modeling demonstrate stronger planning and budgeting practices. Furthermore, Serido et al. (2022) emphasized that parental financial teaching

and early experiences contribute to financial confidence and well-being later in life. Supporting this, Xiao and Porto (2022) highlighted that financial education and past experiences influence present financial satisfaction through behavioral and capability pathways.

Experiencing Financial Well-Being Across Household, Workplace, and Community Contexts: Financial well-being is shaped by multiple social contexts, including the household, workplace, and community. Within households, shared financial responsibilities and decision-making dynamics influence perceived financial security, as emphasized by Netemeyer et al. (2021), who linked financial perceptions to overall well-being. In the workplace, compensation, job stability, and financial benefits significantly affect employees' financial satisfaction and productivity, while broader community factors such as access to financial services and social support further shape financial outcomes.

Brüggen et al. (2021) conceptualized financial well-being as a multidimensional construct influenced by both individual and environmental factors. Moreover, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (2022) highlighted that financial well-being depends on one's ability to meet current obligations while feeling secure about the future. Supporting this ecological perspective, Salignac et al. (2022) argued that financial well-being must be understood across interconnected systems, including family, organizational, and societal levels.

Experiencing the Embodied Effects of Financial Stress and Stability: Financial well-being is deeply embodied through individuals' physical, emotional, and psychological experiences. French et al. (2021) noted that financial knowledge and stability contribute to improved psychological well-being, while financial stress is associated with negative emotional outcomes. In particular, Sweet et al. (2021) found that financial strain, especially debt, is linked to anxiety, depression, and poorer physical health.

This is further supported by Dunn and Mirzaie (2022), who explained that chronic financial stress triggers physiological stress responses that impair cognitive functioning and decision-making. Additionally, Butterworth et al. (2022) demonstrated that financial hardship is strongly associated with mental health issues over time. Conversely, financial stability promotes a sense of control, security, and life satisfaction, highlighting the holistic and embodied nature of financial well-being.

Managing Financial Responsibilities Through Relational Influences: Financial management is inherently relational, as individuals' financial behaviors are shaped by interactions with family members, peers, and social networks. Gudmunson and Danes (2021) emphasized that family financial socialization plays a central role in shaping financial attitudes and behaviors across the lifespan. Similarly, Xiao and O'Neill (2021) highlighted that financial capability is influenced by both individual knowledge and social interactions.

Household dynamics, including spousal communication and shared financial goals, significantly affect financial practices such as budgeting and saving. Furthermore, Kim et al. (2022) noted that family decision-making processes and financial discussions contribute to better financial outcomes. Social influences also extend beyond the household, as Li et al. (2023) found that peer behaviors and social comparisons can shape spending patterns and financial decisions, sometimes leading to financial strain.

Balancing Financial Survival with Aspirations for Stability. Individuals often face the challenge of balancing immediate financial needs with long-term aspirations for stability. Mullainathan and Shafir (2021) explained that scarcity limits cognitive bandwidth, making it difficult for individuals to focus on future-oriented financial planning. In line with this, Lusardi (2022) emphasized that limited financial literacy further constrains individuals' ability to make informed financial decisions. For many, especially in low- to middle-income contexts, financial choices prioritize basic survival needs such as food, housing, and debt repayment. However, Collins and Urban (2022) highlighted that financial capability programs can help individuals gradually build assets and improve long-term stability. Additionally, the World Bank (2022) stressed the importance of financial inclusion and access to resources in enabling individuals to transition from short-term survival to sustainable financial well-being.

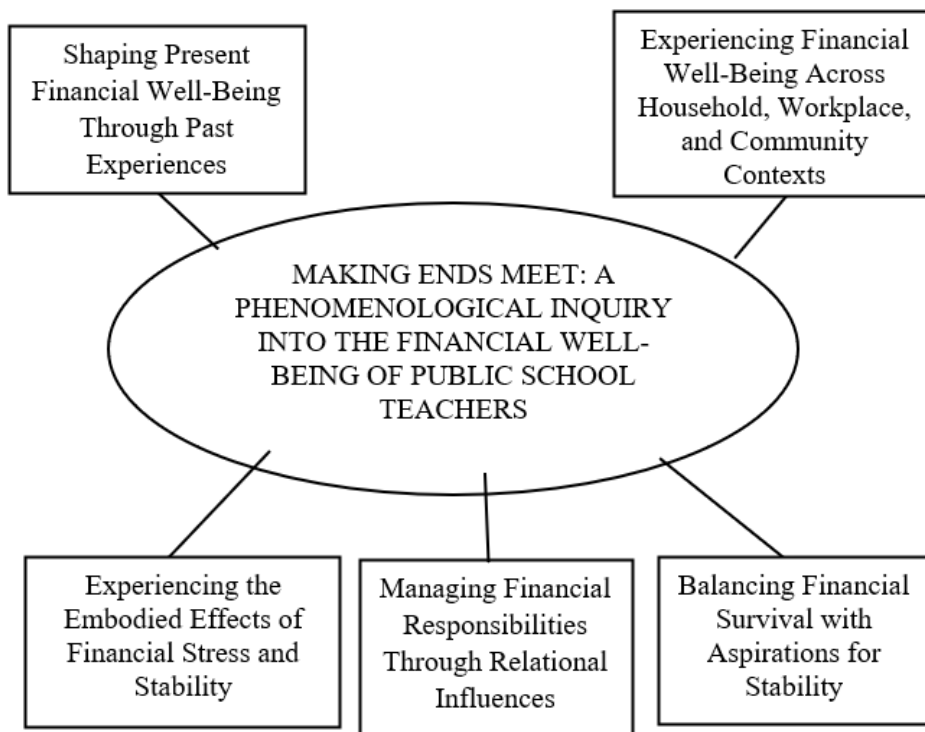


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Study

Statement of the Problem

This study explored the financial well-being of the public-school teachers in one of the is Misamis Occidental.

Specifically, this qualitative study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers describe the influence of past financial experiences and decisions on their present financial well-being?
2. How do teachers experience their financial well-being within the spaces they live and work in, such as their homes, schools, communities, or financial institutions?
3. How do financial pressures or stability manifest physically or emotionally in teachers' day-to-day lives?
4. How do relationships with family, colleagues, students, and community members influence teachers' financial well-being?
5. How do teachers experience and manage the material aspects of financial life, expenses, debt, resources, and possessions, and what meanings do they attach to them?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design

This qualitative study employed phenomenological research design to explore how public school teachers make sense of and navigate their financial well-being as they strive to “make ends meet.” Transcendental phenomenology focuses on understanding the essence of lived experiences by allowing participants to describe their reality in their own words. In this design, the researcher sought to uncover both what teachers experience (textural descriptions) and how they experience these financial realities (structural descriptions). Through this process, the study arrived at the shared essence of teachers' financial challenges, strategies, perceptions, and coping mechanisms. As Creswell (2009) notes, phenomenology is appropriate when the goal is to explore the common meaning of experiences among individuals who have lived through the same phenomenon, in this case,

the financial struggles and decisions that shape teachers' everyday lives. Patton (1990) further emphasizes that phenomenological inquiry uncovers the underlying significance across variations of individual experiences.

This approach is appropriate because the study sought an in-depth understanding of how public school teachers navigate budgeting, debt, obligations, resource constraints, and financial pressures while fulfilling both personal and professional responsibilities. By capturing their reflections, interpretations, and meaning-making processes, the study provides a rich account of how teachers "make ends meet" amid persistent financial demands and limited economic resources.

Setting

The study took place in one of the municipalities located in Misamis Occidental, a province in Northern Mindanao, Philippines. This was conducted in all public schools within the Division of Misamis Occidental, under the supervision of the Department of Education (DepEd). The division covers both urban and rural areas, providing a diverse context for understanding the financial well-being of public-school teachers. This area was selected because it hosts a considerable number of public-school teachers both in elementary and secondary that contribute significantly to the financial well-being of teachers yet often face financial and operational challenges. By situating the research in this environment, the study captured authentic narratives of teachers' financial struggles, coping strategies and aspirations.

Participants

The participants of this study were the 12 public-school teachers from elementary and secondary schools within the district of Lopez Jaena in the Division of Misamis Occidental. They were chosen through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) currently employed as a public-school teacher in the division; (2) married and with at least three years of teaching experience to ensure familiarity with financial responsibilities tied to the profession; (3) willing to openly share personal experiences regarding financial well-being; and (4) able to provide informed consent.

Instruments

Data were gathered using a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide designed to elicit the lived financial experiences of public school teachers. The guide, which was approved by the dissertation committee, contains opening, core, and concluding questions and is grounded in the principles of Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological interview. Moustakas emphasizes creating a space where participants can share rich descriptions of their experiences, and the interview guide was crafted to encourage this openness. The interview process allowed teachers to describe their past and present financial realities and reflect on how they make sense of making ends meet. Follow-up and probing questions were used as needed to clarify meanings and deepen understanding. As the main research instrument in this qualitative inquiry, the researcher gathered, interpreted, and analyzed the data while practicing epoché to bracket personal biases. To support data collection, a brief demographic questionnaire was used to contextualize each participant's background, and field notes or a reflective journal will be maintained to capture non-verbal cues, observations, and researcher reflections that supplemented the interview data. This approach ensured a comprehensive and authentic portrayal of the participants' lived experiences, consistent with the transcendental phenomenological framework.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before conducting the study, the researcher requested permission from the Dean of the Graduate School at Misamis University. After obtaining the permits, the researcher prepared a consent letter for the respondents and explained the importance of the study to them. After the identification of the final participants, scheduled interviews were conducted. Once permission is granted, the researcher scheduled interviews at a time and place convenient for the teachers.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, guided by open-ended questions about their lived experiences on financial well-being. With the participants' consent, each interview was recorded to ensure

accuracy, while field notes were also taken to capture observations and non-verbal cues. At the start of the interviews, the researcher greeted the participants and state the purpose of the discussions. The researcher informed each participant of their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was observed at all times. They were also asked to review the study's written report drafts and to give additional feedback to establish the accuracy.

After the interviews, the researcher transcribed the recordings verbatim and reviewed the transcripts with the participants to validate the accuracy of their responses. The data gathered were analyzed using Moustaka's phenomenological method, which involves extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and ultimately describing the essence of the participants' experiences.

Ethical Considerations

High ethical standards was observed in the research. The researcher submitted the paper to the Misamis University Research Ethics Committee for review, once approved. the study commenced. Full consent of all the persons involved was obtained. The participants were asked to sign an informed consent indicating the aim of the study. The researcher also observed the right of privacy of all public-school teachers involved, including the right to refuse and withdraw. Second, the researcher did not disclose the names of the respondents/participants of the said research. No third party was allowed in the said research. The researcher is the only one who saw the data and also the one who kept the data out of prying eyes. The researcher asked for the consent of the respondents. The respondents were fully aware of the proceedings of the study.

Data Analysis

In this study, Moustakas' (1994) data analysis technique of phenomenological reduction was used. The transcripts of all participants gathered from the interviews were analyzed using the methods of Moustakas. The following are the steps in the phenomenological reduction which served as a guide in analyzing the data gathered: (1) Bracketing, (2) Horizontalization, (3) Clustering into Themes, (4) Textural Description, (5) Structural Description, and (6) Textural-Structural Synthesis.

Bracketing was an approach I used to mitigate the effects of preconceived notions and perceptions held before the study commenced. It is a process of suspending judgments and biases, or 'epoche.' Consequently, I reached a deep level of inquiry from topic and population selection, interview design, collection and interpretation, and dissemination of research findings.

Horizontalization is technically referring to the listing of all the verbatim expressions that have a bearing on the study. Initially, I looked into each statement with equal value. Then, statements that were found irrelevant, repetitive, overlapping, and outside the scope of the study, were ignored. Horizons, which were the remaining sections after the data had been polished, were considered as the constituent and meaningful parts of the phenomenon. According to Moustakas, "Horizons are unlimited, and horizontalization is a never-ending process" (Moustakas, 1994).

Clustering is the third step in obtaining inferences from the study. It involves the reduction of experiences to invariant horizons, creating core themes, and validation of the invariant horizons using multiple data sources. In reducing the statements into horizons, I clustered them into themes and ensured that each theme was implied with only one meaning. It was considered as placing the phenomenon into a "textural language." To validate the invariant horizons obtained from the study, I reviewed the findings of research studies using other methods other than the data-gathering methods being used in the study like observation, field note-taking, focus group interviews and related literature. This validation process was crucial to the accuracy and clarity of the representations.

Textural description, or 'what occurred,' refers to an account that describes the perception of the phenomenon. In obtaining the textural description of the experience of the participants, I used the verbatim excerpts in the interview, and provided a narration of the meaning units which were derived from the themes. Structural description, or how it occurred', is the integration of imaginative variation, which is an ingenious outlook and

insights, to the textural description. An imaginative variation is considered as the mental experiment on analyzing the details and structures of the participants' experience by being detached from natural inclination through epoche. It is appended in each paragraph of textural descriptions to generate a structural description.

In the textural-structural synthesis process, I collated the meaning units of each of the participants and develop from it a composite of textural and structural descriptions that are common to them. A narrative or synthesis represents all of the participants written in a third-person perspective. The primary goal of this final step of Moustakas' method is to obtain the essence of the experience of the phenomenon.

Responses of the participants of the study were analyzed through the NVivo software that produced the final themes of the study. The software was capable of identifying the common responses of the participants. Based on the common responses from the participants, the researcher drafted the final theme of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored the financial well-being of public-school teachers in one municipality in Misamis Occidental, focusing on how teachers experience and manage their financial realities while striving to meet personal and professional responsibilities. The study involved fifteen public-school teachers selected through purposive sampling from elementary and secondary schools in the district of Lopez Jaena under the Division of Misamis Occidental. Participants varied in age, years of teaching experience, family responsibilities, and financial obligations, providing diverse perspectives on the financial challenges and coping strategies of teachers. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, participants were identified using participant codes (e.g., P1, P2, P3) throughout the presentation of findings.

From the analysis of the participants' narratives, five major themes emerged: Shaping Present Financial Well-Being Through Past Experiences, Experiencing Financial Well-Being Across Household, Workplace, and Community Contexts, Experiencing the Embodied Effects of Financial Stress and Stability, Managing Financial Responsibilities Through Relational Influences, and Balancing Financial Survival with Aspirations for Stability. These themes collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of how teachers navigate financial pressures, responsibilities, and aspirations while striving to achieve financial stability and well-being.

Shaping Present Financial Well-Being Through Past Experiences

This theme highlights how teachers' present financial well-being is shaped by their earlier financial experiences, decisions, and lessons learned throughout their professional lives. Participants consistently reflected on how past financial behaviors such as overspending, borrowing, insufficient budgeting, and financial hardship continue to influence their current financial stability and financial management practices. While these experiences initially created financial strain, teachers emphasized that they also served as important learning moments that gradually strengthened their financial awareness and discipline. Through reflection on both financial mistakes and successes, teachers developed more cautious spending habits, improved budgeting practices, and stronger financial planning strategies that guide their current financial decisions.

Participants frequently described how earlier financial difficulties particularly impulsive spending, poor budgeting, and reliance on loans continue to affect their present financial situation. These experiences often resulted in lingering financial obligations or limited financial flexibility, which required teachers to carefully manage their income to meet both personal and family needs. The following statements illustrate how past financial decisions continue to shape teachers' present financial realities.

“It affects my present financial well-being as my salary struggles to keep up with debt payments and family needs due to past loans.” (P3)

“Impulsive spending before affects my money balancing today.” (P4)

“Sometimes I overspend and mismanaged my finances resulting to scarcity of supply.” (P8)

“Past habits like overspending, relying on debt, or not tracking expenses can still affect me now through unpaid balances or weak savings.” (P10)

“My past financial experiences strongly influence my present financial well-being. Early in my teaching career, I made decisions without proper budgeting.” (P11)

These statements reveal that teachers’ financial well-being is not only shaped by present income but also by the lasting effects of earlier financial decisions. Past financial mismanagement, particularly overspending and unplanned borrowing, often created obligations that teachers continue to address in their current financial lives. Teachers explained that learning from past mistakes has encouraged them to adopt more careful budgeting and spending practices. They also shared that past financial challenges serve as reminders to prioritize essential needs and plan for future stability.

At the same time, participants emphasized that these financial difficulties became valuable lessons that encouraged them to develop stronger financial discipline. Many teachers described how their previous financial challenges motivated them to adopt more structured budgeting practices and to prioritize essential expenses over non-essential spending. Teachers noted that these lessons helped them avoid repeating past mistakes and improved their ability to manage debt and savings effectively. They also shared that overcoming earlier financial struggles built confidence in making informed and deliberate financial decisions. These are their answers:

“My past financial challenges taught me to be more careful with spending and to prioritize budgeting and saving.” (P1)

“It helped me realize to make a budgetary plan, prioritize what are needed, and to limit spending beyond my resources.” (P6)

“My past financial experiences help me to be more responsible in budgeting my needs from wants.” (P7)

“My past financial challenges taught me to budget carefully and prioritize needs over wants.” (P10)

“My past financial challenges and successes have taught me to be more disciplined and intentional with my income and expenses.” (P12)

These narratives suggest that financial challenges often functioned as turning points that reshaped teachers’ attitudes toward money management. Through these experiences, teachers developed greater financial responsibility and became more mindful of how they allocate their limited resources. Teachers shared that reflecting on past mistakes helped them establish clear financial priorities and avoid impulsive spending. They also emphasized that these turning points fostered a sense of accountability and encouraged consistent financial planning to achieve both short-term and long-term goals.

Participants also highlighted how specific financial decisions particularly loan availment and family-related expenses continue to shape their present financial well-being. For many teachers, loans were taken to address essential needs such as housing, family support, or financial emergencies. While these decisions provided immediate solutions, they also created long-term financial commitments that continue to affect their monthly financial capacity. They stated the following:

“I was caught in a loan where I availed more than two loan facilities that resulted in a decrease of my net pay.” (P2)

“It was when I decided to get a housing loan. I am now living in my own house with my family, but I’m still paying for it until now.” (P6)

“I got my loan for my family’s needs... from then on, my everyday needs struggles.” (P8)

“My salary struggles to keep up with debt payments and family needs due to past loans.” (P3)

These experiences illustrate how teachers' financial decisions are often shaped by family responsibilities and long-term commitments. While loans sometimes created financial pressure, they were frequently associated with fulfilling essential family needs, reflecting the complex balance teachers must maintain between financial obligations and personal priorities. Teachers also noted that making deliberate choices about loans and expenses helps them meet family needs without compromising long-term financial goals.

Despite these challenges, several participants shared how positive financial practices particularly saving and financial planning contributed to improved financial stability over time. Through gradual learning and self-discipline, teachers reported developing habits such as setting aside savings, building emergency funds, and planning for future financial security. They also emphasized that consistent saving and careful financial planning increase their confidence in handling unexpected expenses and achieving financial independence. These are what they expressed in their answers:

"I learned to set aside a portion of my salary for saving even when my income was limited... I was able to build an emergency fund." (P1)

"My past financial experiences transformed past mistakes regarding debt and impulse spending into disciplined budgeting and risk awareness." (P9)

"Taught me the value of an emergency fund." (P9)

"Small financial successes motivated me to save consistently." (P10)

"My earlier financial habits influence my present priorities by encouraging saving, budgeting, and long-term security." (P12)

These statements demonstrate how teachers gradually transformed their past financial experiences into practical financial strategies that promote stability and preparedness. Positive financial habits, even when developed through trial and error, strengthened their ability to manage financial responsibilities and prepare for future uncertainties. Teachers explained that learning from past financial mistakes allowed them to implement more effective budgeting and saving techniques. They also shared that these strategies foster a sense of control and confidence, enabling them to handle both expected and unexpected financial challenges.

The lived experiences of public school teachers reveal that financial well-being develops over time through the cumulative influence of past financial decisions, challenges, and lessons learned. Teachers described how early financial mismanagement, borrowing, and financial hardships often created ongoing obligations that continue to shape their present financial conditions. However, these experiences also served as important learning opportunities that fostered greater financial awareness, responsibility, and discipline. Through reflection and experience, teachers gradually transformed past financial struggles into practical financial wisdom, guiding their current practices in budgeting, saving, and financial planning. In this way, past financial experiences function not only as sources of difficulty but also as foundations for developing more responsible and resilient financial management behaviors.

Recent studies affirm that financial well-being is significantly shaped by individuals' past financial experiences and behavioral patterns over time (Mahendru et al., 2022). Empirical evidence shows that early financial mismanagement, including excessive borrowing and poor budgeting, continues to influence present financial stability by creating persistent financial obligations and limited flexibility (Garg et al., 2024). Moreover, research highlights that financial difficulties can function as experiential learning opportunities that improve financial literacy, self-regulation, and decision-making (She et al., 2023). Individuals who reflect on past financial challenges are more likely to adopt disciplined financial behaviors such as budgeting, saving, and long-term financial planning (Hwang & Park, 2023). These findings support the view that financial well-being evolves through continuous learning, behavioral adjustment, and the integration of past financial experiences into present financial practices.

The Financial Knowledge and Behavior Theory is highly relevant to the theme as it explains how individuals' past financial experiences shape their current financial well-being through learned behaviors and decision-making patterns (Morris et al., 2025). Teachers' narratives show that earlier practices such as overspending, borrowing, and poor budgeting directly influenced their present financial conditions, reflecting the theory's focus on behavior-driven outcomes (Bai, 2023). At the same time, the theory highlights how financial learning occurs through experience, which is evident as participants transformed past mistakes into improved financial discipline and planning. Their increased awareness in budgeting, saving, and prioritizing needs demonstrates the development of positive financial behaviors over time. Overall, the theory supports the idea that financial well-being is not static but evolves through continuous learning, experience, and behavioral adjustment (Sajuyigbe et al., 2024).

This theme implies that strengthening financial education and early financial awareness among teachers is essential in promoting long-term financial well-being. Institutions may consider providing continuous financial literacy programs, focusing on budgeting, debt management, and savings strategies to help teachers avoid repeating past financial mistakes. The findings also highlight the importance of reflective financial practices, as learning from past experiences can lead to improved decision-making and financial discipline. Additionally, support systems such as mentoring, financial counseling, and access to reliable financial information can further enhance teachers' capacity to manage their finances effectively. Ultimately, empowering teachers with financial knowledge and practical skills can contribute to more sustainable financial behaviors, improved well-being, and greater financial resilience over time.

Experiencing Financial Well-Being Across Household, Workplace, and Community Contexts

This theme illustrates how public school teachers experience financial well-being within the different environments they occupy namely their homes, workplaces, communities, and financial institutions. Participants described that their financial well-being is not shaped solely by their salary or personal financial decisions but by the multiple social and institutional spaces in which they live and work. Within these contexts, teachers must balance family responsibilities, professional expectations, community participation, and financial obligations. These interconnected spaces collectively influence how teachers manage their finances, make spending decisions, and cope with financial pressures. While supportive environments and access to financial resources can enhance feelings of financial stability, increasing responsibilities across these spaces often require teachers to carefully budget their income, prioritize essential expenses, and develop resilience in managing limited financial resources.

Participants frequently emphasized that the home environment plays a central role in shaping their financial well-being. Many teachers described how household responsibilities, family needs, and the management of daily living expenses strongly influence their financial stability. Within the home setting, teachers often assume financial roles that require careful planning and prioritization of resources to ensure that essential needs are met. Teachers also stated that balancing household expenses with personal and professional financial goals requires ongoing assessment and adjustment. They emphasized that effective communication and shared financial responsibilities within the family help maintain stability and reduce financial stress. These are their statements:

“I experience my financial well-being in the spaces where I live and work through my ability to meet daily needs, feel secure about expenses, and manage my budget without constant stress.” (P1)

“Since I am living with my parents, I spend house bill and foods for my family.” (P7)

“I experience financial strain or constraint as household expenses and work-related costs exceed my monthly salary.” (P3)

“I experience my financial well-being through the comfort and limitations of my living and working spaces, where my income determines the quality of my home environment.” (P12)

“At home, I practice budgeting and prioritizing basic needs to maintain stability.” (P10)

These answers reveal that teachers' financial well-being is closely tied to their ability to manage household needs and maintain financial stability within the home environment. For many teachers, financial decisions are shaped not only by personal needs but also by family responsibilities, which require careful allocation of limited financial resources. Teachers emphasized that establishing a consistent household budget helps them plan for both routine expenses and unexpected costs. They also noted that prioritizing essential family needs over personal wants is crucial for sustaining long-term financial security.

Beyond the home environment, teachers also described how the workplace significantly influences their financial experiences. School-related responsibilities, professional expectations, and workplace social interactions often involve financial contributions or expenses that affect teachers' financial planning. Participants noted that participation in school activities, professional obligations, and workplace relationships sometimes require them to allocate part of their income for institutional or social purposes. These are their answers:

“Greater opportunities come also with greater responsibilities, especially with school programs and activities.” (P6)

“Sometimes when the school oblige to contribute something for such event, then we intend for personal needs may use.” (P8)

“My co-teachers influence me in some of my financial expenses.” (P7)

“In my workplace, financial awareness helps me value my income and plan expenses wisely.” (P10)

“Expectations and demands in my community and school require me to spend on activities, contributions and professional needs.” (P11)

These experiences suggest that the workplace functions as an important social space where financial decisions are shaped not only by professional responsibilities but also by institutional expectations and peer interactions. Teachers often find themselves balancing their personal financial priorities with the social and professional demands of their work environment. Workplace norms and peer pressure can influence spending habits, such as contributing to events or gifts, which adds to financial obligations. At the same time, supportive colleagues can provide practical advice and encouragement that help teachers make wiser financial choices within these constraints.

Participants further described how community involvement and social expectations influence their financial behaviors. Engagement in community activities, social gatherings, and collective responsibilities sometimes requires financial contributions that affect teachers' spending priorities. While these activities strengthen social connections and community belonging, they can also create additional financial obligations. Teachers highlighted that navigating these expectations requires careful budgeting and prioritization to maintain both social harmony and financial stability. They expressed the following:

“Expectations and demands in my community or school can shape my financial experiences by influencing how I spend on social activities.” (P1)

“Contributing to school activities and community needs encourages careful budgeting.” (P10)

“Expectations and demands in my community and school require me to spend on professional needs and contribute to activities.” (P12)

“Sometimes my environment makes me feel that it's OK to have financial struggles.” (P4)

These statements demonstrate that teachers' financial well-being is also shaped by the broader social environments in which they participate. Community expectations and social relationships influence how teachers allocate their resources, often requiring them to balance social obligations with financial limitations. Teachers often adjust their spending and saving habits to meet both personal needs and the expectations of their

community. At the same time, supportive social networks can provide guidance and encouragement that help teachers navigate these financial pressures more effectively.

Another significant influence on teachers' financial well-being involves their interactions with financial institutions such as banks, cooperatives, and lending agencies. Participants explained that these institutions play an important role in providing financial support through savings programs, loans, and other financial services that help teachers manage their financial needs. Access to these financial services allows teachers to plan for emergencies and invest in long-term goals such as housing or education. At the same time, reliance on loans requires careful management to avoid over-indebtedness and maintain financial stability. These are their answers to the interview:

“My interactions with banks, cooperatives, or lending institutions influence my sense of financial stability.” (P1)

“They were helpful and accommodating in my application and willing to assist our financial needs.” (P6)

“If I need specific amount thru reloan, they can still lend me.” (P8)

“My interactions with banks, cooperatives, and lending institutions influence my sense of financial stability by giving me access to savings, loans, and financial support.” (P10)

“Banks and cooperatives interactions influence me by shaping how I save, borrow and manage debt.” (P11)

These experiences indicate that financial institutions serve as important structural supports that influence teachers' financial decisions and sense of financial security. Access to credit and savings opportunities provides teachers with financial flexibility, although reliance on loans may also contribute to long-term financial obligations. Teachers highlighted that understanding and effectively using these financial services is crucial for building both short-term stability and long-term financial resilience.

Finally, several participants emphasized that personal beliefs, financial learning experiences, and supportive environments also shape how they perceive and manage their financial well-being. Teachers described how financial literacy, personal values, and religious or family influences guide their financial decisions and attitudes toward money management. These influences help teachers develop strategies and coping mechanisms that align their financial practices with their personal values and long-term goals. They stressed the following:

“Financial literacy trainings and vlogs related to savings and assets building help me think many times before I decide to spend.” (P2)

“As I grew up in a Born-Again Christian family, we were taught that everything we have comes from God.” (P6)

“Home shapes my baseline financial anxiety or security; workplace influences my self-perception.” (P9)

“Every single amount counts.” (P5)

These reflections suggest that financial well-being is not only shaped by material resources but also by personal beliefs, values, and financial learning experiences. Such influences contribute to how teachers interpret financial challenges and develop strategies for managing their financial responsibilities. Teachers often draw on past experiences and acquired financial knowledge to make informed decisions and avoid repeating mistakes. Additionally, personal values and ethical considerations guide how they allocate resources, prioritize expenses, and plan for future financial stability.

The lived experiences of public school teachers reveal that financial well-being emerges within the interconnected spaces of home, workplace, community, and financial institutions. Within these environments, teachers continuously negotiate financial responsibilities, professional expectations, social obligations, and financial opportunities that shape their financial stability and emotional experiences related to money. While limited income and institutional demands can create financial pressure, supportive relationships, careful budgeting practices, and access to financial resources enable teachers to maintain resilience. Ultimately,

teachers' financial well-being is not experienced in isolation but is constructed through the dynamic interaction of personal responsibilities, social expectations, and institutional support across the various spaces they inhabit.

Recent studies emphasize that financial well-being is shaped by multiple social and institutional contexts, including the household, workplace, and community environments (Glenn et al., 2022). Research shows that family responsibilities and household financial roles significantly influence individuals' budgeting behavior, spending priorities, and overall financial stability (Mahendru et al., 2022). In workplace settings, institutional expectations and social interactions have been found to affect financial decision-making, often leading to additional financial obligations linked to professional and social participation (Bashir & Qureshi, 2023). Community engagement and social norms also play a crucial role, as individuals adjust their financial behaviors to meet social expectations and maintain social belonging (Lin & Desai, 2022). Furthermore, access to financial institutions and financial literacy resources has been identified as a key factor in enhancing financial capability, enabling individuals to manage financial challenges and improve long-term financial well-being (Ebirim et al., 2024).

The Personal Financial Management Theory is relevant to this theme as it emphasizes the importance of managing income, expenses, and financial responsibilities across different areas of life (Di Domenico et al., 2022). Teachers' experiences reflect how they allocate their financial resources within the home, workplace, and community, demonstrating the need for intentional budgeting and prioritization (Shi et al., 2025). The theory highlights that financial well-being is achieved through disciplined financial practices, which is evident in how teachers balance household needs, professional obligations, and social contributions. Their interactions with financial institutions further show the role of financial planning in handling savings, loans, and financial commitments (Effendi & Widagdo, 2025). Overall, the theory supports the idea that effective financial management across multiple life contexts is essential in maintaining stability and coping with financial pressures.

This theme implied that improving teachers' financial well-being requires a holistic approach that considers the multiple environments influencing their financial decisions. Educational institutions may develop financial wellness programs that address not only personal budgeting skills but also workplace-related financial demands and expectations. Strengthening family financial literacy and promoting shared financial responsibility within households can also support teachers in managing financial pressures more effectively. In addition, community-based financial education initiatives and supportive social networks can help reduce the burden of social financial obligations while promoting responsible financial practices. Lastly, enhancing access to responsible financial services and strengthening financial literacy programs can empower teachers to make informed financial decisions, build resilience, and achieve long-term financial stability.

Experiencing the Embodied Effects of Financial Stress and Stability

This theme highlights how teachers physically and emotionally experience the realities of financial stress and financial stability in their everyday lives. Participants described that financial concerns are not only economic conditions but are also deeply felt through the body and emotions. Financial pressures often manifest through fatigue, anxiety, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, and reduced concentration, affecting teachers' overall well-being and professional functioning. Conversely, periods of financial stability bring feelings of calmness, improved physical energy, better sleep, and greater emotional balance. These bodily and emotional experiences influence teachers' daily routines, mood, work performance, and interactions with others. Despite these challenges, teachers develop coping strategies such as seeking social support, maintaining optimism, strengthening financial discipline, and relying on faith to manage financial stress and continue fulfilling their professional responsibilities.

Participants frequently described how financial stress produces noticeable physical effects on their bodies. Many teachers reported experiencing fatigue, sleep disturbances, appetite changes, and physical discomfort when faced with financial pressures. These bodily responses often emerge when teachers struggle to balance their financial responsibilities with limited income. Some teachers noted that prolonged financial stress can lead to chronic health issues, affecting both their energy levels and overall well-being. Physical symptoms of stress also influence teachers' ability to concentrate and perform effectively in their professional roles. They stated the following:

“Financial pressures can show up physically as tension, fatigue or trouble sleeping.” (P1)

“It has adverse effect like unstable sleeping hours... it affects me physically.” (P2)

“Sometimes loss of appetite and not enough sleep.” (P3)

“We cannot sleep well and lost our appetite and physically tiring.” (P5)

“Manifest as constant anxiety causes insomnia, headache.” (P9)

“Instability can cause restless sleep, skipped meals, fatigue, and tension.” (P12)

These statements suggest that financial stress is experienced not only cognitively but also physically. Teachers described how persistent financial concerns disrupt their rest, affect their eating patterns, and create physical fatigue, indicating that financial insecurity directly influences their bodily well-being. Participants also shared that these physical effects can exacerbate emotional strain, creating a cycle of stress that affects both personal and professional life. Some teachers reported that managing physical symptoms of stress became a daily challenge, requiring them to develop coping strategies to maintain health and energy.

Participants also emphasized the emotional and psychological effects of financial stress. Financial concerns often lead to feelings of worry, anxiety, and emotional strain that influence teachers' mood, concentration, and interactions with others. These emotional responses can affect both personal well-being and professional performance. Teachers noted that persistent financial stress can undermine their confidence and motivation, making it harder to focus on work and personal goals.

“Yes, there have been moments when financial concerns made me feel stressed or anxious.” (P1)

“Anxiety.” (P4)

“It gives me stress emotionally and physically.” (P7)

“Financial stress can lead to worry, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating.” (P10)

“Financial concerns have made me feel stressed or anxious, which can affect my patience and mood.” (P12)

These narratives reveal that financial stress extends beyond material limitations and becomes an emotional burden that teachers carry in their daily lives. Persistent worries about financial obligations can reduce emotional stability and affect teachers' ability to focus, remain patient, and maintain positive interactions in both personal and professional settings. Teachers shared that coping with this emotional burden often requires intentional stress-management strategies and support from family, colleagues, or mentors.

In contrast, participants described how financial stability produces positive bodily and emotional experiences. When teachers feel financially secure, they report greater peace of mind, improved energy levels, and better emotional balance. Financial stability allows teachers to feel more relaxed and focused, which positively influences their overall well-being and work performance. Participants also noted that financial security enables them to plan for the future with confidence, reducing anxiety and supporting long-term personal and professional goals. These are expressed in the interviews:

“When I feel financially stable, I have more energy, lower stress levels, and a greater sense of overall health.” (P1)

“When there is financial stability, it will make us energetic.” (P5)

“Can sleep soundly and peacefully at night.” (P7)

“When my finances are stable, I have more energy, feel calmer, and can focus better on work.” (P10)

“Stability brings better rest, regular meals, and alertness.” (P12)

These reflections indicate that financial stability creates a sense of physical comfort and emotional relief that enables teachers to perform their daily responsibilities with greater confidence and clarity. The presence of financial security helps restore balance in both bodily health and emotional well-being. Teachers reported that feeling financially stable allows them to approach challenges with a calmer mindset and improved decision-making. Additionally, financial security fosters a sense of control over their lives, reducing stress and enhancing overall resilience.

Despite the physical and emotional challenges caused by financial stress, many teachers described developing coping strategies that help them manage these pressures. Participants shared that support from colleagues, personal resilience, spiritual faith, and improved financial management practices help them maintain motivation and continue fulfilling their responsibilities as educators. Teachers emphasized that these coping strategies not only alleviate stress but also strengthen their ability to navigate future financial challenges more effectively.

“Colleagues give me a condition of belongingness that boosts me to stand up and strive harder.” (P2)

“I just have to align again with my purpose and continue to work with positivity.” (P6)

“I still find time to pray.” (P6)

“Financial situation motivates me to work effectively.” (P7)

“Because of those experiences, I gradually manage and budget my finances.” (P8)

These experiences demonstrate that teachers actively seek ways to cope with financial stress and maintain their emotional stability. Social support, personal reflection, faith, and financial discipline serve as important resources that help teachers navigate financial challenges while sustaining their commitment to their work. Teachers also develop practical routines, such as careful budgeting and time management, to reduce financial strain and maintain well-being. Additionally, sharing experiences and advice with peers strengthens their coping strategies and fosters a sense of community resilience.

The lived experiences of public school teachers reveal that financial well-being is deeply embodied, influencing both physical health and emotional states. Financial pressures often manifest through fatigue, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and mental strain, affecting teachers’ daily functioning and interpersonal interactions. Conversely, periods of financial stability bring physical relaxation, emotional calmness, and renewed energy that support both personal well-being and professional performance. Despite the challenges posed by financial constraints, teachers demonstrate resilience by drawing on social support, personal discipline, and spiritual faith to manage financial stress. These experiences illustrate that financial well-being is not merely an economic condition but a lived bodily and emotional reality that shapes how teachers experience their daily lives and sustain their commitment to their profession.

Altaf & Dodamani (2024) cited that financial stress is not only an economic condition but also an embodied experience that significantly affects individuals’ physical and psychological well-being. Studies have shown that financial strain is strongly associated with adverse physical symptoms such as sleep disturbances, fatigue, and somatic complaints, as well as emotional outcomes including anxiety, depression, and reduced cognitive functioning (Coffey, J. (2022). Conversely, financial stability has been linked to improved mental health, better sleep quality, and higher levels of life satisfaction and productivity (Bondarchuk et al., 2024). Research further suggests that individuals employ various coping mechanisms, including social support, financial planning, and religious or spiritual practices, to mitigate the negative effects of financial stress (Jumady et al., 2024). These findings support the view that financial well-being is deeply embodied, influencing both the physical and emotional dimensions of individuals’ daily lives.

The Life Cycle Hypothesis is relevant to this theme as it explains how individuals’ financial conditions at different stages of life influence their consumption, savings, and overall well-being (Du Plessis et al., 2025).

Teachers' experiences of financial stress and stability reflect how limited income, ongoing obligations, and life-stage responsibilities can create imbalances between financial needs and available resources (Bashir & Qureshi, 2023). When financial demands exceed income, the theory helps explain the resulting stress, which becomes physically and emotionally embodied through fatigue, anxiety, and reduced well-being (Anvari-Clark & Ansong, 2022). Conversely, periods of financial stability align with better resource allocation across time, resulting in improved physical health, emotional balance, and daily functioning. Overall, the theory supports the idea that financial well-being is closely tied to how individuals manage financial resources throughout their life cycle, with direct consequences on both their physical and emotional experiences (Sabri et al., 2023).

This theme implies that addressing teachers' financial well-being requires interventions that consider both their economic conditions and their physical and emotional health. Educational institutions may integrate financial wellness programs with mental health support services to help teachers manage stress more effectively. Promoting financial literacy, stress management strategies, and healthy coping mechanisms can enhance teachers' resilience in dealing with financial pressures. Additionally, fostering supportive workplace environments and peer networks can provide emotional reassurance and reduce the negative effects of financial stress. Strengthening access to holistic support systems can ultimately improve teachers' overall well-being, enabling them to perform their professional roles with greater focus, energy, and emotional stability.

Managing Financial Responsibilities Through Relational Influences

This theme highlights how teachers' financial well-being is shaped by their relationships with family members, colleagues, students, and community members. Participants explained that financial decisions are rarely made in isolation; instead, they are strongly influenced by the expectations, responsibilities, and support systems that arise within their social relationships. Family obligations, workplace interactions, and community participation often create financial commitments that require teachers to allocate their limited financial resources carefully. While these relational influences sometimes increase financial pressure, they can also provide emotional support, practical advice, and encouragement that help teachers manage financial challenges more effectively. As a result, teachers' financial well-being emerges not only from personal financial management but also from the relational networks that shape their financial responsibilities and decision-making.

Participants frequently described family responsibilities as the most significant influence on their financial priorities. Many teachers reported that supporting children, parents, or extended family members required them to carefully manage their income and prioritize essential expenses. For several participants, being the primary provider or breadwinner within the household created additional financial pressure that shaped their financial decisions and spending behaviors. The participants stated the following:

“My responsibilities to my children and family strongly influence my financial decisions and increase my financial burden.” (P3)

“I'm the breadwinner it really strains my financial well-being.” (P4)

“Since I am living with my parents, I spend house bill and foods for my family.” (P7)

“My family is my responsibility and I am the only breadwinner.” (P9)

“Supporting my family requires careful budgeting and planning.” (P10)

These accounts illustrate that teachers' financial priorities are strongly influenced by their roles within the family. Providing for family members often becomes the central factor guiding how teachers allocate their income, requiring them to balance personal needs with familial responsibilities. Teachers often make sacrifices in personal spending to ensure that family needs are met, which can influence long-term financial goals. Family expectations also motivate teachers to adopt disciplined budgeting and saving habits to maintain financial stability for their household.

Participants also described how relationships with colleagues, friends, and community members influence their financial behaviors and spending decisions. Social expectations within schools and communities sometimes require teachers to contribute financially to activities, events, or collective responsibilities. These expectations can create additional financial obligations that affect teachers' financial planning.

These are reflected in their answers:

"I have teams coaching in Journalism and Sports where sometimes it influenced me to spend money I hadn't planned for." (P1)

"They think that I have much money because I am working and they expect me to support them." (P6)

"In the community, some would say 'Maestra man ka! Dako kag sweldo,' not knowing the financial battle I am silently engaging." (P8)

"Contributing to school activities, gifts for family celebrations, or community events required me to adjust my budget." (P10)

"Expectations like contributing to family needs or school activities guide how I manage and allocate my money." (P12)

These narratives reveal that teachers often navigate social expectations that influence how they spend their income. While these expectations strengthen social relationships and community participation, they can also place additional financial pressure on teachers who must carefully balance social obligations with financial limitations. Teachers narrated that these social pressures sometimes require them to adjust personal budgets or delay personal financial goals to meet communal obligations. At the same time, positive social interactions and encouragement from peers help teachers make wiser financial decisions within these expectations.

At the same time, participants emphasized that relationships can positively influence financial management by providing guidance and advice. Teachers reported that family members, colleagues, and trusted individuals sometimes offer financial insights or practical suggestions that help them make wiser financial decisions. These supportive relationships encourage teachers to adopt better budgeting, saving, and spending practices. Teachers also gain confidence in managing their finances knowing they have access to advice and shared experiences from trusted people in their social networks. These are their statements:

"When I am in good terms with these people, right advice is given." (P5)

"They support and give advice on how to spend money wisely." (P6)

"Listening to their advice." (P7)

"Colleagues' advice encourages me to budget carefully and spend wisely." (P10)

"My relationships provide guidance and encouragement to save." (P11)

These reflections suggest that relational interactions can function as important sources of financial learning and support. Through shared experiences and advice, teachers gain insights that help them develop more responsible financial practices. Teachers often model financial behaviors observed in family members or colleagues, reinforcing positive habits. Collaborating and discussing financial challenges with trusted peers also helps them identify strategies to manage limited resources more effectively.

Participants also described how relationships provide emotional support during periods of financial difficulty. When teachers encounter financial stress, support from family members, spouses, or colleagues can offer reassurance and encouragement that help them cope with financial pressures. This emotional support strengthens teachers' resilience, enabling them to maintain focus and continue fulfilling their professional and personal responsibilities.

“My husband supported me along the way in my struggle.” (P2)

“When I share my financial problems, they help suggest ways to solve them.” (P8)

“Positive relationships provide encouragement and shared resources.” (P10)

“Family and colleagues can provide guidance, advice, or assistance that impacts how I manage money.” (P12)

These experiences indicate that financial well-being is not only influenced by economic resources but also by the emotional and social support available within teachers' relationships. Supportive relationships help teachers navigate financial challenges by providing both practical assistance and emotional encouragement. Teachers shared that guidance and shared experiences from trusted individuals help them make more informed financial decisions. Emotional support from family, colleagues, and friends also reduces stress and fosters confidence in managing financial responsibilities.

The lived experiences of public school teachers reveal that financial well-being is deeply shaped by relational influences. Teachers often carry significant financial responsibilities within their families, which strongly shape their spending priorities and financial decisions. At the same time, workplace interactions and community expectations create additional financial obligations that require careful budgeting and sacrifice. Despite these pressures, supportive relationships provide valuable guidance, emotional encouragement, and practical advice that help teachers cope with financial challenges and make responsible financial choices. Ultimately, teachers' financial well-being emerges not only from individual financial practices but also from the complex network of relationships that influence their financial responsibilities and everyday financial experiences.

Glenn et al (2022) emphasize that financial well-being is socially embedded and significantly influenced by relational contexts such as family, workplace, and community networks. Research indicates that family responsibilities, particularly among breadwinners, strongly shape financial priorities, often requiring individuals to allocate resources toward household needs at the expense of personal financial goals (Jalal Ahamed, 2025). Social expectations and workplace relationships have also been found to influence financial behaviors, as individuals adjust their spending to meet collective obligations and maintain social belonging (Roman et al., 2025). At the same time, relational networks serve as important sources of financial socialization, where individuals gain financial knowledge, attitudes, and practices through advice, observation, and shared experiences (Fan et al., 2022). Furthermore, emotional and social support from significant others has been shown to buffer financial stress and enhance individuals' capacity to manage financial challenges effectively (Freak-Poli et al., 2022).

The Financial Knowledge and Behavior Theory is relevant to this theme as it explains how financial behaviors are shaped not only by individual knowledge but also by social interactions and relational influences (Ingale & Paluri, 2022). Teachers' experiences show that financial decisions are strongly influenced by family responsibilities, workplace expectations, and community relationships, reflecting how external social factors shape financial behavior (Manalo et al., 2024).

The theory emphasizes that financial learning and decision-making develop through interaction, which is evident in how teachers adopt budgeting practices and spending habits based on advice, expectations, and shared experiences (Tan et al., 2025). Additionally, the presence of emotional and practical support from relationships reinforces positive financial behaviors and helps teachers cope with financial pressures. Overall, the theory supports the idea that financial well-being is socially constructed through continuous interaction between personal financial knowledge and the relational environments that influence everyday financial decisions (Stebbins & Quito, 2025).

This theme implies that efforts to improve teachers' financial well-being should consider the strong influence of relational networks on financial decision-making. Financial literacy programs may be designed to include family-oriented approaches, encouraging shared financial planning and responsibility within households. Schools can also promote supportive workplace environments where colleagues can share financial knowledge, experiences, and practical strategies.

Additionally, raising awareness about social financial pressures within communities may help reduce unrealistic expectations placed on teachers. Strengthening relational support systems can enhance teachers' financial resilience by providing both practical guidance and emotional encouragement in managing financial responsibilities.

Balancing Financial Survival with Aspirations for Stability

This theme highlights how public school teachers experience the material dimensions of financial life as they continuously balance immediate financial survival with long-term aspirations for financial stability. Participants described how their daily financial experiences revolve around managing limited income while addressing essential needs such as food, transportation, household bills, and work-related expenses. Teachers often engage in careful budgeting and prioritization to ensure that basic necessities are met despite financial constraints. At the same time, they expressed hopes of achieving greater financial stability through savings, financial discipline, and improved financial knowledge. Within this context, material resources such as possessions, savings, and investments carry symbolic meaning, representing security, responsibility, and preparedness for the future. Conversely, financial limitations and debt obligations sometimes create feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty.

Participants frequently described their financial lives as centered on managing essential household and professional expenses necessary for daily functioning. Meeting basic needs often requires teachers to carefully allocate their limited income and prioritize essential expenditures. Teachers noted that careful tracking of expenses and budgeting are crucial to ensure that all necessary obligations are met each month. They also emphasized that balancing immediate needs with long-term goals, such as savings or debt repayment, requires constant financial planning and discipline, as reflected in their answers:

“I experience the material aspects of financial life through managing money for necessities, bills, savings, and occasional wants.” (P1)

“Food. Baby’s milk.” (P3)

“Food, clothing, shelter.” (P5)

“Food, transportation and shelter.” (P7)

“Paying for household needs, school-related expenses, and basic personal necessities.” (P10)

“The most significant financial responsibilities in my daily life are covering household expenses and supporting family needs.” (P12)

These accounts illustrate that teachers' financial realities are grounded in the material demands of everyday living. Managing basic necessities becomes the central focus of their financial practices, requiring careful planning and prioritization of available resources. Teachers often make trade-offs between wants and needs to ensure that essential expenses are covered without falling into debt. They also highlighted that consistent budgeting and mindful spending help maintain stability despite limited income.

Participants also described debt as a common reality that influences their financial decisions and often limits their financial flexibility. Loans, housing obligations, and other financial commitments can create ongoing financial pressure that requires teachers to manage their income carefully. Teachers emphasized that while debt can provide necessary financial support, it also requires disciplined repayment to avoid long-term strain. They also noted that managing multiple financial obligations often influences their ability to save and invest for future goals. These are their statements:

“Multiple loan weaken my financial status.” (P2)

“I incurred debts for housing purposes, but I still managed to allocate funds for essentials.” (P6)

“Before I engage to it, I think over and over if it is necessary.” (P8)

“Debts really hold me but I still manage them since it is automatically deducted from my salary.” (P9)

“To have no loans, no deduction in the pay slips.” (P7)

These reflections suggest that debt is both a financial burden and a necessary strategy for managing major life expenses. While borrowing may provide immediate financial support, it can also reduce teachers’ financial flexibility and create long-term financial obligations. Teachers highlighted that careful planning and prioritization are essential when taking on debt to ensure it aligns with their financial goals. They also noted that learning from past borrowing experiences helps them make wiser financial decisions in the future.

In response to these challenges, teachers emphasized the importance of financial discipline and budgeting as key strategies for managing limited financial resources. Participants described how careful monitoring of expenses and prioritization of needs over wants help them maintain financial balance. Teachers also shared that maintaining a written budget or tracking expenses digitally helps prevent overspending and increases awareness of financial habits. Consistently practicing financial discipline allows them to gradually build savings and prepare for unexpected expenses despite limited income. These are what they expressed:

“I manage debts, expenses, and savings by keeping track of what I owe, budgeting for daily needs.” (P1)

“I tried to build savings firmly and be still in my discipline and habit.” (P2)

“I weigh each item of which of them I needed the most.” (P5)

“I only spend not beyond my means or else I would fall into a debt trap.” (P8)

“I prioritize needs over wants and keep track of my spending.” (P10)

“I manage debts, expenses, and savings by budgeting and carefully prioritizing essentials.” (P11)

These narratives demonstrate that teachers actively employ financial management practices to maintain stability despite financial constraints. Budgeting, financial discipline, and careful decision-making serve as practical tools that help teachers navigate financial challenges. Teachers noted that regularly reviewing their financial plans allows them to adjust spending and prioritize emerging needs effectively. They also emphasized that cultivating consistent financial habits over time strengthens their confidence and ability to handle both expected and unexpected expenses.

Participants also highlighted how possessions, savings, and financial resources symbolize security and preparedness for future uncertainties. Material resources are not merely economic assets but also carry emotional meaning associated with stability, confidence, and self-reliance. Teachers explained that having savings or essential possessions provides peace of mind and reduces anxiety about unexpected expenses. They also shared that these resources reinforce a sense of personal responsibility and control over their financial future:

“The things I own give me a sense of financial security.” (P1)

“Having savings or essential items gives me confidence and peace of mind.” (P10)

“The things I own reflect my ability to provide for my needs.” (P11)

“Having essential resources brings confidence while lacking them creates stress.” (P12)

“The things I lack create a feeling of being financially trapped.” (P9)

These experiences illustrate how material possessions and financial resources function as symbols of financial stability and personal dignity. Having savings or essential resources provides teachers with reassurance and confidence, while financial scarcity can create feelings of insecurity. Teachers expressed that possessing financial resources allows them to plan ahead and meet both personal and family needs without constant stress.

They also emphasized that financial preparedness fosters a sense of independence and strengthens their ability to handle unforeseen challenges.

Despite the challenges of financial constraints, teachers expressed aspirations for improved financial conditions in the future. Many participants emphasized their hopes of achieving financial independence, reducing debt, and providing better opportunities for their families. Teachers described that these aspirations motivate them to practice disciplined budgeting, save consistently, and make informed financial decisions. They also underscored that setting long-term financial goals provides a sense of purpose and direction in managing their daily expenses and responsibilities. These are indicated in their statements:

“I hope to achieve greater financial stability and independence in the future.” (P1)

“I dream to be debt free and have strong financial conditions.” (P2)

“I hope to achieve financial stability and provide a better future for my children.” (P3)

“I want financial security that allows me to support my family and live with less stress.” (P10)

“My aspiration is to achieve stability, build savings, and support my family comfortably.” (P12)

These reflections demonstrate that teachers view financial discipline, savings, and financial learning as pathways toward achieving long-term financial security. Aspirations for stability motivate teachers to remain committed to responsible financial management despite present financial limitations. Teachers emphasized that developing consistent financial habits strengthens their confidence in achieving future goals. They also noted that envisioning financial stability encourages them to prioritize needs, reduce unnecessary spending, and plan strategically for both short-term and long-term expenses.

The lived experiences of public school teachers reveal that the material dimensions of financial life revolve around the continuous negotiation between financial survival and aspirations for stability. Teachers manage daily financial responsibilities by carefully balancing essential expenses, debt obligations, and limited resources. Material possessions and financial resources carry deep symbolic meaning, representing security, dignity, and the capacity to support their families. While financial constraints often generate stress and uncertainty, teachers demonstrate resilience through disciplined budgeting, careful resource management, and hopes for improved financial well-being. Through these practices and aspirations, teachers navigate the material realities of financial life while striving toward greater financial stability and independence.

Apriansah et al (2022) highlighted that financial well-being involves managing the tension between meeting immediate financial needs and pursuing long-term financial stability. Research shows that individuals with limited income often prioritize essential expenditures such as food, housing, and transportation, requiring careful budgeting and trade-offs between needs and wants (Samuel, 2023). Debt has also been identified as a double-edged factor, serving as a necessary financial tool for addressing major expenses while simultaneously constraining financial flexibility and increasing financial stress (Dote Pardo & Severino-González, 2025). Moreover, studies indicate that financial discipline, including budgeting, saving, and expense tracking, plays a crucial role in maintaining financial stability and improving financial resilience over time (Edo-Osagie, 2025). Additionally, material resources such as savings and assets are found to carry both economic and symbolic value, contributing to individuals' sense of security, self-worth, and preparedness for future uncertainties (Fleming, 2025).

The Personal Financial Management Theory is highly relevant to this theme as it emphasizes the practical management of income, expenses, debt, and savings in achieving financial stability (Prakoso & Apriliani, 2024). Teachers' experiences reflect how they continuously balance limited financial resources by prioritizing basic needs, managing debt, and practicing disciplined budgeting (Tagapulot, 2024). The theory highlights that financial survival depends on intentional decision-making, which is evident in how teachers carefully allocate their income and avoid unnecessary expenses to prevent financial strain (Jumady et al., 2024). It also underscores the importance of long-term financial planning, as seen in teachers' aspirations to build savings,

reduce debt, and achieve financial independence (Di Domenico et al., 2022). Overall, the theory supports the idea that financial well-being is attained through consistent financial discipline and strategic management of resources, enabling individuals to move from survival toward stability (Effendi et al., 2024).

This theme connotes that supporting teachers' financial well-being requires strategies that address both short-term financial survival and long-term financial aspirations. Financial education programs may focus on strengthening budgeting skills, debt management, and savings behavior to help teachers balance immediate needs with future goals. Institutions can also promote access to sustainable financial services that support responsible borrowing and long-term financial planning. Encouraging a savings culture and providing tools for financial tracking can enhance teachers' sense of control and financial security. Ultimately, empowering teachers with practical financial strategies and resources can help them navigate financial constraints while working toward greater stability and independence.

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the financial well-being of public-school teachers in one municipality in Misamis Occidental. Specifically, the study addressed the following research questions: (1) how teachers described the influence of past financial experiences and decisions on their present financial well-being; (2) how teachers experienced financial well-being within the spaces they lived and worked in; (3) how financial pressures or stability manifested physically and emotionally in their daily lives; (4) how relationships with family members, colleagues, students, and community members influenced their financial well-being; and (5) how teachers experienced and managed the material aspects of financial life such as expenses, debt, resources, and possessions.

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to capture the essence of teachers' lived financial experiences. Fifteen public-school teachers from elementary and secondary schools in the district of Lopez Jaena, Division of Misamis Occidental, participated in the study. Participants were selected purposively based on established inclusion criteria. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews using a researcher-made interview guide question. The interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Moustakas' phenomenological data analysis.

Findings

Based on the analysis of the participants' responses, the following findings were generated:

1. **Shaping Present Financial Well-Being Through Past Experiences.** Teachers' present financial well-being was shaped by past financial experiences, including borrowing, overspending, and limited financial planning, which also led them to develop stronger budgeting and financial discipline.
2. **Experiencing Financial Well-Being Across Household, Workplace, and Community Contexts.** Teachers experienced financial well-being within their homes, workplaces, communities, and financial institutions, where responsibilities and expectations influenced their financial decisions and resource management.
3. **Experiencing the Embodied Effects of Financial Stress and Stability.** Financial stress manifested through fatigue, anxiety, and sleep disturbances, while financial stability promoted emotional calmness, better focus, and improved physical well-being.
4. **Managing Financial Responsibilities Through Relational Influences.** Family obligations, workplace relationships, and community expectations shaped teachers' financial priorities, while supportive relationships provided guidance and encouragement.
5. **Balancing Financial Survival with Aspirations for Stability.** Teachers managed essential expenses and debts through budgeting and financial discipline while aspiring to achieve long-term financial stability and security.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Teachers' financial well-being develops through cumulative financial experiences over time. Past financial decisions and challenges shape their current financial conditions and help them develop stronger financial awareness and management practices.
2. Teachers' financial well-being is influenced by the environments in which they live and work. Household responsibilities, workplace expectations, community involvement, and interactions with financial institutions affect their financial stability and decision-making.
3. Financial well-being is reflected in teachers' physical and emotional experiences. Financial stress results in fatigue, anxiety, and emotional strain, while financial stability contributes to improved well-being and work performance.
4. Teachers' financial experiences are shaped by social relationships. Family responsibilities, workplace interactions, and community expectations influence financial decisions, while supportive relationships provide guidance and encouragement.
5. Teachers balance financial survival with aspirations for stability. Despite financial constraints, they practice budgeting and financial discipline while striving for long-term financial security.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. School administrators may strengthen financial literacy initiatives for teachers by organizing seminars and training on budgeting, debt management, savings, and financial planning to help teachers make more informed financial decisions based on their financial experiences.
2. School leaders and administrators may review institutional practices that create additional financial demands on teachers and develop supportive policies that minimize unnecessary financial contributions related to school or community activities.
3. Educational institutions may implement financial wellness and stress management programs that provide teachers with guidance on managing financial pressures, maintaining work-life balance, and promoting mental and emotional well-being.
4. Schools may encourage collaborative support systems among teachers such as peer mentoring, financial learning sessions, or support groups where teachers can share experiences and strategies in managing financial responsibilities.
5. Policy makers and educational leaders may strengthen compensation, benefits, and financial support programs for teachers to help them achieve long-term financial stability and improve their overall quality of life.
6. Future researchers may extend the study to a larger sample or multiple school divisions and consider using mixed-methods or comparative research designs to provide a broader understanding of teachers' financial well-being and coping strategies.

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