

# Push and Pull Factors Influencing DepED Teachers' Migration Abroad

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the phenomenon of brain drain among former public-school teachers in the Department of Education (DepEd) Schools Division of Zambales. Anchored in Lee's Push-Pull Theory of Migration and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation, this study examined how emotional, cultural, and professional factors influence teachers' decisions to seek overseas employment. The study aimed to describe teachers' lived experiences, identify key push factors, examine perceptions of compensation, workload, and career advancement, compare local and overseas opportunities, and explore challenges in migration decision-making.

A phenomenological design guided by Clark Moustakas was employed. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with thirty (30) purposively selected former DepEd teachers in Zambales and analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke. Findings revealed that migration intentions are driven by interconnected factors, including burnout, emotional exhaustion, and feelings of being undervalued. Cultural influences, such as family expectations and societal views that equate working abroad with success, also play a significant role. Professionally, excessive workload, administrative demands, limited career advancement, and inadequate compensation further push teachers to consider leaving. Participants perceived overseas employment as offering clearer career pathways, stronger recognition, and greater financial stability. However, migration decisions were accompanied by emotional struggles, including fear of uncertainty, separation from family, and guilt about leaving students behind.

The study concludes that teacher migration is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by systemic inefficiencies, cultural pressures, and professional dissatisfaction. To address these challenges, the dissertation proposes Project S.T.A.Y. (Support, Transform, Advance, Yield: Teacher Retention), a holistic intervention framework designed to strengthen teacher well-being, streamline workloads, enhance career growth opportunities, improve compensation and incentives, engage communities in reframing cultural narratives, and sustain retention through continuous monitoring and policy refinement. Grounded in both local realities and global literature, the framework offers a comprehensive strategy to mitigate brain drain and sustain the teaching workforce in Zambales.

**Keywords:** push-pull theory, two-factor theory, brain drain, teacher migration, overseas employment

## INTRODUCTION

Globally, teacher migration reflects deep disparities between developed and developing nations, underscoring systemic inequities in compensation, workload, and career advancement. Persistent push factors such as low salaries, heavy workloads, and limited promotion opportunities remain particularly acute in countries with underfunded education systems (Ingersoll, 2001; Bense, 2015). These conditions create environments where teachers feel undervalued and professionally stagnant, prompting them to seek opportunities abroad. In the Philippines, educators frequently report emotional exhaustion, undervaluation, and limited career mobility, which contribute significantly to their decision to migrate (Magonsik & Ngag, 2024; Naul, 2025). Administrative

burdens further exacerbate these challenges, detracting from instructional quality and intensifying dissatisfaction, as highlighted in DepEd's workload reports (DepEd, 2023). Internationally, high-income countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom have intensified recruitment efforts to address teacher shortages. These nations offer competitive salaries, better resources, and clearer career pathways, making them attractive destinations for teachers from developing countries (UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2020). This recruitment drive has reshaped the global education landscape, reinforcing the push-pull dynamics of migration (Appleton et al., 2006; OECD, 2019). Scholars argue that this phenomenon contributes to a "brain drain" in sending countries, where the loss of skilled educators undermines local education systems and weakens institutional capacity (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012; Eslit, 2023). The Teachers' Dignity Coalition (2024) and Philstar (2024) have similarly warned that the exodus of teachers from DepEd represents not only a staffing crisis but also a long-term threat to educational quality and equity. In Southeast Asia, teacher migration is increasingly recognized as a regional concern, with countries struggling to retain qualified educators amid rising demand for skilled human capital (ASEAN Secretariat, 2025). Filipino teachers, in particular, are highly sought after for their adaptability, English proficiency, and pedagogical training, making them prime candidates for international recruitment (Dela Cruz, 2024; Asis & Bartram, 2018). This demand reflects the comparative advantage of Filipino educators in global labor markets, but it also intensifies the vulnerability of the Philippine education system to attrition. Studies reveal that migration decisions are not solely economic but also shaped by professional frustrations and cultural expectations. Teachers often perceive overseas employment as offering greater recognition, structured professional growth, and improved well-being compared to the stagnation they experience locally (Santos & Dizon, 2022; Tantay, 2024). Moreover, cultural narratives equating migration with success amplify the attractiveness of overseas opportunities. Cabato (2026) and Castulo et al. (2025) highlight that migration is often framed as a pathway to prestige and upward mobility, reinforcing societal pressures on educators to leave. This cultural framing magnifies the appeal of migration, as teachers weigh the emotional costs of leaving against the promise of professional dignity abroad. Ultimately, teacher migration illustrates the intersection of economic, professional, and cultural forces, revealing how global inequalities shape individual career trajectories and national education systems. The Philippine case demonstrates that unless systemic reforms are implemented—addressing compensation, workload, career advancement, and recognition—the push factors driving migration will persist. As UNESCO (2021) and OECD (2019) emphasize, retaining teachers requires holistic strategies that integrate emotional support, professional development, and societal recognition. Without such interventions, the cycle of brain drain will continue, undermining educational quality and weakening the capacity of local schools to meet the demands of learners in an increasingly competitive global environment.

In the Philippine context, teacher migration has escalated significantly over the past decade, creating serious implications for public education and national development. Reports indicate that thousands of Filipino teachers leave annually due to low wages, insufficient benefits, limited career advancement, and heavy administrative workload within the Department of Education (DepEd) (Philstar, 2024). Despite ongoing reforms to increase salaries and address workforce gaps, many educators continue to seek overseas opportunities to improve economic stability, enhance professional growth, and escape workplace stress and burnout (Reyes, 2021; Santos & Dizon, 2022). These realities are consistent with findings from Helpline PH (2023), which highlighted that administrative overload and inadequate compensation remain among the most pressing reasons for teacher attrition. Globally, teacher migration is often linked to systemic challenges such as poor working conditions, limited recognition, and emotional exhaustion (Bense, 2015; Ingersoll, 2001). These push factors are compounded by the allure of better compensation, structured recognition, and professional mobility abroad (OECD, 2019; Appleton et al., 2006). Studies by Docquier and Rapoport (2012, 2019) emphasize that such migration patterns contribute to brain drain in sending countries, weakening local education systems while strengthening those of receiving nations. In the Philippines, this phenomenon is particularly concerning, as highlighted by the Teachers' Dignity Coalition (2024), which warned that the exodus of teachers could undermine the country's long-term educational capacity and compromise the quality of instruction in public schools. High-income countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom have intensified recruitment efforts to address teacher shortages, attracting educators from developing nations, including the Philippines, with promises of higher salaries, improved resources, and clearer career pathways (UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2020). This recruitment drive has reshaped the global education landscape, reinforcing the push-pull dynamics that affect migration decisions. Garcia (2025) and Lopez & Balleascas (2020) further illustrate how Filipino teachers adapt to foreign educational contexts, often reporting greater recognition, structured

professional growth, and enhanced well-being compared to their experiences in DepEd. Recent national analyses highlight that teacher attrition and migration contribute to unfilled teaching positions and inconsistencies in service delivery in public schools, further emphasizing the need for deeper understanding of educator mobility (PIDS, 2024). Frianeza et al. (2024) also noted that systemic challenges in the Philippine education system—such as inadequate instructional support, limited professional growth, and weak recognition mechanisms—compound the push factors driving migration. These findings underscore that migration decisions are not purely transactional but deeply personal, shaped by teachers’ aspirations for dignity, recognition, and well-being. As Tantay et al. (2024) argue, educators often weigh the emotional costs of leaving—such as family separation and uncertainty—against the promise of professional dignity and financial stability abroad. Moreover, cultural narratives play a critical role in shaping migration intentions. In many communities, overseas employment is equated with success and upward mobility, reinforcing societal pressures on teachers to leave (Cabato, 2026; Castulo et al., 2025). This cultural framing magnifies the appeal of migration, as teachers perceive local teaching as undervalued compared to the prestige associated with working abroad. Asis and Bartram (2018) highlight that Filipino teachers are particularly attractive to international recruiters due to their adaptability, English proficiency, and pedagogical training, further intensifying the demand for their skills in global labor markets. Teacher migration in the Philippines illustrates the intersection of economic, professional, emotional, and cultural forces, revealing how global inequalities shape individual career trajectories and national education systems. Addressing these challenges requires evidence-based retention frameworks that integrate emotional support, workload management, career advancement opportunities, competitive compensation, and cultural engagement. Without such interventions, the cycle of brain drain will persist, undermining the country’s ability to sustain a strong and motivated teaching workforce.

Given these global, national, and local concerns, this study seeks to explore the influences behind DepEd teachers leaving for overseas employment in the Schools Division of Zambales. Teacher migration in the Philippines has been widely recognized as part of the broader “brain drain” phenomenon, where skilled professionals seek opportunities abroad due to systemic challenges in their home country (Reyes, 2021; Philstar, 2024). In the education sector, these challenges include low salaries, limited career advancement, and heavy administrative workloads, which contribute to burnout and attrition (Ingersoll, 2001; Bense, 2015). These systemic issues are further compounded by inadequate instructional support and organizational inefficiencies, as highlighted by Frianeza et al. (2024), who noted that teachers often struggle with insufficient resources and unclear career pathways. The Philippine case reflects a larger global trend. Internationally, teacher migration is driven by disparities in wages, working conditions, and recognition between developed and developing nations (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). Receiving countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom have intensified recruitment efforts to address teacher shortages, offering competitive salaries, better resources, and structured career ladders. This recruitment drive reshapes the global education landscape, reinforcing the push-pull dynamics of migration (Appleton et al., 2006). Docquier and Rapoport (2012, 2019) argue that such disparities fuel brain drain, weakening the education systems of sending countries while strengthening those of receiving nations. Locally, anecdotal accounts suggest that Zambales teachers face similar pressures, compounded by cultural expectations and family obligations that reinforce migration as a pathway to success (Tantay, Monticillo, & Derasin, 2024). This aligns with Parreñas (2001), who emphasized that migration in the Philippines is deeply embedded in cultural narratives of family upliftment, and Asis (2006), who documented the social consequences of migration for left-behind families. Filipino teachers are often perceived as highly adaptable, proficient in English, and well-trained in pedagogy, making them attractive candidates for international recruitment (Asis & Bartram, 2018; Dela Cruz, 2024). This demand further intensifies the vulnerability of the Philippine education system to attrition. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, this research aims to deepen understanding of the lived experiences, motivations, challenges, and decision-making processes of teachers in Zambales. Phenomenology is particularly suited to uncovering the essence of migration intentions, as it emphasizes personal narratives and subjective meaning-making (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This methodological choice is reinforced by studies such as Lopez & Ballescás (2020), who demonstrated how Filipino educators’ migration experiences are best understood through their personal accounts of frustration, aspiration, and cultural identity. By focusing on lived experiences, this study seeks to capture the nuanced interplay of emotional, cultural, and professional factors that statistical data alone cannot fully explain. The implications of teacher migration are profound. At the national level, attrition contributes to unfilled teaching positions, inconsistencies in service delivery, and declining morale

among those who remain (PIDS, 2024). At the local level, schools in Zambales face challenges in sustaining instructional quality, particularly in rural areas where resources are already scarce. Frianeza et al. (2024) emphasize that systemic challenges—such as inadequate instructional support and limited professional growth—compound the push factors driving migration. Moreover, cultural narratives equating overseas employment with prestige amplify the attractiveness of migration, creating societal pressures that frame leaving as a moral responsibility to uplift families (Cabato, 2026; Castulo et al., 2025). Through this investigation, the study intends to contribute insights that can help inform policy reforms, retention strategies, and support programs designed to strengthen teacher welfare and reduce overseas-driven brain drain within the Philippine public school system. By situating the experiences of Zambales teachers within both national and global contexts, the research underscores the urgent need for holistic interventions that address emotional well-being, workload management, career advancement, compensation, and cultural recognition. Ultimately, this study seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations that elevate teaching as a dignified and sustainable profession, ensuring that educators remain valued contributors to Philippine education and national development.

At the local level, the Schools Division of Zambales is not exempt from the growing challenge of teacher migration. Although limited empirical research has been conducted specifically within this division, anecdotal reports and school-level accounts consistently reveal that many teachers express dissatisfaction related to workload, financial constraints, and perceived stagnation in career development—factors that often prompt them to consider employment abroad (Tantay, Monticillo, & Derasin, 2024). Teachers in Zambales also report emotional and familial influences, such as the desire to support their families financially and the cultural appeal of overseas employment, which further shape their migration intentions. These local realities mirror national findings where Filipino teachers face heavy administrative tasks, inadequate compensation, and limited promotion opportunities, leading to burnout and attrition (Reyes, 2021; Santos & Dizon, 2022). Recent studies emphasize that migration decisions are not purely economic but also tied to social expectations and cultural narratives that equate overseas work with success (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). In Zambales, where many households rely on remittances, the pressure to migrate is reinforced by community norms and family obligations (PIDS, 2024). This aligns with findings by Asis (2006), who documented how migration reshapes family dynamics, with left-behind children and spouses adjusting to new roles while relying on remittances for survival. Similarly, Parreñas (2001) highlighted that migration in the Philippine context is deeply embedded in cultural notions of *pag-aahon ng pamilya* (uplifting the family), which resonates strongly in provinces like Zambales. These cultural expectations create a powerful narrative that frames migration not only as an economic choice but also as a moral responsibility to secure family well-being and social prestige. Beyond cultural expectations, professional frustrations also play a critical role in shaping migration intentions. Frianeza et al. (2024) noted that systemic challenges in the Philippine education system—such as inadequate instructional materials, insufficient classroom support, and limited professional growth—compound the push factors driving migration. Teachers often feel trapped in stagnant career pathways, with promotion systems perceived as slow, inequitable, and influenced by favoritism. Lopez and Balleascas (2020) further observed that Filipino educators often perceive foreign systems as offering clearer career pathways, structured recognition, and merit-based advancement, contrasting sharply with the stagnation they experience locally. This comparative disadvantage magnifies the appeal of overseas employment, where teachers anticipate greater respect, professional dignity, and opportunities for growth. The interplay of emotional, cultural, and professional factors suggests that teachers in Zambales are not only motivated by financial incentives but also by aspirations for recognition, dignity, and fulfillment. Migration decisions are shaped by a convergence of systemic inefficiencies, cultural pressures, and personal aspirations. Teachers weigh the emotional costs of leaving—such as separation from family and uncertainty about adaptation—against the promise of professional stability and societal prestige abroad. As Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) argue, lived experiences of Filipino educators abroad reveal both opportunities and struggles, underscoring the importance of grounding retention strategies in the authentic voices of teachers at the local level. Despite these realities, there remains a lack of qualitative, context-specific studies exploring how teachers in Zambales personally interpret and experience these challenges. Addressing this gap is crucial, as localized research can provide insights into the nuanced motivations of educators and inform policy interventions tailored to the needs of teachers in the division. By situating Zambales within the broader discourse on teacher migration, this study contributes to evidence-based retention frameworks that integrate emotional, cultural, professional, and economic dimensions. Ultimately, understanding the lived experiences of teachers in Zambales is essential

for designing interventions that sustain the teaching workforce, mitigate brain drain, and strengthen the long-term capacity of the Philippine public education system.

Analyzing the experiences of Zambales teachers within both national and global contexts, this research seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations to sustain the teaching workforce and mitigate the growing challenge of teacher migration. Teacher attrition in the Philippines is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader global pattern where educators from developing nations seek opportunities abroad due to systemic inequities in compensation, workload, and career advancement (Ingersoll, 2001; Bense, 2015; OECD, 2019). By situating Zambales within this wider discourse, the study underscores the importance of understanding how local realities intersect with global labor demands, shaping teachers' migration intentions in complex and multidimensional ways.

As Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) highlight, understanding the lived realities of Filipino educators in both local and international contexts is essential for designing interventions that address not only economic concerns but also emotional, cultural, and professional dimensions of migration. Teachers in Zambales, like their counterparts nationwide, report dissatisfaction with heavy administrative workloads, limited promotion opportunities, and inadequate compensation (Reyes, 2021; Santos & Dizon, 2022). These frustrations are compounded by emotional exhaustion and feelings of undervaluation, which often push educators to consider overseas employment as a pathway to dignity, recognition, and stability.

Cultural expectations further intensify migration intentions. In provinces such as Zambales, where many households rely on remittances, overseas employment is often framed as a moral responsibility to uplift the family (*pag-aahon ng pamilya*) and achieve social prestige (Parreñas, 2001; Asis, 2006). This cultural narrative reinforces the perception that migration equates to success, creating societal pressures that make staying in local teaching positions appear less rewarding. Teachers thus navigate not only professional frustrations but also cultural obligations and familial expectations, which collectively shape their decision-making processes.

High-income countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom continue to intensify recruitment efforts to address teacher shortages, offering competitive salaries, structured career pathways, and stronger recognition systems (UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2020). Filipino teachers, known for their adaptability, English proficiency, and pedagogical training, are highly sought after in these contexts (Asis & Bartram, 2018; Dela Cruz, 2024). This demand amplifies the vulnerability of local education systems, as the loss of skilled educators contributes to brain drain and undermines the long-term capacity of public schools in provinces like Zambales (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012; Teachers' Dignity Coalition, 2024). Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study emphasizes the importance of capturing teachers' personal narratives and subjective meaning-making (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lived experiences provide critical insights into the interplay of emotional, cultural, and professional push factors that statistical data alone cannot fully explain. As Lopez & Ballecas (2020) demonstrated, Filipino educators' migration experiences are best understood through their accounts of frustration, aspiration, and identity, which reveal the deeper motivations behind their decisions.

This research aims to contribute to evidence-based policy reforms and retention frameworks tailored to the needs of teachers in Zambales. By grounding recommendations in authentic teacher voices, the study seeks to inform interventions that address systemic inefficiencies, strengthen professional pathways, improve compensation, and reframe cultural narratives. In doing so, it positions teaching as a dignified and sustainable profession, ensuring that educators remain valued contributors to both local communities and the broader Philippine education system. This study is qualitative in nature and focused on uncovering the underlying influences that drive Department of Education (DepEd) teachers in the Schools Division of Zambales to consider or pursue overseas employment. Specifically, it explored the emotional, cultural, and professional factors that shape their decision-making processes, as well as the personal and professional experiences that contribute to their migration intentions. The research was anchored on the Push and Pull Theory of Migration (Lee, 1966) and the Two-Factor Theory of Motivation (Herzberg, 1959), which served as interpretive lenses for understanding teachers' experiences and perspectives. These frameworks are particularly relevant in the Philippine context, where

migration is often shaped by systemic challenges such as low compensation, heavy workloads, and limited career mobility (Frianeza et al., 2024; Lopez & Balleascas, 2020).

The study involved thirty (30) selected DepEd teachers from various elementary and secondary schools within the Division of Zambales. Participants include teachers who either (a) have previous migration experience and (b) are currently working abroad and willing to participate via remote interview. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that only those with direct and relevant experiences contribute meaningful insights to the phenomenon under investigation. Data were gathered through unstructured interviews to allow participants the freedom to narrate their stories authentically. Thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, were utilized to identify, analyze, and interpret recurring patterns and themes across participant narratives.

The participants in this study were selected based on specific inclusion criteria to ensure that only individuals with relevant and meaningful experiences contributed to the exploration of teacher migration within the Schools Division of Zambales. First, participants had to be current or former DepEd teachers serving in public schools within the division, as their insights were essential to understanding localized realities and institutional conditions influencing migration decisions. Additionally, participants were required to possess direct experience related to overseas migration—either by having previously worked abroad, currently being employed overseas, or demonstrating clear intentions or preparations to migrate, such as undergoing application processes, attending orientation seminars, or actively seeking international teaching opportunities. Their exposure to migration, whether realized or anticipated, ensured that they could provide deeper reflections regarding the motivations, influences, and challenges associated with leaving DepEd for work abroad. To achieve this, the study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research to identify and select individuals who are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015). This method was chosen because the research sought to capture the lived experiences of teachers whose perspectives were most relevant to the study's objectives, rather than to generalize findings across the entire population. By deliberately selecting participants who met the inclusion criteria, the researcher ensured that the data collected would be rich, contextually grounded, and directly aligned with the study's focus on migration intentions. Purposive sampling was further complemented by criterion-based selection, wherein participants were screened according to specific conditions such as length of service in DepEd, exposure to migration processes, and willingness to share personal narratives. This approach allowed the researcher to include a diverse range of voices—from early-career teachers contemplating migration to veteran educators who had already experienced working abroad. Such diversity provided a more comprehensive understanding of how migration intentions cut across different career stages and personal circumstances. The sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation, a key consideration in phenomenological research. Saturation occurs when no new themes or insights emerge from additional interviews, indicating that the phenomenon has been sufficiently explored (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). In this study, thirty (30) participants were purposively selected, a number deemed adequate to capture the complexity of migration experiences while allowing for in-depth analysis of individual narratives. This sample size aligns with Creswell and Poth's (2018) recommendation that phenomenological studies typically involve 5–25 participants, though larger samples may be justified when the phenomenon under investigation is multifaceted.

Phenomenology was chosen as the methodological approach because it allows for a deeper exploration of lived experiences, capturing the subjective meanings teachers attach to their migration decisions (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Central to phenomenology is the emphasis on personal narratives and meaning-making. By foregrounding teachers' accounts, the study seeks to understand how individuals interpret their circumstances, negotiate cultural expectations, and respond to systemic challenges. This methodological choice acknowledges that migration is not a uniform process but a deeply personal journey influenced by overlapping factors such as burnout, family obligations, and aspirations for professional dignity. Through phenomenology, the researcher can identify patterns across narratives while respecting the uniqueness of each teacher's experience, thereby producing insights that are both contextually grounded and theoretically rich. Previous studies have demonstrated the value of phenomenology in migration research. For example, Diokno et al. (2020) employed phenomenological methods to examine the lived experiences of Filipino educators abroad, revealing how professional frustrations and cultural obligations intersect in shaping migration decisions. Similarly,

Macanlalay & Gaza (2025) highlighted the coping strategies and adaptive mechanisms of teachers working overseas, showing how phenomenology can illuminate the emotional and psychological dimensions of migration that are often overlooked in policy discussions. These studies underscore the methodological strength of phenomenology in capturing the complexity of human experiences, particularly in contexts where migration is driven by both systemic inequities and cultural narratives. Applying this approach to teachers in Zambales allows the study to situate local realities within broader national and global contexts. Teachers in the division face challenges such as heavy administrative workloads, limited career advancement, and inadequate compensation, which mirror national findings (Reyes, 2021; Santos & Dizon, 2022). Yet, phenomenology enables the researcher to go beyond these structural issues by exploring how teachers personally interpret and respond to them. For instance, some may view migration as a means of achieving financial stability, while others may see it as fulfilling cultural expectations of *pag-aahon ng pamilya* (uplifting the family) (Parreñas, 2001; Asis, 2006). By capturing these subjective meanings, the study provides a more holistic understanding of migration intentions that integrates economic, emotional, and cultural dimensions. Moreover, phenomenology aligns with the study's goal of informing evidence-based retention strategies. As Lopez & Balleascas (2020) demonstrated, Filipino educators' migration experiences are best understood through their personal accounts of frustration, aspiration, and identity. Such insights are critical for designing interventions that resonate with teachers' lived realities rather than imposing generic solutions. By uncovering the essence of migration intentions among Zambales teachers, this study contributes to the development of policies and frameworks that address not only material concerns but also the intangible aspects of teacher well-being, recognition, and professional fulfillment.

Migration decisions in the Philippine context are not solely economic but are deeply embedded in cultural expectations and family obligations. Asis (2006) documented how migration reshapes family dynamics, with left-behind children and spouses adjusting to new roles while relying on remittances for survival. Parreñas (2001) similarly emphasized that migration is framed as a moral responsibility, with teachers often perceiving overseas employment as a way to uplift their families. This moral framing is particularly evident in the concept of *pag-aahon ng pamilya* (uplifting the family), which positions migration as both an economic necessity and a cultural duty. In Zambales, where many households depend heavily on remittances, these cultural narratives are especially strong. Teachers often feel pressured by community norms that equate migration with success, reinforcing the idea that working abroad is not only a financial solution but also a social expectation (Castulo et al., 2025; Cabato, 2026). This pressure is magnified by the visibility of returning Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who are celebrated for their ability to provide for their families, build homes, and finance education. Such community recognition creates a cycle where migration becomes the benchmark of achievement, further influencing teachers' decisions to leave. Beyond the economic and cultural dimensions, migration is also tied to emotional obligations. Teachers often express guilt and anxiety about failing to meet family expectations if they remain in local teaching positions with limited financial rewards. The emotional burden of wanting to provide better opportunities for children and dependents intensifies the appeal of overseas employment. This aligns with findings by Tantay, Monticillo, and Derasin (2024), who noted that teachers in Zambales often interpret migration as both a professional escape from stagnation and a personal fulfillment of familial duty. Moreover, migration decisions are shaped by broader societal narratives that valorize overseas employment as a pathway to prestige and upward mobility. Cabato (2026) observed that migration is frequently portrayed in media and community discourse as a success story, reinforcing the perception that those who leave are more accomplished than those who remain. This cultural framing not only influences individual teachers but also creates collective expectations within communities, where staying in local teaching positions may be perceived as settling for less. Professional frustrations further intersect with these cultural pressures. Teachers in Zambales, like many across the Philippines, face heavy administrative workloads, inadequate compensation, and limited career advancement opportunities (Reyes, 2021; Santos & Dizon, 2022). These systemic challenges compound the cultural and emotional push factors, making migration appear as the most viable option for achieving both economic stability and social recognition. Lopez and Balleascas (2020) highlighted that Filipino educators often perceive foreign systems as offering clearer career pathways and structured recognition, contrasting sharply with the stagnation they experience locally. These insights suggest that migration decisions among teachers in Zambales are not merely transactional choices driven by financial incentives. Instead, they represent complex negotiations between professional frustrations, cultural expectations, and emotional obligations. Teachers weigh the costs of leaving—such as family separation and uncertainty—against the promise of dignity, recognition, and improved

well-being abroad. Understanding these overlapping influences is crucial for designing retention strategies that address not only material concerns but also the cultural and emotional dimensions of migration.

Teacher migration is driven by disparities in wages, working conditions, and recognition between developed and developing nations (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). High-income countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom have intensified recruitment efforts to address teacher shortages, offering competitive salaries, better resources, and clearer career pathways (Ingersoll, 2001; Gonzales, 2020). These recruitment strategies have reshaped the global education landscape, creating a demand for Filipino teachers who are valued for their English proficiency, adaptability, and resilience (Asis & Bartram, 2018; Garcia, 2025). However, this global demand also exacerbates the brain drain in the Philippines, where the loss of skilled educators undermines the quality of public education (Docquier & Rapoport, 2019; Teachers' Dignity Coalition, 2024).

At the national level, studies highlight that teacher attrition and migration contribute to unfilled teaching positions and inconsistencies in service delivery in public schools (PIDS, 2024; Helpline PH, 2023). Frianeza et al. (2024) noted that systemic challenges such as inadequate instructional materials and limited professional growth opportunities compound the push factors driving migration. Moreover, the emotional toll of teaching in underfunded schools, where teachers often feel undervalued and overburdened, intensifies their desire to seek opportunities abroad (Kyriacou, 2018; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). These findings underscore the importance of addressing both structural and emotional dimensions of teacher welfare in retention strategies.

Locally, anecdotal accounts suggest that Zambales teachers face similar pressures, compounded by cultural expectations and family obligations that reinforce migration as a pathway to success (Tantay, Monticillo, & Derasin, 2024). Teachers in the division often report feelings of guilt about leaving their students, fear of separation from their families, and anxiety about adapting to new environments. Yet, these emotional struggles are often outweighed by the promise of financial stability and professional recognition abroad (Lopez & Ballescas, 2020; Garcia, 2025). This tension highlights the complex interplay between personal aspirations and social responsibilities in shaping migration intentions.

Through this investigation, the study intends to contribute insights that can help inform policy reforms, retention strategies, and support programs designed to strengthen teacher welfare and reduce overseas-driven brain drain within the Philippine public school system. Evidence-based interventions must address not only economic concerns but also emotional, cultural, and professional dimensions of teacher migration. For example, improving compensation and reducing administrative burdens can address hygiene factors, while enhancing recognition and career development opportunities can strengthen motivators (Alinsangan & Ruiz, 2021; Greenhaus et al., 2019). Additionally, community-based support programs that acknowledge the cultural pressures surrounding migration can help teachers navigate their decisions more effectively (Rajendran et al., 2017; Sumalinog, 2022).

Situating the experiences of Zambales teachers within both national and global contexts, the research seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations for sustaining the teaching workforce. As Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) highlight, understanding the lived realities of Filipino educators in both local and international contexts is essential for designing interventions that address the multifaceted nature of migration. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on teacher migration by emphasizing the importance of localized, qualitative research in informing policies that balance the aspirations of educators with the needs of the education system.

This study aimed to explore and understand the underlying factors influencing the decision of Department of Education (DepEd) teachers in the Schools Division of Zambales to leave their positions and seek employment abroad. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions: What is the profile of the participants in terms of years in teaching?; How do DepEd teachers describe their personal and professional experiences that influenced their intention to work abroad?; What emotional, cultural, and professional push factors influence teachers' decisions to leave the Philippines and consider seeking employment overseas?; How do teachers perceive the role of compensation, workload, and career advancement opportunities in their decision to migrate?; In what ways do teachers compare professional growth, recognition, and development opportunities in DepEd to those available abroad?; What challenges and struggles—emotional, psychological, or social—do teachers

encounter as they contemplate or undergo the process of migration?; and What retention plan or framework may be proposed based on the findings?

## METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative research method, specifically a phenomenological design, to explore and understand the lived experiences of Department of Education (DepEd) teachers in the Schools Division of Zambales who have considered or pursued overseas employment. A qualitative research design was deemed most appropriate since the research sought to uncover the meanings, motivations, and emotions behind teachers' decisions to leave the local teaching profession, rather than to measure variables numerically. As Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasize, qualitative research allows for the deep exploration of participants' perspectives within their natural settings, enabling the researcher to interpret how individuals construct meaning from their experiences. Phenomenology, as outlined by Moustakas (1994), focuses on capturing the essence of lived experiences by giving voice to participants' narratives. This design was particularly relevant because teacher migration is not only an economic or professional issue but also an emotional and cultural phenomenon. Employing semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires, the study provided participants with the opportunity to articulate their personal stories, challenges, and aspirations in their own words. Furthermore, phenomenological research emphasizes bracketing—the researcher's effort to set aside personal biases to authentically capture participants' perspectives (Van Manen, 1990). This ensured that the findings reflected teachers' genuine experiences rather than preconceived assumptions. The design also allowed for thematic analysis, which identified recurring patterns such as push-pull factors, emotional strain, and cultural obligations. Overall, the phenomenological design provided a holistic and human-centered lens for understanding the complex motivations driving teacher migration in Zambales. Data was gathered through Google Forms, Email, and unstructured interviews through audio recording, allowing participants to express their thoughts freely and in-depth. This method enabled the researcher to gain rich, descriptive data that reflect the complex interplay of emotional, cultural, and professional considerations surrounding migration. The researcher served as the primary instrument in collecting and analyzing data, applying thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework to identify recurring themes and patterns from the narratives.

The participants of this study consisted of thirty (30) teachers with 3 to 5 years of service from selected public elementary and secondary schools in the Division of Zambales. As shown in Table 1, seven (7) teachers were selected from Sta. Cruz, Candelaria, Masinloc described as Zone 1; eight (8) from Palauig, Iba, Botolan as Zone 2; eight (8) from Cabangan, San Felipe, San Narciso, San Antonio described as Zone 3; and San Marcelino, Castillejos, Subic as Zone 4, with seven (7) participants.

These schools were selected to represent a balanced distribution of teachers across different public institutions within the division, ensuring a fair and comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing teachers' intentions to migrate abroad. The inclusion of teachers from multiple schools allowed the researcher to gather diverse insights regarding compensation, workload, career advancement, and professional development opportunities in various school contexts.

Table 1 Distribution of the Teacher–Respondents from Secondary Schools, Division of Zambales

Public Secondary Schools	Teachers ( <i>f</i> )
Zone 1	7
Zone 2	8
Zone 3	8
Zone 4	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>

The Division of Zambales serves as an ideal location for this study because it encompasses a mix of urban and rural school settings, reflecting the varied teaching experiences and challenges that may contribute to teachers' perceptions and migration intentions. This distribution ensures that the findings of the study are representative of the broader population of public secondary school teachers within the division.

The primary research instrument employed in this study was a semi-structured interview guide, carefully designed to elicit rich qualitative data from DepEd teachers in the Schools Division of Zambales who have considered or pursued overseas employment. Semi-structured interviews are widely recognized in qualitative

inquiry for their ability to balance structure with flexibility, enabling researchers to explore predetermined themes while allowing participants to articulate their lived experiences in their own words (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The instrument was divided into several sections to capture the multidimensional aspects of teacher migration. It includes the Participant Profile, Personal and Professional Experiences, Emotional Push Factors, Cultural Push Factors, Professional Push Factors, including bureaucratic challenges, limited recognition, and career stagnation, alongside Compensation and Workload, which assessed teachers' perceptions of salary, benefits, and administrative burdens. Frianeza et al. (2024) highlights that systemic inefficiency such as inadequate instructional resources and weak professional development systems, exacerbate these frustrations. To capture aspirations, the guide included questions on Career Advancement and a Comparison of Professional Growth Opportunities in DepEd versus abroad, highlighting perceived gaps in recognition and support. Finally, the section on Challenges and Struggles in the Migration Decision-Making Process explored emotional, psychological, and social obstacles faced by teachers preparing for overseas employment.

The data collection for this qualitative study was conducted through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with selected public elementary and secondary school teachers from the Division of Zambales. These participants were purposefully chosen based on their teaching experience—ranging from three to five years in the public school system—and their perspectives regarding the factors influencing their decisions to either remain in or leave the Department of Education (DepEd) for employment abroad. Purposeful sampling is widely recognized in qualitative research as an effective strategy for identifying participants who can provide rich, relevant, and diverse insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By focusing on teachers with several years of experience, the study ensured that participants had sufficient exposure to the systemic realities of the Philippine education system, making their reflections particularly valuable in understanding migration intentions.

To maximize accessibility and participation, the researcher employed multiple modes of communication and data collection. Initial contact with participants was facilitated through social media platforms, which have increasingly become valuable tools for recruitment in qualitative research due to their wide reach and convenience (Bryman, 2016; Kozinets, 2019). Social media allowed the researcher to establish rapport, explain the purpose of the study, and schedule interviews at times most convenient for the participants. This approach was particularly effective in reaching teachers in geographically dispersed areas of Zambales, where traditional recruitment methods may have been limited.

In addition to interviews, responses were also gathered through Google Forms, which provided a flexible and accessible means for participants to share their perspectives. Online survey tools such as Google Forms are widely recognized for their efficiency in collecting qualitative data, especially in contexts where participants may have limited availability for synchronous interviews (Evans & Mathur, 2018). The use of Google Forms allowed participants to reflect on open-ended questions at their own pace, ensuring thoughtful responses while reducing logistical barriers. This method complemented the interviews by capturing additional insights and enabling triangulation of data sources, thereby enhancing the credibility and richness of the findings (Patton, 2015).

Semi-structured interviews remained the primary method of data collection, as they allowed for flexibility in exploring participants' lived experiences while maintaining alignment with the study's research objectives. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or virtually, depending on participant preference and availability. With participants' consent, all sessions were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in transcription and analysis. Audio-recording is considered a best practice in qualitative research, as it preserves the authenticity of participants' voices and minimizes the risk of data loss or misinterpretation (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Field notes were also taken during and after the interviews to capture non-verbal cues, contextual observations, and emerging insights that could enrich the interpretation of the data.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the data collection process. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained, and participants were assured of confidentiality, voluntary involvement, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The use of social media and online platforms was carefully

managed to protect privacy, with communications limited to professional contexts and data securely stored. Integrating multiple methods—social media contact, Google Forms responses, and audio-recorded interviews—the study ensured a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of teacher migration intentions in Zambales. This multimodal approach not only increased participation but also strengthened the validity of the findings through methodological triangulation. The combination of synchronous and asynchronous data collection methods provided flexibility, inclusivity, and depth, making the study well-suited to capture the complex interplay of professional, cultural, and emotional factors influencing teacher migration.

The main goal of the data collection process was to obtain rich, detailed, and authentic narratives that would capture the lived experiences, motivations, and reflections of teachers concerning the phenomenon of brain drain in the Philippine education system. As Moustakas (1994) emphasizes in phenomenological research, the authenticity of participants' voices is central to uncovering the essence of lived experiences. Thus, the design of the data collection process prioritized openness, inclusivity, and participant comfort to encourage honest and meaningful sharing.

Prior to the actual data gathering, the researcher sought approval from the Schools Division Superintendent of Zambales and secured informed consent from all participants. Ethical compliance was a cornerstone of the study, ensuring that participants were fully aware of the purpose of the research, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. This aligns with the ethical standards outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018), who stress the importance of transparency and participant autonomy in qualitative inquiry. Each participant was oriented about the study's objectives and reassured that their identities would remain confidential, with pseudonyms used in transcripts and reports to protect anonymity.

After gaining permission, the researcher scheduled interviews at times and locations most convenient and comfortable for the participants. This flexibility was crucial in creating a safe and open environment conducive to honest sharing. Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) note that the interview setting plays a significant role in shaping the quality of responses, as participants are more likely to disclose sensitive experiences when they feel secure and respected.

The primary data were collected using a validated qualitative interview guide developed by the researcher. The guide consisted of open-ended questions aligned with the study's statement of the problem and theoretical framework. It was divided into several sections to capture the multidimensional aspects of teacher migration.

The Participant Profile section gathered demographic and professional background information such as years of teaching experience, current designation, and subject area taught. This contextual data provided essential background for interpreting participants' responses. The Personal and Professional Experiences section allowed teachers to narrate their career journeys and highlight significant events that shaped their professional identities. The Emotional Push Factors section probed into stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion, reflecting Kyriacou's (2018) findings on teacher burnout and Maslach and Leiter's (2016) multidimensional model of emotional strain. The Cultural Push Factors section examined how community perceptions and family expectations influenced migration intentions, echoing Asis (2006) and Parreñas (2001), who emphasize the cultural framing of migration as family upliftment. The Professional Push Factors section explored bureaucratic challenges, limited recognition, and career stagnation, consistent with Mendoza (2021) and Santos & Dizon (2022). The Compensation and Workload section assessed teachers' perceptions of salary, benefits, and administrative burdens, aligning with Frianeza et al. (2024) who highlight systemic inefficiencies in the Philippine education system. The Career Advancement and Comparison of Opportunities section highlighted perceived gaps in recognition and support between DepEd and overseas employment, reflecting Lopez & Ballescás (2020) and Garcia (2025). Finally, the Challenges and Struggles in Migration Decision-Making section explored emotional, psychological, and social obstacles faced by teachers preparing for overseas employment.

Combining structured prompts with open-ended questions, the instrument ensured flexibility while maintaining focus on the study's objectives. This design allowed participants to articulate their lived experiences authentically, consistent with Creswell and Poth's (2018) emphasis on instruments that facilitate deep exploration in qualitative research.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or virtually, depending on the participants' preference and availability. With participants' consent, all sessions were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in data transcription and analysis. Field notes were also taken during and after the interviews to capture non-verbal cues, contextual observations, and emerging insights that could enrich the interpretation of the data. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) suggest, field notes complement recordings by providing additional layers of meaning that may not be evident in verbal transcripts alone.

After the interviews, the researcher transcribed the recordings verbatim to maintain the authenticity of participants' voices and experiences. This practice is consistent with Moustakas (1994), who emphasizes the importance of preserving participants' exact words in phenomenological research to capture the essence of lived experiences. To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, participants were allowed to review their transcripts for accuracy and make clarifications or corrections where necessary—a process known as member checking. This strategy is widely recognized as a means of validating qualitative data by ensuring that interpretations accurately reflect participants' intended meanings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher also kept a reflective journal throughout the data collection phase to document personal observations and minimize potential biases during interpretation. Reflexivity is a critical component of qualitative research, as it allows the researcher to remain aware of their positionality and its potential influence on data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

All data were securely stored in files, accessible only to the researcher, ensuring ethical compliance and confidentiality of information. This practice aligns with ethical guidelines in qualitative research, which prioritize the protection of participants' privacy and the responsible handling of sensitive data. Through this systematic and ethical data collection process, the study seeks to uncover the complex interplay of professional, economic, and emotional factors influencing the migration intentions of Filipino teachers. The use of semi-structured interviews as the primary data-gathering tool is deemed most appropriate, as it provides the depth and richness needed to fully understand the phenomenon under investigation. Lopez and Ballescas (2020) and Cabato (2026) emphasize that migration studies require tools capable of capturing nuanced narratives that go beyond economic explanations, integrating cultural, emotional, and professional dimensions.

The researcher upheld the highest ethical principles throughout the study, with additional considerations due to the nature of qualitative inquiry, which involved deeper engagement with participants' personal experiences. Qualitative research often requires participants to disclose sensitive reflections, making ethical safeguards essential to protect their dignity, privacy, and well-being (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). Before the conduct of the unstructured interviews, the purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits of the study were clearly explained to each participant. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews, and participants were reminded that their involvement was voluntary and that they could refuse to answer any question or withdraw at any point without penalty. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), transparency and voluntary participation are essential components of ethical qualitative research, ensuring that participants retain autonomy and control over their involvement.

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms or codes were used instead of real names when transcribing interview data. Audio recordings were made only with the participants' explicit permission and were stored securely on a password-protected device. Transcriptions were kept confidential, and any identifying information was removed before analysis and reporting. This practice aligns with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) emphasis on trustworthiness, which requires researchers to safeguard participants' identities and maintain integrity in data handling. The researcher also remained sensitive to participants' emotions and maintained neutrality during the interviews, as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), to avoid bias and respect participants' perspectives. Reflexivity was practiced through journaling, ensuring that personal assumptions did not interfere with the authenticity of participants' voices (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical clearance and approval were granted by the Graduate School Research Ethics Committee of the President Ramon Magsaysay State University, ensuring that all procedures complied with institutional and national ethical research standards. This step reinforced adherence to the Philippine National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Social Science Research (PhilHealth Research Ethics Board, 2017), which emphasize respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Furthermore, member checking was employed, allowing participants to review

transcripts and confirm the accuracy of their statements, thereby strengthening credibility and ensuring that their perspectives were faithfully represented (Birt et al., 2016).

Overall, the ethical compliance measures ensured that the study was conducted with integrity, respect, and accountability. By prioritizing informed consent, confidentiality, neutrality, and institutional approval, the researcher safeguarded participants' rights while producing credible and trustworthy findings on teacher migration.

The qualitative data gathered from the in-depth interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis Framework in combination with Moustakas' (1994) Phenomenological Method. This analytic approach was employed to systematically uncover recurring themes, meanings, and patterns from the lived experiences of public-school teachers in the Division of Zambales regarding their decisions or intentions to migrate abroad. The process aimed to interpret not just the *what* and *how* of participants' experiences, but also the *why*—the underlying motivations, challenges, and aspirations that contribute to the phenomenon of teacher migration. Upon completion of the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and to preserve the authenticity of participants' responses. The researcher conducted multiple readings of the transcripts to gain a holistic understanding of the data. Following Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological steps, the researcher first engaged in *epoche*—a process of setting aside personal biases and preconceptions to view the data objectively. This was followed by horizontalization, where every significant statement relevant to the research questions was treated with equal importance. These significant statements were clustered into meaning units or themes, which represented the essence of participant's shared experiences. Next, the researcher employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process for thematic analysis: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Through this process, recurring patterns related to *compensation and benefits, workload and working conditions, career advancement and professional development, and migration intentions* were identified and interpreted in the context of the teacher's lived realities. Coding was done manually, allowing the researcher to remain closely engaged with the data and to trace connections between individual experiences and the broader issue of teacher migration.

The data analysis process began with data familiarization, wherein all verbatim responses from the participants were carefully transcribed and thoroughly reviewed to ensure accuracy and understanding of the gathered information. This was followed by the initial open coding process, where each response was meticulously examined and assigned with short descriptive labels or codes that accurately represented the participants' statements. For example, the response "Mabagal po ang promotion at kulang ang recognition" was coded as "Slow promotion" and "Lack of recognition."

Afterward, axial coding was conducted by grouping codes with similar meanings into appropriate sub-categories. Codes such as "Slow promotion," "Favoritism," and "Limited recognition" were clustered under the axial category "Career stagnation." These axial categories were then synthesized through selective coding to develop broader overarching themes that reflected the major push and pull factors identified in the study. For instance, the axial category "Career stagnation" contributed to the broader theme "Professional Push Factors."

Furthermore, responses written in Filipino were translated into English to promote easier accessibility and understanding for foreign readers. To ensure reliability and consistency, all codes were cross-checked and reviewed carefully. Whenever ambiguities emerged, the researcher revisited the original transcripts to validate the coding decisions. Peer review and consultation with academic advisers were also conducted to strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis. Finally, a coding matrix was developed to systematically document the relationship between verbatim responses, open codes, axial codes, and the final themes generated in the study.

The analysis of the ten audio-recordings was conducted through a manual, rigorous process to ensure the trustworthiness of findings. Each recording was first transcribed verbatim, capturing participants' exact words to preserve authenticity. Following transcription, the researcher engaged in data cleaning, which involved reviewing the transcripts line by line to correct errors, remove redundancies, and clarify unclear statements. This step also included verifying the accuracy of responses through member checking, where participants were asked to confirm that their transcribed accounts reflected their intended meaning. Data cleaning was crucial in

eliminating inconsistencies and ensuring that only reliable and valid information was carried forward into the coding stage.

Once cleaned, the transcripts were subjected to open coding, where significant words and phrases were manually highlighted to represent raw data points. These codes were then clustered into axial codes, identifying sub-themes such as emotional exhaustion, compensation dissatisfaction, or cultural pressures. Through constant comparison across transcripts, recurring patterns were consolidated into broader themes that captured the lived experiences of teachers. Throughout this process, the researcher maintained memos and notes to document coding decisions and reflections, ensuring transparency and rigor.

Finally, the cleaned and coded data were synthesized into thematic categories that aligned with the study's objectives. To enhance validity, triangulation was applied by comparing qualitative insights with quantitative indicators, such as workload reports and salary data, ensuring consistency between narrative accounts and documented realities (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This methodological triangulation reinforced the robustness of findings by integrating multiple sources of evidence. The cleaned and analyzed data ultimately revealed five major thematic areas: lived experiences, emotional factors, push factors, pull factors, and migration challenges. By combining data cleaning, manual coding, and thematic clustering, the analysis ensured that findings were both credible and representative of participants' voices. This manual approach emphasized immersion in the data, allowing the researcher to capture nuances and emotional depth that automated tools might overlook, thereby strengthening the validity of conclusions and recommendations.

These insights were synthesized into emergent themes that form the foundation for the proposed Teacher Retention Framework, which aims to address issues of compensation, workload, and professional growth within the Philippine education system.

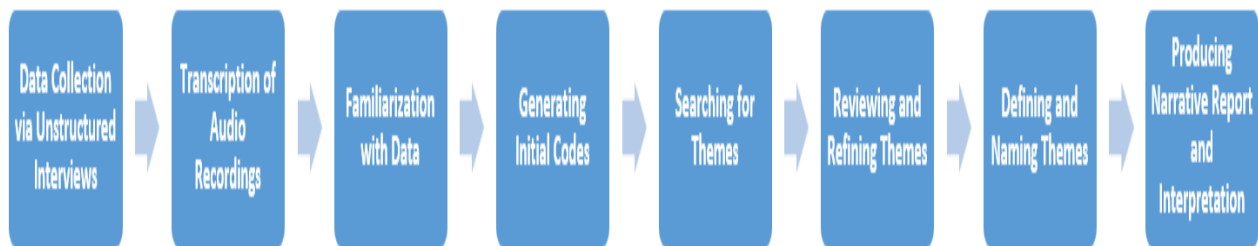


Figure 3. Framework for the Analysis of Qualitative Data Based

Figure 3 illustrates the Summary Table of Qualitative Data Analysis Steps as a flowchart. The flowchart depicted the systematic process that was employed in analyzing the qualitative data collected from interviews with DepEd teachers in the Schools Division of Zambales. The process combined the phenomenological method of Moustakas (1994) and the thematic analysis framework of Braun and Clarke (2006) to ensure a comprehensive and credible interpretation of the participants' lived experiences. Each step in the diagram represented a distinct yet interconnected phase in transforming raw interview data into meaningful themes that captured the essence of the phenomenon being studied.

The process began with Data Collection via Unstructured Interviews, where open-ended questions were used to allow participants to share their thoughts, emotions, and experiences freely. This phase ensured that authentic and detailed responses were gathered. The next step, Transcription of Audio Recordings, involved converting recorded interviews into written form. This ensured accuracy and enabled the researcher to review the data multiple times, preserving the participants' exact words and tone for analysis.

Once the data were transcribed, the Familiarization with Data phase commenced. In this step, the researcher read and re-read the transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the content. Important statements, ideas, and patterns were noted to capture the initial sense of the participant's lived realities. This stage aligned with Moustakas' (1994) concept of epoche—bracketing personal biases to maintain objectivity.

After immersion, the process moved to Generating Initial Codes, where significant statements and key ideas were identified and labeled. Each code represented a concept or factor relevant to the research questions, such as compensation, workload, motivation, or migration intention. These initial codes were then grouped in the Searching for Themes stage, where patterns and connections among the coded data were identified. This phase helped reveal underlying meanings that went beyond individual responses.

Next was Reviewing and Refining Themes, where the researcher examined the themes for coherence, consistency, and distinctiveness. Overlapping or redundant themes were merged, while irrelevant ones were removed to ensure analytical clarity. This was followed by Defining and Naming Themes, where each theme was clearly described and given a title that captured its essence—such as Push Factors: Workload and Financial Strain or Pull Factors: Career Growth Abroad.

Finally, the process culminated in Producing the Narrative Report and Interpretation, where the identified themes were synthesized and explained in detail. Direct quotations from participants were incorporated to support the findings, ensuring authenticity and transparency. The researcher interpreted the themes in light of the study's theoretical framework—Lee's (1966) Push and Pull Theory of Migration and Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory of Motivation—to explain how internal and external factors shaped teachers' migration intentions.

The flowchart reflected a rigorous and reflective process of qualitative analysis that transformed descriptive narratives into meaningful insights. It ensured that each phase of analysis—from data collection to interpretation—was guided by methodological discipline, ethical integrity, and theoretical grounding. Through this process, the study captured the voices of Filipino teachers and provided a deeper understanding of the emotional, professional, and socio-economic dimensions of brain drain in Philippine education.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Profile of the Participants

Results revealed a wide range of teaching experience, from early-career educators to seasoned teachers with more than fifteen years of service. This diversity underscores that migration intentions are not confined to a single career stage. Both novice and veteran teachers expressed frustrations with workload, recognition, and compensation, suggesting that systemic issues cut across tenure and subject specialization. This finding aligns with Ingersoll's (2001) assertion that teacher attrition is often driven by institutional conditions rather than individual characteristics, highlighting that dissatisfaction is embedded within the broader organizational culture of schools.

Furthermore, this presents a diverse profile of participants, ranging from early-career educators with only three years of service to veteran teachers with nearly two decades of experience. This diversity underscores that migration intentions are not confined to a single career stage or subject specialization. Instead, dissatisfaction with systemic conditions—such as workload, recognition, and compensation—cuts across tenure, teaching roles, and disciplines.

The responses reveal a spectrum of teaching experience, from “*Tatlong taon pa lang po akong nagtuturo*” (three years) to “*Labinsiyam na taon na po akong guro sa elementarya*” (nineteen years). Early-career teachers often reported feelings of disillusionment, noting that the realities of teaching did not match their initial expectations (Kyriacou, 2018). For many, the promise of teaching as a noble profession quickly gave way to bureaucratic demands, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient instructional resources. Frianeza et al. (2024) emphasize that systemic inefficiencies, including weak professional development systems and inadequate instructional support, exacerbate these frustrations.

This phenomenon aligns with Veenman's (1984) concept of “reality shock,” where novice teachers experience a gap between their expectations and the realities of classroom practice. Fantilli and McDougall (2009) similarly note that lack of mentoring and institutional support intensifies attrition among new teachers. Migration, therefore, appears as a rational response to unmet expectations, offering financial stability and professional growth at the outset of their careers.

Conversely, veteran teachers expressed frustration over stagnant career progression and limited recognition. Despite years of service, many reported that promotion processes were opaque and leadership opportunities scarce (Mendoza, 2021). This echoes Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory, which emphasizes that the absence of motivators such as achievement and advancement leads to dissatisfaction. Santos & Dizon (2022) confirm that limited career mobility within DepEd is a critical push factor, leaving teachers with few opportunities for advancement despite their long tenure.

The expanded dataset also highlights varied teaching roles, from classroom teachers to advisers and subject coordinators. For instance, one participant noted, "*Adviser po ako ng Grade 4 section*" (I am the adviser of a Grade 4 section), while another stated, "*Subject coordinator po ako sa Filipino*" (I am the subject coordinator for Filipino). These roles illustrate the layered responsibilities educators carry beyond classroom instruction.

Research confirms that additional responsibilities, such as advisory roles and subject coordination, often increase workload without corresponding recognition or compensation (Ingersoll, 2001; Bense, 2015). This imbalance contributes to professional dissatisfaction and strengthens migration intentions. Teachers perceive overseas employment as offering clearer career pathways and structured recognition, contrasting sharply with the stagnation they face locally (Lopez & Ballescas, 2020).

The responses also reveal a wide range of subject specializations, including English, Science, Mathematics, Humanities, Filipino, and Social Studies. This multidisciplinary profile reflects the breadth of the teaching workforce in Zambales. However, regardless of specialization, teachers reported similar frustrations with workload, recognition, and compensation.

Reyes (2021) found that burnout and undervaluation are common across disciplines, while Maslach and Leiter (2016) argue that burnout is multidimensional, encompassing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. These dimensions are evident among Filipino teachers across subject areas, reinforcing that migration intentions are systemic rather than discipline-specific.

Early-career teachers often reported feelings of disillusionment, noting that the realities of teaching—such as administrative burdens and low pay—did not match their initial expectations (Kyriacou, 2018). For many, the promise of teaching as a noble profession quickly gave way to the harsh realities of bureaucratic demands, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient instructional resources. Frianeza et al. (2024) emphasize that systemic inefficiencies, including weak professional development systems and inadequate instructional support, exacerbate these frustrations. As a result, migration appeared as an opportunity to secure financial stability and professional growth at the outset of their careers.

Conversely, veteran teachers, despite their years of service, expressed frustration over stagnant career progression and limited recognition. This echoes Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory, which emphasizes that the absence of motivators such as achievement and advancement leads to dissatisfaction. Mendoza (2021) and Santos & Dizon (2022) confirm that limited career mobility within DepEd is a critical push factor, leaving teachers with few opportunities for advancement despite their long tenure.

Lopez and Ballescas (2020) observed that Filipino educators abroad often experience clearer career pathways and structured recognition, contrasting sharply with the stagnation they face locally. Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) further highlight that Filipino teachers in foreign contexts report greater professional satisfaction and dignity, though these gains are accompanied by emotional challenges such as family separation and cultural adjustment.

The convergence of economic, professional, emotional, and cultural factors underscores the multidimensional nature of teacher migration. For early-career teachers, migration represents a pathway to financial stability and professional growth. For veteran teachers, it is a response to stagnation and lack of recognition. For both groups, migration is framed as a rational and culturally reinforced decision.

Retention strategies must therefore address both hygiene factors (salary, workload, job security) and motivators (recognition, career advancement, autonomy). Herzberg's framework suggests that improving hygiene factors

alone will not suffice; meaningful motivators must also be provided to sustain professional fulfillment. Frianeza et al. (2024) recommend strengthening professional development systems, while Lopez and Ballescas (2020) highlight the importance of structured recognition and merit-based promotion.

Moreover, retention strategies must consider the emotional and cultural dimensions of migration. Reyes (2021) emphasizes the need for institutional recognition to counter feelings of undervaluation, while Asis (2006) and Parreñas (2001) highlight the importance of addressing cultural narratives that valorize migration. Campaigns that elevate teaching as a dignified and respected profession within the Philippines, coupled with community engagement initiatives that highlight local teacher success stories, can help counter the perception that migration is the only pathway to success.

Finally, localized interventions are essential. Studies in Zambales and other provincial divisions reveal that migration intentions are shaped by contextual realities such as resource shortages, weak leadership, and community expectations (Tantay, Monticillo, & Derasin, 2024). Addressing these localized challenges through targeted policies—such as improving access to instructional resources, strengthening school leadership, and engaging communities in valuing teachers—can help sustain the teaching workforce at the provincial level.

## 2. Personal and Professional Experiences

Results shows and presents qualitative insights into the personal and professional experiences of DepEd teachers in Zambales, highlighting the paradoxical nature of teaching as both fulfilling and frustrating. The open codes reveal narratives of joy and meaning in teaching, yet these are consistently tempered by challenges such as heavy workloads, lack of recognition, and economic dissatisfaction. The axial codes and themes—Fulfillment vs. frustration, Workload and recognition issues, and Paradox of teaching: meaningful yet challenging—illustrate the multidimensional realities shaping teachers' career trajectories and migration intentions.

Teachers described their journey as “*masaya pero mahirap*” (fulfilling but difficult), underscoring the paradox of teaching. On one hand, teaching is rewarding because of its social impact and the joy of shaping learners' futures. On the other hand, the profession is burdened by systemic challenges that erode morale. This paradox aligns with Kyriacou's (2018) findings that while teaching can be intrinsically rewarding, stressors such as workload, administrative demands, and low pay often overshadow its meaningful aspects.

Maslach and Leiter (2016) further explain this paradox through the lens of burnout, noting that emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment coexist with teachers' sense of purpose. In Zambales, teachers expressed pride in their role but lamented the lack of recognition and support, echoing Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory, which emphasizes that motivators such as achievement and recognition are critical for sustaining professional satisfaction.

One of the additional open codes—“*Halos araw-araw may dala akong trabaho sa bahay*” (Almost every day I bring work home)—highlights the spillover of workload into personal life. This reflects the blurred boundaries between professional and personal time, contributing to stress and emotional exhaustion. Helpline PH (2023) reported that administrative overload and clerical demands are among the most common complaints of DepEd teachers, reinforcing the theme of workload strain.

Reyes (2021) found that burnout and undervaluation are pervasive across career stages, with teachers frequently reporting emotional exhaustion brought about by the demands of the profession. This emotional strain is not limited to novice educators but extends to veteran teachers who feel that their years of service are met with limited recognition and stagnant career progression. Maslach and Leiter (2016) describe burnout as multidimensional, encompassing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment—all of which are evident among Filipino teachers. These conditions intensify migration intentions, as overseas employment is perceived to offer not only better compensation but also healthier work-life balance, clearer career pathways, and structured recognition (Lopez & Ballescas, 2020; OECD, 2019). For many educators, migration becomes both a rational response to systemic frustrations and a means of reclaiming professional dignity, reinforcing the view that emotional well-being is central to sustaining teacher retention.

Another open code—“*Mababa po ang sahod kumpara sa abroad, kaya nakaka-discourage*” (The salary here is low compared to abroad, so it is discouraging)—underscores the economic dissatisfaction that drives migration intentions among teachers. Participants consistently compared local salaries with those offered abroad, perceiving overseas employment as a rational choice to secure financial stability and improve their quality of life. Reyes (2021) noted that wage disparities of up to five to ten times higher in host countries make migration highly appealing, while OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) confirm that compensation is one of the strongest determinants of teacher retention globally. This finding resonates with Becker’s (1964) Human Capital Theory, which frames migration as an investment decision to maximize returns on professional qualifications. Teachers view their skills and credentials as assets that yield greater value in international labor markets. Docquier and Rapoport (2012) similarly argue that migration flows are shaped by rational calculations, where individuals weigh the costs of leaving against the anticipated benefits of higher income, structured recognition, and improved working conditions abroad. Thus, economic dissatisfaction, rooted in salary inequities, emerges as a critical push factor that intensifies migration intentions and highlights the urgent need for competitive compensation reforms within DepEd.

Docquier and Rapoport (2012) argue that wage disparities are central to the phenomenon of brain drain, as skilled professionals migrate to contexts where their expertise is more highly compensated and valued. This economic imbalance creates strong push factors for teachers in the Philippines, who often perceive their local salaries as inadequate relative to the demands of the profession. Lopez and Ballescas (2020) observed that Filipino educators abroad frequently experience structured recognition, merit-based promotion, and clearer career pathways, contrasting sharply with the stagnation and limited mobility they face locally. These opportunities abroad not only provide financial stability but also foster professional dignity, reinforcing migration as both an economic and professional decision.

Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) further highlight that Filipino teachers in foreign contexts report greater satisfaction with their roles, noting improved working conditions, access to resources, and institutional respect. However, these gains are accompanied by emotional challenges such as family separation, cultural adjustment, and the strain of transnational caregiving responsibilities. Parreñas (2001) emphasizes that such emotional costs are deeply embedded in the migration experience, underscoring its complexity. Thus, while wage disparities and professional recognition abroad drive migration, the decision is also shaped by emotional and cultural trade-offs that must be considered in retention strategies.

Recognition emerged as a recurring theme in Table 3, with teachers describing their work as “*rewarding pero kulang sa recognition*” (rewarding but lacking in recognition). This sentiment reflects the undervaluation of their contributions, where the intrinsic rewards of teaching—such as student success and community service—are overshadowed by the absence of institutional acknowledgment. Santos and Dizon (2022) emphasize that limited recognition and career mobility are critical push factors for migration, as teachers often feel their efforts are invisible within bureaucratic structures. Herzberg’s (1959) Two-Factor Theory provides a useful lens for interpreting this finding. While hygiene factors such as salary, workload, and job security prevent dissatisfaction, they do not generate true motivation. Instead, motivators—recognition, achievement, and opportunities for advancement—are essential for sustaining professional fulfillment. In the Philippine context, however, these motivators are often absent, leaving teachers with a sense of stagnation despite their dedication. Frianeza et al. (2024) further highlight that weak professional development systems exacerbate this undervaluation, depriving teachers of growth opportunities. Globally, Lopez and Ballescas (2020) observed that Filipino educators abroad often experience structured recognition and merit-based promotion, contrasting sharply with local stagnation. Thus, recognition is not a peripheral issue but a central determinant of teacher satisfaction and retention.

Beyond professional and economic factors, cultural expectations also shape migration intentions. Asis (2006) and Parreñas (2001) emphasize that migration is often framed as a moral responsibility to uplift the family (*pag-aahon ng pamilya*). Teachers in Zambales echoed this sentiment, noting that low salaries make it difficult to meet family needs, thereby intensifying the appeal of overseas employment. Tantay, Monticillo, & Derasin (2024) observed that increasing numbers of teachers in Zambales are preparing credentials for overseas employment, reflecting how cultural obligations intersect with professional dissatisfaction.

Globally, OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) report similar patterns, where teachers across career stages seek overseas employment due to systemic challenges in their home countries. Bense (2015) adds that teacher migration is often driven by dissatisfaction with workload, salary, and recognition, rather than individual shortcomings. These findings reinforce the idea that migration intentions are systemic, cutting across novice and veteran teachers alike.

The findings from Table 3 underscore the need for retention strategies that address both hygiene factors (salary, workload, job security) and motivators (recognition, career advancement, autonomy). Herzberg's theory suggests that improving hygiene factors alone will not suffice; meaningful motivators must also be provided to sustain professional fulfillment.

Frianeza et al. (2024) recommend strengthening professional development systems, recognizing that continuous training and mentoring are essential to sustaining teacher motivation and reducing attrition. Without structured opportunities for growth, educators often feel stagnant, reinforcing migration intentions. Lopez and Ballescas (2020) highlight the importance of structured recognition and merit-based promotion, noting that Filipino teachers abroad frequently experience clearer career pathways and institutional acknowledgment of their contributions. This contrasts sharply with the local context, where recognition is often concentrated among administrators and career progression remains slow and opaque (Mendoza, 2021). Reyes (2021) emphasizes the need for institutional recognition to counter feelings of undervaluation, arguing that acknowledgment of teachers' efforts is central to sustaining professional identity. Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory supports this view, suggesting that motivators such as recognition, achievement, and advancement are critical for true job satisfaction. In the absence of these motivators, even improved salaries or working conditions may fail to retain teachers. Beyond professional structures, cultural narratives also shape migration decisions. Asis (2006) and Parreñas (2001) highlight that migration is often framed as a moral responsibility to uplift the family (*pag-aahon ng pamilya*). This cultural valorization of overseas employment intersects with professional frustrations, intensifying migration intentions. Thus, retention strategies must integrate economic reforms with culturally sensitive approaches, ensuring that teachers feel valued both institutionally and socially. Addressing recognition gaps and reframing cultural narratives, policymakers can design holistic interventions that sustain teacher morale and reduce the appeal of overseas employment.

Integrating economic, professional, emotional, and cultural considerations, policymakers can design holistic interventions that reduce the appeal of overseas employment and sustain the teaching workforce in Zambales and beyond.

Findings highlight that while teaching remains a deeply meaningful profession, systemic deficiencies in recognition, workload management, and compensation push educators to consider overseas employment. This paradox—between intrinsic fulfillment and external discouragement—shapes their career trajectory and migration intentions, underscoring the urgent need for reforms that balance professional meaning with institutional support.

### 3. Emotional Push Factors

The results highlight the emotional pressures that shape the migration intentions of DepEd teachers in Zambales. The open codes reveal narratives of emotional exhaustion, feelings of undervaluation, loss of motivation, anxiety, and guilt, which collectively point to the pervasive issue of burnout. The axial codes and themes—Burnout and Emotional Exhaustion and Emotional Strain as a Migration Driver—illustrate how emotional burdens intersect with professional dissatisfaction and economic pressures, ultimately influencing teachers' decisions to consider overseas employment.

Teachers described their daily experiences as emotionally draining, citing the overwhelming demands of teaching and paperwork. Statements such as “Araw-araw po akong emotionally drained dahil sa dami ng pagtuturo at paperwork” (Every day I feel emotionally drained because of the amount of teaching and paperwork) reflect the chronic fatigue that characterizes burnout. Maslach and Leiter (2016) define burnout as a

multidimensional construct involving emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. These dimensions are evident in the teachers' narratives, where exhaustion coexists with feelings of diminished value and motivation.

Kyriacou (2018) emphasizes that teacher burnout is often linked to workload pressure, emotional exhaustion, and insufficient support structures. In the Philippine context, these stressors are compounded by financial struggles and societal expectations, creating psychological strain that makes overseas employment appear both empowering and necessary (Reyes, 2021). Helpline PH (2023) similarly reported that administrative overload and clerical demands contribute to widespread stress among DepEd teachers, reinforcing migration intentions.

Another recurring theme is the sense of being undervalued. Teachers expressed sentiments such as "Sometimes I feel unappreciated despite all my efforts" and "Minsan po pakiramdam ko walang halaga ang ginagawa ko dahil kulang ang appreciation mula sa pamunuan" (Sometimes I feel that what I do has no value because of the lack of appreciation from the administration). These statements highlight the absence of recognition, which Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory identifies as a critical motivator. Without recognition and achievement, teachers experience dissatisfaction, even if hygiene factors such as salary and working conditions are addressed.

Santos and Dizon (2022) confirm that limited recognition and career mobility are critical push factors for teacher migration, as educators often feel that their contributions are undervalued within the Department of Education. This lack of acknowledgment diminishes intrinsic motivation, weakening teachers' sense of professional fulfillment and eroding their long-term commitment to the profession. Mendoza (2021) adds that recognition in the Philippine context is frequently concentrated among administrators, leaving classroom teachers overlooked despite their central role in student learning. Such inequities foster perceptions of invisibility, where teachers' daily efforts are not translated into institutional appreciation.

Frianeza et al. (2024) further emphasize that systemic inefficiencies—such as inadequate instructional resources, weak professional development systems, and limited mentoring opportunities—exacerbate feelings of stagnation and undervaluation. Without structured pathways for growth, teachers experience professional stagnation even after years of service. Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory provides a useful lens here: while hygiene factors like salary and workload prevent dissatisfaction, motivators such as recognition, achievement, and advancement are essential for sustaining true job satisfaction. In their absence, teachers increasingly view migration as a rational alternative, offering clearer career pathways, merit-based promotion, and structured recognition abroad (Lopez & Ballecas, 2020). Thus, the lack of recognition locally becomes not just a professional concern but a systemic driver of migration intentions.

Reyes (2021) notes that psychological strain is a significant factor in migration intentions, as teachers seek overseas employment to escape environments that compromise their mental health. Maslach and Leiter (2016) argue that burnout and anxiety are not merely individual issues but systemic outcomes of organizational cultures that fail to support teachers.

Interestingly, Table 4 also reveals feelings of guilt among teachers considering migration. One participant stated, "*Nakakaramdam po ako ng guilt na iiwan ang mga estudyante*" (I feel guilty about leaving the students). This highlights the emotional conflict between professional dissatisfaction and personal commitment to learners. While teachers recognize the tangible benefits of overseas employment—such as higher salaries, structured recognition, and clearer career pathways—they also grapple with the moral responsibility of serving their students. Day and Gu (2010) argue that teachers' professional identity is deeply tied to emotional investment in learners, making the thought of leaving them behind particularly distressing.

This emotional struggle reflects the tension between push factors (low pay, heavy workload, limited recognition) and the pull of overseas opportunities. Sussman (2010) notes that migration decisions often involve identity negotiation, where individuals must reconcile personal aspirations with relational obligations. Battistella (2018) similarly emphasizes that Filipino migrants frequently face psychological stress during transitions, balancing hopes for better opportunities with the emotional costs of separation.

The guilt expressed by teachers illustrates that migration is not purely transactional but deeply personal, shaped by moral dilemmas and emotional bonds. Lee's (1966) Push-Pull Theory supports this complexity, recognizing that alongside economic and professional considerations, emotional struggles significantly influence migration intentions. Thus, guilt emerges as a critical dimension of teacher migration, underscoring the need for psychosocial support systems that help educators navigate the emotional weight of their decisions.

Asis (2006) and Parreñas (2001) emphasize that migration is often framed as a moral responsibility to uplift the family, but this responsibility can conflict with teachers' professional duty to their students. This tension creates emotional strain, reinforcing the complexity of migration decisions.

The themes burnout, undervaluation, anxiety, and guilt—collectively illustrate how emotional strain drives migration intentions. Teachers perceive overseas employment as a pathway to regain professional respect, achieve work-life balance, and secure financial stability. Lopez and Ballescas (2020) observed that Filipino educators abroad often experience clearer career pathways and structured recognition, contrasting sharply with the stagnation they face locally. Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) similarly highlight that Filipino teachers in foreign contexts report greater professional satisfaction and dignity, though these gains are accompanied by emotional challenges such as family separation.

Globally, OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) report similar patterns, where emotional strain and burnout are significant drivers of teacher migration. Bense (2015) adds that dissatisfaction with workload, salary, and recognition often outweighs intrinsic motivation, prompting teachers to seek opportunities abroad.

The findings from Table 4 underscore the need for retention strategies that address not only economic and professional factors but also emotional well-being. Herzberg's theory suggests that improving hygiene factors alone will not suffice; meaningful motivators such as recognition, achievement, and autonomy must also be provided.

Reyes (2021) emphasizes the importance of institutional recognition to counter feelings of undervaluation. Frianeza et al. (2024) recommend strengthening professional development systems to provide teachers with opportunities for growth and achievement. Maslach and Leiter (2016) highlight the need for organizational cultures that prioritize teacher well-being, reducing burnout and anxiety.

Moreover, retention strategies must consider the emotional conflict teachers experience when balancing professional dissatisfaction with commitment to students. Asis (2006) and Parreñas (2001) highlight the importance of addressing cultural narratives that valorize migration, ensuring that teachers feel valued within their local contexts.

Integrating economic, professional, emotional, and cultural considerations, policymakers can design holistic interventions that reduce the appeal of overseas employment and sustain the teaching workforce in Zambales and beyond.

The findings underscore that emotional push factors are not peripheral but central to understanding teacher migration. Emotional exhaustion, undervaluation, and guilt collectively shape teachers' career trajectories, reinforcing the need for retention strategies that prioritize mental health support, recognition systems, and workload management. Without addressing these emotional pressures, migration will continue to be perceived as a rational and necessary escape from systemic discouragement.

#### 4. Cultural Push Factors

Table 5 highlights the cultural and social dimensions of teacher migration in Zambales, showing how community perceptions and expectations strongly shape teachers' decisions to consider overseas employment. The open codes reveal narratives such as "*Sa amin po, ang pag-abroad ay tanda ng tagumpay*" (For us, going abroad is a sign of success), "*Nakaka-pressure po kasi parang expected na mag-abroad ka*" (It is pressuring because it feels like going abroad is expected), "*Kapag may kamag-anak na nakapag-abroad, parang inaasahan na susunod ka rin*" (When a relative has gone abroad, it feels like you are expected to follow), and "*Sa barangay namin, mas*

*tinitingala ang mga pamilya na may OFW*” (In our community, families with overseas workers are more respected). These responses underscore the theme of cultural pressure to migrate, where overseas employment is equated with success, prestige, and fulfillment of familial and community obligations.

This cultural framing reveals that migration is not simply an economic decision but a socially reinforced pathway. Teachers often feel compelled to conform to community norms that valorize migration, with kinship networks and role models further intensifying this expectation. Asis (2006) and Parreñas (2001) emphasize that migration in the Philippines is frequently viewed as a collective family strategy, rooted in moral responsibility to uplift the household. In this context, teachers’ professional frustrations intersect with cultural narratives, creating a powerful push toward overseas employment.

Retention strategies must therefore address not only economic and professional factors but also these cultural dimensions. By strengthening recognition systems, providing transparent career pathways, and reframing success within the local education system, policymakers can counter the perception that migration is the only route to dignity and respect.

This finding resonates with Asis (2006) and Parreñas (2001), who argue that migration in the Philippines is not merely an economic decision but a socially embedded practice framed as a moral responsibility to uplift the family (*pag-aahon ng pamilya*). Teachers in Zambales, like many Filipino workers, are influenced by kinship networks and community narratives that valorize overseas employment as a pathway to dignity and respect. Lopez and Ballescas (2020) further observed that families with OFWs often gain elevated social status, reinforcing migration as a cultural benchmark of achievement.

The cultural dimension of migration also intersects with professional dissatisfaction. When teachers feel undervalued locally, the prestige associated with working abroad becomes even more compelling. Tantay, Monticillo, & Derasin (2024) note that in Zambales, anecdotal accounts already suggest increasing numbers of teachers preparing credentials for overseas employment, reflecting how cultural expectations amplify systemic frustrations. Thus, migration intentions are shaped not only by economic and professional push factors but also by cultural narratives that equate overseas work with success, respect, and familial duty.

The perception that going abroad is a sign of success reflects deeply ingrained cultural narratives in Philippine society. Migration is often valorized as a pathway to upward mobility, both economically and socially. Asis (2006) notes that overseas employment is frequently framed as a family strategy for survival and advancement, with remittances serving as tangible evidence of success. Parreñas (2001) similarly emphasizes that migration is embedded in cultural discourses of sacrifice and duty, where working abroad is equated with prestige and moral responsibility.

In Zambales, teachers reported that families with overseas workers are more respected in their communities, reinforcing the idea that migration enhances social status. Lopez and Ballescas (2020) observed that Filipino educators abroad often experience not only professional recognition but also elevated social standing for their families back home. This prestige becomes a powerful cultural push factor, motivating teachers to pursue overseas employment despite emotional and professional challenges.

The open code *“Nakaka-pressure po kasi parang expected na mag-abroad ka”* (It is pressuring because it feels like you are expected to go abroad) illustrates how migration is not merely an individual choice but a socially reinforced expectation. Teachers in Zambales reported feeling pressured by community norms that equate migration with success, creating a sense of obligation to conform. Tantay, Monticillo, and Derasin (2024) highlight that in Zambales, migration has become increasingly normalized, with communities expecting professionals, including teachers, to seek opportunities abroad.

Underlying these perceptions are cultural narratives of sacrifice and family upliftment. Parreñas (2001) emphasizes that migration is often framed as a moral responsibility to uplift the family (*pag-aahon ng pamilya*). Teachers in Zambales echoed this sentiment, noting that low salaries make it difficult to meet family needs, thereby intensifying the appeal of overseas employment. Asis (2006) observed that migration is deeply

embedded in cultural discourses of sacrifice, where working abroad is seen as a noble act of providing for one's family.

Moreover, cultural push factors intersect with emotional and professional pressures. Teachers reported feelings of guilt and inadequacy when unable to meet societal expectations, echoing Lopez & Balleascas (2020) who found that cultural norms strongly influence migration decisions by shaping identity and self-worth. This suggests that migration intentions are not only driven by economic disparities but also by the desire to fulfill cultural ideals of success and family responsibility.

This cultural framing intersects with professional dissatisfaction, creating a multidimensional rationale for migration. Teachers perceive overseas employment not only as a solution to economic challenges but also as a fulfillment of cultural and familial obligations.

The cultural push factors identified in Table 5 intersect with emotional and professional pressures discussed in earlier tables. Teachers who feel undervalued and emotionally exhausted also face cultural expectations to migrate, reinforcing their intentions. Reyes (2021) found that burnout and undervaluation are common across career stages, while Santos and Dizon (2022) noted that limited career mobility and inadequate compensation intensify migration likelihood. When combined with cultural narratives of success and obligation, these pressures create a powerful push toward overseas employment.

The findings from Table 5 underscore the need for retention strategies that address not only economic and professional factors but also cultural narratives that shape migration decisions. Policymakers must recognize that migration is not merely an economic choice but a socially reinforced pathway tied to identity, respect, and collective aspirations. In the Philippine context, migration is often valorized as a means of uplifting the family, with overseas employment framed as both a moral responsibility and a marker of success (Asis, 2006; Parreñas, 2001). This cultural dimension intensifies the push factors identified in earlier tables, as teachers feel compelled to pursue opportunities abroad not only for financial gain but also to fulfill social expectations.

Frianeza et al. (2024) recommend strengthening professional development systems to provide teachers with opportunities for growth and recognition, emphasizing that meaningful training and transparent career pathways can counter perceptions of stagnation. Reyes (2021) highlights the importance of institutional recognition to address feelings of undervaluation, noting that teachers who feel respected and acknowledged are less likely to seek employment abroad. Lopez and Balleascas (2020) further stress the need for structured recognition and merit-based promotion, which can restore dignity and respect within the local context. These reforms are critical in shifting cultural narratives, as they demonstrate that success and professional fulfillment can be achieved within the Philippine education system.

Retention strategies must integrate economic, professional, and cultural dimensions. By addressing undervaluation, strengthening recognition, and reframing migration as one of many possible pathways rather than the only route to success, policymakers can foster a more sustainable teaching workforce.

Moreover, retention strategies must engage with cultural narratives that valorize migration. Asis (2006) and Parreñas (2001) suggest that policies should emphasize the value of local contributions, ensuring that teachers feel respected and valued within their communities. Tantay, Monticillo, & Derasin (2024) highlight the importance of community-based interventions that celebrate local educators, reducing the cultural pressure to migrate. Asis (2006) noted that migration in the Philippines is deeply embedded in cultural narratives of *pag-aahon ng pamilya* (uplifting the family), where working abroad is perceived as a moral responsibility and a pathway to honor. Similarly, Battistella (2018) emphasized that migration is often celebrated within communities, reinforcing the idea that overseas employment equates to achievement and social recognition. For teachers, this cultural valorization intensifies dissatisfaction with local conditions, as remaining in the Philippines may be perceived as stagnation or failure.

The findings underscore that cultural narratives play a pivotal role in shaping teacher migration. Addressing this requires not only institutional reforms but also community-level interventions that redefine success in teaching as a valued local profession, thereby countering the perception that fulfillment can only be achieved abroad.

## 5. Professional Push Factors

Table 6 illustrates that teachers expressed discouragement over slow promotion processes and perceived favoritism within the Department of Education (DepEd). Many participants reported that advancement opportunities were limited, opaque, and often influenced by connections rather than merit. This lack of recognition and merit-based progression reinforced perceptions of professional stagnation, leaving teachers feeling undervalued despite years of service and dedication. Such findings highlight that, beyond financial concerns, career progression opportunities are critical motivators for migration.

In addition, the professional pressures that motivate DepEd teachers in Zambales to consider overseas employment are clearly reflected in the open codes. Narratives such as “*Mabagal po ang promotion at kulang ang recognition*” (Promotion is slow and recognition is lacking), “*Minsan may favoritism sa promotion*” (Sometimes there is favoritism in promotion), “*Kahit matagal na sa serbisyo, pareho pa rin ang sahod*” (Even after many years of service, the salary remains the same), “*Madalas inuuna ang paborito ng admin sa training at promotion*” (Often, the administration prioritizes their favorites for training and promotion), and “*Kulang po ang oportunidad para sa professional development*” (There are insufficient opportunities for professional development) converge into the theme of professional stagnation. These responses highlight teachers’ perceptions of limited growth, inequitable practices, and inadequate recognition within the local education system.

This theme resonates with Herzberg’s (1959) Two-Factor Theory, which distinguishes between hygiene factors—such as salary and working conditions—and motivators like recognition, achievement, and advancement. While hygiene factors prevent dissatisfaction, motivators are essential for sustaining true job satisfaction. In the Philippine context, however, teachers often report that both sets of factors are lacking. Mendoza (2021) observed that recognition is frequently concentrated among administrators, leaving classroom teachers overlooked despite their central role in student learning. Santos and Dizon (2022) further confirm that limited career mobility and favoritism in promotion processes intensify feelings of undervaluation, reinforcing migration intentions.

Frianeza et al. (2024) add that systemic inefficiencies, including weak professional development systems and inadequate instructional resources, exacerbate these frustrations. Without structured opportunities for growth, teachers experience stagnation even after years of service. Globally, Lopez and Ballescas (2020) found that Filipino educators abroad often encounter clearer career pathways and merit-based promotion, contrasting sharply with the stagnation they face locally. Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) similarly highlight that overseas employment provides not only financial stability but also professional dignity, though these gains are accompanied by emotional challenges such as family separation.

Thus, professional stagnation emerges as a critical push factor in teacher migration. Addressing inequitable practices, strengthening professional development, and institutionalizing recognition systems are essential strategies to sustain teacher morale and reduce the appeal of overseas employment.

Teachers consistently reported frustration with slow promotion processes, with the statement “*Mabagal po ang promotion at kulang ang recognition*” (Promotion is slow and recognition is lacking) reflecting the perception that career advancement within DepEd is sluggish and often disconnected from merit. Many educators feel trapped in positions with little opportunity for progression, which undermines motivation and professional identity. Mendoza (2021) confirms that limited career mobility is a critical push factor for migration, while Santos and Dizon (2022) emphasize that career stagnation intensifies migration likelihood, particularly when teachers perceive overseas employment as offering clearer pathways for advancement and recognition.

OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) report similar patterns, where teachers in various countries seek overseas employment due to limited career mobility and recognition in their home systems. Bense (2015) adds that professional stagnation is a common driver of teacher attrition, as educators leave environments that fail to reward their contributions. These findings highlight that the issue of career stagnation is not unique to the Philippines but part of a broader global challenge, where systems that fail to provide structured promotion and recognition lose valuable talent to migration.

The responses “*Minsan may favoritism sa promotion*” (Sometimes there is favoritism in promotion) and “*Madalas inuuna ang paborito ng admin sa training at promotion*” (Often the favorites of administrators are prioritized in training and promotion) highlight perceptions of favoritism and inequity in career advancement. Teachers expressed frustration that promotions and training opportunities are often influenced by administrative preferences rather than merit. This erodes trust in institutional processes, reinforces feelings of undervaluation, and strengthens migration intentions. Ingersoll (2001) argues that organizational conditions, including inequitable practices, are central to teacher attrition, while Frianeza et al. (2024) emphasize that systemic inefficiencies in the Philippine education system exacerbate dissatisfaction, as teachers perceive professional opportunities as limited and unfairly distributed.

Lopez and Ballescás (2020) observed that Filipino educators abroad often experience merit-based recognition and structured promotion, contrasting sharply with the favoritism they face locally. Overseas systems provide clearer pathways for advancement, transparent evaluation criteria, and recognition mechanisms that restore professional dignity. Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) similarly highlight that Filipino teachers abroad report greater satisfaction with structured promotion systems, reinforcing the comparative disadvantage of local practices.

Findings from Table 6 reveal that slow promotion, favoritism, and lack of recognition converge to form powerful professional push factors driving migration intentions. Teachers perceive that their years of service and dedication do not translate into advancement or acknowledgment, leading to frustration and disengagement. Addressing these challenges requires systemic reforms that institutionalize merit-based promotion, strengthen professional development systems, and embed recognition into organizational culture. By doing so, DepEd can reduce inequities, restore trust, and foster long-term retention. Without such reforms, professional stagnation will continue to erode morale and push teachers toward overseas employment, where they believe their contributions will be more fairly valued.

The statement “*Kahit matagal na sa serbisyo, pareho pa rin ang sahod*” (Even after many years of service, the salary remains the same) underscores the deep frustration teachers feel about salary stagnation despite their tenure and contributions. Many educators reported that their compensation does not reflect their years of dedication, undermining motivation and making overseas employment appear more attractive. Reyes (2021) found that inadequate compensation is a critical push factor across career stages, while Santos and Dizon (2022) noted that salary stagnation intensifies migration likelihood, particularly when teachers perceive foreign systems as offering clearer financial progression and structured career pathways.

Becker’s (1964) Human Capital Theory frames migration as an investment decision, where individuals seek contexts that maximize returns on their qualifications. Teachers, having invested years in education and professional development, naturally gravitate toward environments where their expertise is better compensated. Docquier and Rapoport (2012) similarly argue that wage disparities are central to brain drain, as skilled professionals migrate to countries that value their contributions more highly. In this sense, migration becomes a rational choice, as teachers weigh the opportunity costs of remaining in a stagnant system against the potential rewards abroad.

The response “*Kulang po ang oportunidad para sa professional development*” (There are insufficient opportunities for professional development) highlights another critical dimension of dissatisfaction within the Department of Education (DepEd). Teachers expressed frustration that training and growth opportunities are limited, restricting their ability to enhance skills, adapt to evolving pedagogical demands, and advance their careers. UNESCO (2021) stresses that continuous professional development is essential for sustaining teacher motivation and retention, while Lopez and Ballescás (2020) observed that overseas contexts often provide structured pathways for professional growth, making migration more appealing. Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) further highlight that Filipino teachers abroad report greater access to training and development, contributing to professional satisfaction and long-term security.

This perception of stagnation is particularly concerning in the context of global education systems, where continuous professional development is recognized as a cornerstone of instructional quality. Herzberg’s (1959) Two-Factor Theory emphasizes that motivators such as achievement, recognition, and advancement are essential

for job satisfaction. When these motivators are absent, employees inevitably experience frustration and disengagement, even if hygiene factors such as salary are addressed. Reyes (2021) found that career stagnation is a significant factor influencing migration intentions, while Santos and Dizon (2022) noted that limited professional growth opportunities contribute to attrition across public schools.

Salary stagnation and limited professional development converge to create a powerful push toward migration. Teachers perceive overseas employment as offering not only financial stability but also professional dignity and growth. Addressing these challenges requires systemic reforms that strengthen compensation packages, institutionalize recognition, and embed professional development opportunities into the organizational culture. By doing so, DepEd can reduce the comparative disadvantage that drives teachers abroad, restore professional dignity, and foster long-term retention.

Frianeza et al. (2024) emphasize that weak professional development systems in the Philippines exacerbate dissatisfaction, leaving teachers with few opportunities for growth. Instead of being empowered through structured training, mentoring, and career advancement pathways, many educators feel trapped in repetitive cycles of compliance-driven seminars that fail to address their professional needs. This lack of meaningful development undermines motivation and contributes to attrition, as teachers increasingly view overseas employment as a pathway to structured recognition and skill enhancement.

Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory provides a useful lens for interpreting these frustrations. While hygiene factors such as salary and workload prevent dissatisfaction, motivators like recognition, achievement, and opportunities for growth are essential for sustaining true job satisfaction. In the Philippine context, however, both hygiene factors and motivators are often absent. Teachers not only face stagnant salaries and heavy workloads but also lack access to professional development programs that could foster achievement and recognition. This dual absence intensifies migration intentions, as educators seek environments where their contributions are valued and their skills continuously developed.

The OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) report that countries with strong professional development systems—such as Singapore and Finland—achieve higher teacher retention rates. These systems emphasize continuous training linked to career progression, mentorship programs, and collaborative learning communities. In contrast, Filipino teachers often describe local training as irregular, insufficient, and disconnected from career advancement (Reyes, 2021). This comparative disadvantage magnifies the attractiveness of migration, as teachers perceive foreign systems as offering structured, merit-based opportunities for growth.

Lopez and Ballescas (2020) observed that Filipino educators abroad frequently experience clearer career pathways and merit-based promotion, contrasting sharply with the stagnation they face locally. Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) similarly highlight that overseas employment provides not only financial stability but also professional dignity, as teachers are given access to resources, training, and recognition that reinforce their identity as valued professionals. These findings underscore that professional development is not a supplementary benefit but a central determinant of teacher satisfaction and retention.

In Zambales, the lack of professional development opportunities intersects with broader systemic inefficiencies, including inadequate instructional resources and inequitable promotion practices. Teachers perceive that without meaningful growth opportunities, their careers remain stagnant regardless of years of service. This sense of stagnation erodes professional identity and intensifies migration intentions, as overseas employment is framed not only as a financial solution but also as a professional lifeline. Addressing this issue requires institutional reforms that strengthen professional development systems, link training to career progression, and ensure equitable access for all teachers. By investing in continuous learning and structured recognition, DepEd can counteract the push factors driving migration and sustain teacher morale within the Philippine education system.

UNESCO (2021) stresses the importance of continuous professional development in sustaining teacher motivation and retention, noting that systems with structured growth opportunities achieve higher levels of teacher satisfaction and lower attrition rates. Lopez and Ballescas (2020) observed that overseas contexts often provide clear pathways for professional advancement, including mentoring, training, and merit-based promotion, making migration more appealing to Filipino educators. Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) similarly highlight

that Filipino teachers abroad report greater access to training and development programs, which contribute to professional satisfaction, long-term career security, and a stronger sense of dignity in their work. These comparative advantages reinforce migration intentions, as teachers perceive foreign systems as valuing their professional growth more than local institutions.

Underlying these professional pressures is the persistent issue of recognition. Teachers consistently reported that their contributions are undervalued, with statements such as “*kulang ang recognition*” (recognition is lacking) reflecting the absence of acknowledgment for their efforts. Herzberg’s (1959) Two-Factor Theory emphasizes that motivators such as recognition, achievement, and advancement are critical for sustaining professional satisfaction. Without recognition, teachers experience dissatisfaction, even if hygiene factors such as salary and working conditions are addressed. Reyes (2021) found that undervaluation is a significant factor influencing migration intentions, while Santos and Dizon (2022) noted that limited recognition and career stagnation intensify attrition across public schools.

Findings reveal that professional development and recognition are not supplementary concerns but central determinants of teacher retention. When teachers perceive stagnation and undervaluation locally, they are more likely to seek opportunities abroad where their skills are rewarded and their contributions acknowledged. Addressing these challenges requires systemic reforms that institutionalize recognition, strengthen professional development systems, and ensure transparent career pathways. By embedding these motivators into the organizational culture, DepEd can reduce migration intentions, restore professional dignity, and foster long-term retention.

Reyes (2021) found that undervaluation is a significant factor in migration intentions, as teachers seek environments where their contributions are respected and acknowledged. This sense of undervaluation is not only financial but also professional, as many educators feel that their dedication and achievements are overlooked. Santos and Dizon (2022) similarly emphasize that limited recognition intensifies migration likelihood, noting that when teachers perceive stagnation in their careers and a lack of appreciation for their work, they are more inclined to pursue opportunities abroad. Frianeza et al. (2024) add that systemic inefficiencies, such as weak professional development systems and opaque promotion processes, exacerbate feelings of stagnation and undervaluation, further reinforcing migration intentions.

The professional push factors identified in Table 6 intersect with emotional and cultural pressures discussed in earlier tables, creating a multidimensional rationale for migration. Teachers who feel undervalued and professionally stagnant also experience emotional exhaustion, frustration, and burnout, which weaken their motivation to remain in the local system. Maslach and Leiter (2016) highlight that burnout is multidimensional, encompassing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment—all of which are evident in teachers’ narratives. These emotional strains are compounded by cultural expectations, as migration is often framed as a moral responsibility to uplift the family. Asis (2006) and Parreñas (2001) emphasize that this cultural narrative is deeply embedded in Filipino society, where overseas employment is valorized as a pathway to success and familial upliftment.

Undervaluation, limited recognition, and professional stagnation converge with emotional exhaustion and cultural obligations to create powerful migration intentions. Teachers are not only seeking financial stability but also environments where their professional identities are respected and their contributions are valued. Addressing these challenges requires systemic reforms that strengthen recognition systems, provide transparent career pathways, and embed professional development opportunities into institutional frameworks. Without these reforms, undervaluation will continue to push teachers abroad, reinforcing the cycle of brain drain and weakening the local education system.

Frianeza et al. (2024) recommend strengthening professional development systems to provide teachers with opportunities for growth and recognition, emphasizing that training must be meaningful, transparent, and directly tied to career progression. Lopez and Ballescás (2020) highlight the importance of structured recognition and merit-based promotion, noting that reforms in these areas would restore dignity and respect to teachers within the local context. Reyes (2021) emphasizes the need for institutional recognition to counter feelings of undervaluation, while Santos and Dizon (2022) stress that addressing career stagnation is essential to reducing

attrition. Together, these studies point to the necessity of systemic reforms that go beyond financial incentives, focusing instead on empowering teachers professionally and emotionally.

This theme aligns closely with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which emphasizes that motivators such as achievement, recognition, and advancement are essential for job satisfaction. When these motivators are absent, employees inevitably experience frustration and disengagement, even if hygiene factors are met. In the Philippine context, Reyes (2021) found that career stagnation is a significant factor influencing teachers' migration intentions, while Santos and Dizon (2022) noted that limited professional growth opportunities contribute to attrition across public schools. OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) further confirm that countries with structured professional development systems achieve higher teacher retention rates, underscoring the global relevance of recognition and advancement.

The findings from Table 6 reveal that professional stagnation and lack of recognition are not supplementary concerns but central drivers of teacher dissatisfaction and migration. Addressing these challenges requires reforms that institutionalize recognition systems, strengthen professional development, and ensure transparent career pathways. By embedding these motivators into the organizational culture, DepEd can reduce the comparative disadvantage that drives teachers abroad, restore professional dignity, and foster long-term retention.

Similar patterns have been observed. The OECD (2019) reported that structured, transparent, and merit-based promotion systems in countries such as Singapore and the United Kingdom serve as strong retention mechanisms, offering teachers clear pathways for advancement. In contrast, systems that fail to provide such opportunities often face higher rates of teacher turnover and migration. UNESCO (2021) further emphasized that professional growth and recognition are key to sustaining teacher motivation and reducing global shortages.

For DepEd teachers, the perception that foreign systems offer clearer, structured, and merit-based career pathways intensifies migration intentions. This suggests that reforms in promotion processes, recognition systems, and professional development opportunities are essential to counteract professional push factors and retain skilled educators within the Philippine education system.

## 6. Compensation

Results reveal that participants consistently described their salary as inadequate, with responses such as "*Hindi po sapat para sa pangangailangan ng pamilya*" (The salary is not enough for the needs of the family). Compensation was widely perceived as disproportionate to the workload and insufficient to meet family needs. This economic dissatisfaction emerged as one of the strongest push factors, particularly when teachers compared their earnings with opportunities abroad, where higher salaries and better benefits are expected. The mismatch between effort and reward created frustration, with many teachers expressing that their financial struggles undermined both their professional dignity and their ability to support their families.

Reyes (2021) observed that wage disparities between the Philippines and destination countries often reach five to ten times higher, making overseas employment highly appealing. Mendoza (2021) adds that inadequate compensation, coupled with bureaucratic challenges, intensifies migration intentions among Filipino teachers. This perception of inequity is further reinforced by Docquier and Rapoport's (2012) Human Capital Theory, which suggests that individuals invest in education and professional development to maximize returns; when local systems fail to provide adequate financial rewards, migration becomes a rational choice. Ingersoll (2001) similarly argues that organizational conditions, including salary structures, are central to teacher attrition, while Kyriacou (2018) emphasizes that financial dissatisfaction often interacts with workload stress to exacerbate burnout.

Compensation has been identified globally as a critical determinant of teacher retention. The OECD (2019) noted that competitive salaries and benefits are among the strongest incentives for sustaining teacher motivation, while UNESCO (2021) highlighted that low pay contributes significantly to teacher shortages in developing countries. Lopez and Balleascas (2020) observed that Filipino educators abroad often report greater satisfaction with structured compensation packages, including medical coverage, retirement plans, and allowances, which provide

long-term stability. Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) further emphasize that overseas systems often pair financial rewards with structured recognition, reinforcing professional satisfaction.

In the Philippine context, the mismatch between workload and compensation exacerbates emotional strain and professional dissatisfaction, pushing educators to seek opportunities abroad where their skills are more financially valued. Teachers often described feelings of demotivation, noting that salary stagnation undermines their enthusiasm for teaching and weakens their professional identity. Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory underscores that hygiene factors such as salary are essential for preventing dissatisfaction; without adequate compensation, motivators like achievement and recognition are overshadowed. Addressing these challenges requires systemic reforms that strengthen compensation packages, align benefits with workload realities, and institutionalize recognition systems. By embedding these motivators into the organizational culture, DepEd can reduce the comparative disadvantage that drives teachers abroad, restore professional dignity, and foster long-term retention.

Moreover, the inadequacy of compensation intersects with broader socioeconomic realities. Teachers often carry financial responsibilities beyond their immediate households, including extended family support, children's education, and healthcare needs. When local salaries fail to meet these obligations, migration becomes not only a professional decision but also a familial necessity. Thus, salary inequities are not merely an economic issue but a central factor shaping migration intentions, underscoring the urgent need for reforms in teacher compensation and benefits to retain educators within DepEd.

The findings align with Reyes (2021), who reported that wage disparities between the Philippines and destination countries often reach five to ten times higher, making overseas employment highly appealing. Similarly, Mendoza (2021) emphasized that inadequate compensation, coupled with bureaucratic challenges, intensifies migration intentions among Filipino teachers. This perception of inequity is further reinforced by Docquier and Rapoport's (2012) Human Capital Theory, which suggests that individuals invest in education and professional development to maximize returns; when local systems fail to provide adequate financial rewards, migration becomes a rational choice.

This highlights the role of compensation in shaping the migration intentions of DepEd teachers in Zambales. The open codes reveal narratives such as "*Hindi po sapat para sa pangangailangan ng pamilya*" (It is not enough to meet the needs of the family), "*Mababa po kumpara sa abroad*" (It is lower compared to abroad), "*Kulang po ang sahod para sa gastusin sa edukasyon ng mga anak*" (The salary is insufficient to cover my children's education expenses), "*Hindi po sapat ang allowance at benefits, lalo na sa medical at retirement*" (The allowance and benefits are insufficient, especially for medical and retirement needs), "*Nakaka-demotivate po kasi hindi tumataas ang sahod kahit tumatagal sa serbisyo*" (It is demotivating because the salary does not increase even with years of service), and "*Mas nakaka-engganyo po ang abroad dahil may mas mataas na sahod at mas maayos na benepisyo*" (Working abroad is more enticing because of higher salaries and better benefits). These responses converge into the themes of financial dissatisfaction and economic push factors, underscoring how compensation directly influences motivation and migration decisions.

Teachers consistently reported that their salaries are inadequate to meet family needs. The statement "*Hindi po sapat para sa pangangailangan ng pamilya*" reflects the financial strain that teachers experience, particularly in supporting household expenses. Reyes (2021) found that financial dissatisfaction is a common frustration among teachers, with many struggling to balance professional responsibilities with family obligations. Frianeza et al. (2024) similarly emphasize that systemic inefficiencies in the Philippine education system exacerbate financial strain, leaving teachers with limited resources to support their families.

The statement "*Kulang po ang sahod para sa gastusin sa edukasyon ng mga anak*" highlights the specific burden of educational expenses, reinforcing the theme of financial dissatisfaction. Teachers perceive their salaries as insufficient to provide quality education for their children, intensifying migration intentions. Asis (2006) and Parreñas (2001) emphasize that migration is often framed as a moral responsibility to uplift the family, making overseas employment a rational choice for teachers seeking to fulfill familial obligations.

Furthermore, compensation has been identified as a critical determinant of teacher retention. The OECD (2019) noted that competitive salaries and benefits are among the strongest incentives for sustaining teacher motivation, while UNESCO (2021) highlighted that low pay contributes significantly to teacher shortages in developing countries. In the Philippine context, the mismatch between workload and compensation exacerbates emotional strain and professional dissatisfaction, pushing educators to seek opportunities abroad where their skills are more financially valued.

Santos and Dizon (2022) confirm that salary stagnation intensifies migration likelihood, particularly when teachers perceive overseas employment as offering clearer financial progression and structured career pathways. Mendoza (2021) adds that limited recognition and stagnant compensation undermine professional identity, prompting teachers to seek opportunities abroad where merit-based systems reward tenure and achievement. OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) further emphasize that inadequate compensation is a recurring global challenge, often linked to declining retention rates. Ingersoll (2001) argues that organizational conditions, including salary structures, are central to teacher attrition, while Kyriacou (2018) highlights that financial dissatisfaction interacts with workload stress to exacerbate burnout.

These findings reveal that compensation is not simply a financial issue but a systemic factor influencing teacher motivation, identity, and retention. Filipino teachers compare their stagnant local salaries with the structured compensation packages abroad, perceiving migration as a rational choice to secure both financial stability and professional respect. Addressing this challenge requires reforms that strengthen compensation packages, institutionalize recognition, and align benefits with workload realities. By embedding these motivators into the organizational culture, DepEd can reduce the comparative disadvantage that drives teachers abroad, restore professional dignity, and foster long-term retention.

Teachers consistently compared local salaries with those offered abroad, underscoring the stark disparity between domestic compensation and overseas opportunities. The statement *“Mababa po kumpara sa abroad”* (It is lower compared to abroad) reflects the widespread perception that overseas employment provides significantly higher pay. Similarly, the open code *“Mas nakaka-engganyo po ang abroad dahil may mas mataas na sahod at mas maayos na benepisyong”* (Abroad is more enticing because of higher salaries and better benefits) reinforces this comparison, highlighting the appeal of foreign systems where compensation packages are more competitive and benefits are structured to support long-term stability.

Becker’s (1964) Human Capital Theory frames migration as an investment decision, where individuals seek contexts that maximize returns on their qualifications and skills. Teachers, having invested years in education and professional development, naturally gravitate toward environments where their expertise is better compensated. Docquier and Rapoport (2012) similarly argue that wage disparities are central to brain drain, as skilled professionals migrate to countries that value their contributions more highly. Lopez and Ballezas (2020) observed that Filipino educators abroad often experience structured recognition and merit-based promotion, contrasting sharply with the stagnation and undervaluation they face locally. This comparative disadvantage reinforces migration intentions, as teachers perceive overseas employment as both financially rewarding and professionally dignifying.

The compensation-related push factors identified in Table 7 intersect with emotional and professional pressures discussed in earlier tables. Teachers who feel financially dissatisfied also experience emotional exhaustion and professional stagnation, creating a multidimensional rationale for migration. Reyes (2021) found that burnout and undervaluation are pervasive across career stages, while Santos and Dizon (2022) noted that limited career mobility and inadequate compensation intensify migration likelihood. OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) confirm that inadequate compensation is a recurring global challenge, often linked to declining retention rates. Ingersoll (2001) further emphasizes that organizational conditions, including salary structures, are central to attrition, while Kyriacou (2018) highlights that financial dissatisfaction interacts with workload stress to exacerbate burnout.

When combined with cultural narratives of success and obligation, these pressures create a powerful push toward overseas employment. Migration is not simply a financial decision but a holistic response to systemic undervaluation, where teachers seek environments that provide both economic stability and professional respect.

Addressing these challenges requires reforms that strengthen compensation packages, institutionalize recognition, and align benefits with workload realities. By embedding these motivators into the organizational culture, DepEd can reduce the comparative disadvantage that drives teachers abroad and foster long-term retention.

Globally, OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) report similar patterns, where inadequate compensation and benefits consistently drive teacher dissatisfaction and migration. Teachers across diverse contexts highlight that low salaries, stagnant pay scales, and insufficient benefits undermine morale and retention. Bense (2015) adds that dissatisfaction with salary and recognition often outweighs intrinsic motivation, prompting educators to seek opportunities abroad where their contributions are more financially and professionally valued. These findings reinforce the idea that compensation is a systemic issue, cutting across novice and veteran teachers alike, and not merely a challenge for early-career educators.

The findings from Table 7 underscore the urgent need for retention strategies that directly address financial dissatisfaction and economic push factors. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) suggests that improving hygiene factors such as salary and benefits is critical for preventing dissatisfaction. Without adequate compensation, teachers will continue to perceive overseas employment as a more attractive option, particularly when foreign systems offer competitive pay, structured benefits, and recognition mechanisms. In the Philippine context, Reyes (2021) found that financial dissatisfaction is a significant driver of migration intentions, as teachers often compare their local earnings with the higher salaries and benefits available abroad.

Frianeza et al. (2024) recommend strengthening compensation packages to provide teachers with financial stability and long-term security, emphasizing that reforms must go beyond incremental salary adjustments to include health benefits, retirement plans, and allowances that reflect workload realities. Lopez and Ballescas (2020) highlight the importance of structured recognition and merit-based promotion, noting that financial rewards must be paired with dignity and respect to sustain motivation. Ingersoll (2001) similarly argues that organizational conditions, including compensation, are central to teacher attrition, while Kyriacou (2018) stresses that economic dissatisfaction often interacts with workload stress to intensify burnout.

These findings reveal that compensation is not simply an economic issue but a multidimensional factor influencing teacher retention, motivation, and migration. Addressing financial dissatisfaction requires systemic reforms that integrate competitive salaries, comprehensive benefits, and recognition systems. By embedding these motivators into institutional frameworks, DepEd can reduce the comparative disadvantage that drives teachers abroad, restore professional dignity, and foster long-term retention.

The findings underscore that compensation is not merely an economic issue but a central factor shaping migration intentions. Addressing salary inequities and improving benefits are essential strategies for retaining teachers within DepEd and reducing the appeal of overseas employment.

## 7. Workload

Results highlights the workload-related pressures that shape the migration intentions of DepEd teachers in Zambales. The open codes reveal narratives such as “Mabigat po, may teaching at administrative tasks pa” (It is heavy, with both teaching and administrative tasks), “Halos araw-araw may dala akong trabaho” (Almost every day I bring work home), “Bukod sa pagtuturo, marami pang reports na kailangang ipasa” (Aside from teaching, there are so many reports that need to be submitted), “Minsan po sabay-sabay ang deadlines kaya nakaka-pressure” (Sometimes deadlines come all at once, which is very pressuring), “Nakaka-stress po at minsan nagkakasakit ako” (It is stressful and sometimes I get sick), “Nababawasan po ang oras ko sa pamilya dahil sa dami ng trabaho” (My time with family is reduced because of too much work), and “Minsan po nawawalan ako ng gana magturo dahil sa sobrang dami ng gawain” (Sometimes I lose the motivation to teach because of too much work). These responses converge into the themes of workload stress and workload as a burnout driver, underscoring how excessive demands directly influence motivation, well-being, and migration decisions.

The narratives illustrate how teachers are burdened not only with instructional responsibilities but also with administrative tasks, compliance requirements, and extracurricular obligations. Ingersoll (2001) and Kyriacou

(2018) confirm that excessive workload is one of the strongest predictors of teacher attrition globally. Maslach and Leiter (2016) further describe burnout as a multidimensional process, encompassing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment—all of which are evident in the accounts of Zambales teachers. The constant pressure of overlapping deadlines and reporting requirements erodes their capacity to focus on teaching, diminishing both professional satisfaction and personal well-being.

The impact of workload extends beyond the professional sphere into teachers' personal lives. Several participants noted that excessive demands reduce time with family, creating strain in fulfilling domestic responsibilities. This aligns with Reyes (2021), who observed that poor work-life balance is a critical push factor in teacher migration. When educators feel that their professional obligations compromise their health and family relationships, migration becomes a rational alternative, offering not only financial stability but also healthier work-life balance abroad.

Frianeza et al. (2024) emphasize that systemic inefficiencies—such as understaffing, inadequate instructional resources, and weak support systems—exacerbate workload pressures. Teachers often compensate for these gaps by working beyond official hours, bringing tasks home, and sacrificing personal time. This cycle of overwork contributes to stress-related illnesses, as reflected in the open code “Nakaka-stress po at minsan nagkakasakit ako”. Such health consequences intensify dissatisfaction and reinforce migration intentions, as overseas employment is perceived to provide more manageable workloads and institutional support.

OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) report similar patterns, noting that workload intensification is a major factor driving teacher shortages in many countries. Comparative studies show that nations with effective workload management—such as Finland and Singapore—achieve higher teacher retention rates by balancing instructional demands with administrative support. In contrast, the Philippine system often places disproportionate administrative burdens on teachers, leaving them overwhelmed and undervalued.

Table 8 describes that workload is not merely a logistical issue but a systemic driver of burnout and migration. Addressing this challenge requires reforms that streamline administrative processes, provide adequate staffing, and strengthen support systems. By reducing workload pressures and prioritizing teacher well-being, DepEd can mitigate burnout, sustain motivation, and reduce the appeal of overseas employment. Teachers reported heavy workloads that extended beyond classroom instruction, encompassing administrative tasks, extracurricular responsibilities, and compliance-related paperwork. Statements such as “*Mabigat po, may teaching at administrative tasks pa*” highlight the imbalance between responsibilities and compensation, underscoring how workload pressures contribute directly to burnout, poor work-life balance, and declining job satisfaction. This theme reflects the findings of Kyriacou (2018), who emphasized that excessive workload is one of the most significant stressors in the teaching profession, often leading to emotional exhaustion and attrition.

In the Philippine context, PIDS (2024) reported that teachers spend a substantial portion of their time on non-teaching duties, such as preparing reports and fulfilling bureaucratic requirements, which detract from instructional quality and increase stress. This administrative overload aligns with Ingersoll's (2001) assertion that organizational conditions, rather than individual shortcomings, are the primary drivers of teacher turnover. Teachers in this study consistently expressed frustration that their workload was disproportionate to their compensation, reinforcing migration intentions as they perceived overseas systems to offer more balanced responsibilities and better support structures.

Teachers consistently reported that their workload is heavy, encompassing both teaching and administrative tasks. The statement “*Mabigat po, may teaching at administrative tasks pa*” reflects the dual burden of instructional responsibilities and clerical demands. Frianeza et al. (2024) emphasize that systemic inefficiencies in the Philippine education system exacerbate workload pressures, as teachers are often tasked with excessive reporting requirements that detract from instructional time.

The statement “*Bukod sa pagtuturo, marami pang reports na kailangang ipasa*” (Aside from teaching, there are so many reports that need to be submitted) highlights the administrative overload that compounds teaching responsibilities in DepEd schools. Teachers expressed frustration that paperwork and reporting consume

significant time, leaving less energy for lesson preparation, student engagement, and instructional innovation. This administrative burden reflects a systemic issue where educators are tasked not only with teaching but also with fulfilling bureaucratic requirements, often at the expense of their core instructional role.

Ingersoll (2001) argues that organizational conditions, including administrative overload, are central to teacher attrition, as they create environments where educators feel overwhelmed and undervalued. Kyriacou (2018) similarly notes that excessive non-teaching duties contribute to stress and burnout, weakening teachers' motivation and professional identity. In the Philippine context, Reyes (2021) observed that teachers spend a disproportionate amount of time on compliance-related tasks, such as preparing reports and meeting documentation requirements, which detract from instructional quality and erode morale.

This imbalance between teaching and administrative responsibilities has broader implications for teacher well-being. Maslach and Leiter (2016) emphasize that workload pressures are a primary driver of burnout, leading to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Teachers in Zambales reported that the constant demands of reporting and paperwork not only diminish their enthusiasm for teaching but also reduce time with family, contributing to poor work-life balance.

OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) confirm that administrative overload is a recurring challenge in education systems worldwide, often linked to declining teacher retention rates. Excessive reporting requirements, compliance-driven documentation, and bureaucratic tasks divert teachers' time away from instructional work, eroding both morale and professional identity. In contrast, countries that streamline reporting processes and provide administrative support—such as Finland and Singapore—achieve higher teacher satisfaction and retention by allowing educators to focus on teaching and student engagement rather than clerical duties.

For Filipino teachers, the perception that overseas employment offers more manageable workloads and stronger institutional support reinforces migration intentions. Reyes (2021) found that teachers in the Philippines often spend disproportionate time on paperwork, which contributes to stress and burnout. Ingersoll (2001) similarly argues that organizational conditions, including administrative overload, are central to teacher attrition. Kyriacou (2018) adds that excessive non-teaching duties intensify stress, weakening motivation and professional identity. Maslach and Leiter (2016) further emphasize that workload pressures are a primary driver of burnout, leading to emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment.

Comparative studies also highlight that streamlined systems abroad provide teachers with clearer career pathways and recognition. Lopez and Balleascas (2020) observed that Filipino educators overseas benefit from structured support and merit-based recognition, while Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) note that teachers abroad report healthier workloads and greater professional satisfaction. These findings underscore that administrative overload is not merely an inconvenience but a systemic push factor driving migration. Addressing this challenge requires reforms that reduce bureaucratic demands, institutionalize administrative support, and prioritize instructional work. By doing so, DepEd can alleviate stress, restore teacher focus on student learning, and mitigate the comparative disadvantage that fuels migration intentions.

Thus, administrative overload emerges as a critical push factor in teacher migration, underscoring the need for reforms that reduce bureaucratic demands, prioritize instructional work, and restore teachers' focus on student learning.

The statement “*Minsan po sabay-sabay ang deadlines kaya nakaka-pressure*” (Sometimes deadlines come all at once, which is very pressuring) underscores the intense time pressure teachers face in their daily responsibilities. Overlapping deadlines create stress, reduce the quality of work, and reinforce the broader theme of workload stress. Kyriacou (2018) notes that unrealistic deadlines and multitasking demands are major contributors to teacher stress, often leading to emotional exhaustion and burnout. For teachers in Zambales, this pressure is compounded by administrative tasks, lesson planning, extracurricular duties, and reporting requirements, leaving little room for rest or professional growth.

International studies echo these findings. OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) report similar patterns across education systems worldwide, where excessive workload and time pressure drive teacher dissatisfaction and

migration. Teachers in countries with poorly managed demands often seek employment abroad, perceiving foreign systems as offering more balanced workloads and structured support. Bense (2015) adds that workload stress is a common driver of teacher attrition, as educators leave environments that fail to manage demands effectively. This comparative disadvantage highlights how systemic inefficiencies in workload management contribute directly to migration intentions.

Teachers also reported that workload stress negatively affects their health. The statement “*Nakaka-stress po at minsan nagkakasakit ako*” (It is stressful and sometimes I get sick) reflects the physical toll of excessive demands. Stress-related illnesses, fatigue, and weakened immunity were commonly cited, illustrating how professional pressures spill over into personal well-being. Maslach and Leiter (2016) emphasize that burnout is multidimensional, encompassing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. These dimensions are evident in teachers’ narratives, where stress leads to illness, diminished motivation, and disengagement from their work.

The findings reveal that workload stress is not merely an operational issue but a systemic challenge with emotional, physical, and professional consequences. Addressing these pressures requires reforms that streamline administrative tasks, balance deadlines, and provide teachers with adequate support systems. Without such interventions, the cycle of stress, burnout, and migration will continue to erode teacher retention and weaken the education system.

The response “*Nababawasan po ang oras ko sa pamilya dahil sa dami ng trabaho*” (My time with family is reduced because of too much work) highlights the negative impact of workload on teachers’ work–life balance. Excessive demands force educators to sacrifice personal and family time, creating frustration and intensifying migration intentions. Reyes (2021) found that burnout and undervaluation are pervasive across career stages, with teachers often feeling emotionally drained by the demands of the profession. This erosion of family time not only affects personal well-being but also undermines the holistic identity of teachers, who value balance between professional responsibilities and family obligations.

The statement “*Minsan po nawawalan ako ng gana magturo dahil sa sobrang dami ng gawain*” (Sometimes I lose the motivation to teach because of too much work) illustrates the loss of enthusiasm caused by workload stress. Teachers reported that excessive demands diminish their passion for teaching, weakening their professional identity and sense of purpose. Herzberg’s (1959) Two-Factor Theory emphasizes that motivators such as achievement, recognition, and meaningful work are critical for sustaining professional satisfaction. When workload overwhelms teachers, these motivators are overshadowed, leading to dissatisfaction, disengagement, and declining instructional quality. This loss of motivation is not simply an individual issue but a systemic consequence of organizational cultures that fail to manage demands effectively.

Santos and Dizon (2022) confirm that workload stress intensifies migration likelihood, particularly when teachers perceive overseas employment as offering healthier work–life balance. Filipino educators abroad often report greater satisfaction with structured workloads, as Lopez and Ballescas (2020) observed, contrasting sharply with the excessive demands they face locally. In foreign contexts, teachers benefit from clearer boundaries between professional and personal life, dedicated time for professional development, and recognition systems that value their contributions. These comparative advantages reinforce migration intentions, as teachers view overseas employment not only as financially rewarding but also as emotionally sustainable.

The findings emphasize that workload stress erodes motivation, damages family relationships, and accelerates migration intentions. Addressing these challenges requires reforms that streamline administrative tasks, balance deadlines, and institutionalize recognition and support systems. By prioritizing teacher well-being and work–life balance, DepEd can reduce burnout, restore motivation, and foster retention, ensuring that educators remain committed to their profession and their communities rather than seeking relief abroad. The workload-related push factors identified in Table 8 intersect with emotional, professional, and cultural pressures discussed in earlier tables. Teachers who feel overwhelmed by workload also experience emotional exhaustion, professional stagnation, and cultural expectations to migrate, reinforcing their intentions. Maslach and Leiter (2016) highlight that burnout is not merely an individual issue but a systemic outcome of organizational cultures that fail to support teachers.

Globally, workload stress has emerged as one of the most significant drivers of teacher migration, cutting across both developed and developing contexts. OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) report that excessive demands, overlapping responsibilities, and poor work-life balance consistently contribute to teacher attrition, as educators struggle to sustain motivation under mounting pressures. The issue is not simply about long hours but about the imbalance between instructional duties and administrative requirements, which erodes teachers' capacity to focus on their core mission of student learning. Bense (2015) adds that workload stress often outweighs intrinsic motivation, meaning that even teachers who are deeply committed to their profession eventually reach a breaking point when systemic demands become overwhelming.

Frianeza et al. (2024) recommend reducing administrative burdens to allow teachers to focus more effectively on instruction, emphasizing that the excessive demands placed on educators undermine their ability to deliver quality teaching. This recommendation is echoed by Reyes (2021), who stresses the importance of addressing burnout as a critical step in countering migration intentions. Burnout, often triggered by heavy workloads and administrative overload, erodes teachers' motivation and weakens their professional identity, making overseas employment appear as a more sustainable alternative. Lopez and Ballescas (2020) further highlight the need for structured workloads and merit-based recognition, arguing that these reforms would provide teachers with dignity and respect within the local context. Without such measures, teachers perceive their contributions as undervalued, reinforcing dissatisfaction and migration aspirations.

Furthermore, workload pressures were consistently found to erode teachers' work-life balance, with many reporting limited time for family, rest, or professional development. This imbalance resonates with Maslach and Leiter's (2016) framework on burnout, which identifies workload as a central predictor of emotional fatigue, disengagement, and declining job satisfaction. Teachers in Zambales described how overlapping deadlines, reporting requirements, and administrative tasks left them exhausted, reducing their enthusiasm for teaching and diminishing their sense of accomplishment. The cumulative effect of these pressures is not only professional stagnation but also personal strain, as educators struggle to reconcile their responsibilities with their well-being. In this context, migration emerges as a rational alternative, offering not only higher salaries but also healthier workloads, clearer recognition systems, and improved professional dignity. Addressing these systemic burdens through reforms in workload management, recognition, and professional development is therefore essential to sustaining teacher morale and reducing the appeal of overseas employment.

Findings emphasize that workload is not simply a logistical issue but a critical push factor influencing teacher migration. Addressing this requires institutional reforms that streamline administrative tasks, redistribute responsibilities, and prioritize teacher well-being to sustain motivation and retention.

## 8. Career Advancement

Teachers consistently reported frustration with slow promotion processes. The statement "*Kahit matagal na sa serbisyo, bihira ang pagkakataon para ma-promote*" reflects the perception that career advancement within DepEd is sluggish and often disconnected from merit. Mendoza (2021) confirms that limited career mobility is a critical push factor for migration, as teachers feel trapped in positions with little opportunity for progression. Santos and Dizon (2022) similarly emphasize that career stagnation intensifies migration likelihood, particularly when teachers perceive overseas employment as offering clearer pathways for advancement.

Globally, OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) report similar patterns, where teachers in various countries seek overseas employment due to limited career mobility and recognition in their home systems. Bense (2015) adds that professional stagnation is a common driver of teacher attrition, as educators leave environments that fail to reward their contributions.

The statements "*Minsan po hindi malinaw ang criteria sa promotion*" (Sometimes the criteria for promotion are unclear) and "*Mas inuuna po ang mga may koneksyon kaysa sa performance*" (Those with connections are prioritized over performance) highlight teachers' perceptions of favoritism and lack of transparency in promotion processes within DepEd. Many educators expressed frustration that promotions and training opportunities are often influenced by administrative preferences rather than merit, eroding trust in institutional systems and reinforcing migration intentions. Ingersoll (2001) argues that organizational conditions, including inequitable

practices, are central to teacher attrition, while Frianeza et al. (2024) emphasize that systemic inefficiencies in the Philippine education system exacerbate dissatisfaction, as teachers perceive professional opportunities as limited and unfairly distributed. Lopez and Ballescas (2020) observed that Filipino educators abroad often experience merit-based recognition and structured promotion, contrasting sharply with the favoritism they face locally, which makes overseas employment appear more rational and rewarding.

The statement “*Kulang po ang training at seminars na makakatulong sa promotion*” (There is a lack of training and seminars that could help with promotion) underscores another dimension of professional stagnation: insufficient access to professional development. Teachers reported that training and seminars are not only limited but also poorly aligned with career advancement, leaving them unprepared to qualify for promotion. Frianeza et al. (2024) highlight that weak professional development systems in the Philippines exacerbate dissatisfaction, depriving teachers of growth opportunities and reinforcing perceptions of stagnation. Globally, UNESCO (2021) stresses the importance of continuous professional development in sustaining teacher motivation and retention, noting that systems with structured training pathways achieve higher teacher satisfaction. Lopez and Ballescas (2020) observed that overseas contexts often provide clearer and more accessible opportunities for professional growth, while Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) similarly highlight that Filipino teachers abroad report greater access to training and development, contributing to professional dignity and satisfaction.

Taken together, these findings reveal that limited career advancement opportunities, favoritism in promotion, lack of transparency, and weak professional development systems converge to form a powerful push factor for teacher migration. When educators perceive that their years of service and dedication do not translate into recognition or advancement, professional identity is undermined, and migration emerges as a rational alternative. Overseas employment is not only seen as financially rewarding but also as offering structured recognition, merit-based promotion, and continuous professional development—conditions that restore teachers’ sense of value and dignity. Addressing these systemic gaps through transparent promotion criteria, equitable access to training, and institutional recognition is therefore essential to sustaining teacher morale and reducing migration intentions.

Underlying these career advancement pressures is the persistent issue of recognition, which teachers consistently reported as lacking. Statements such as “*kulang ang recognition*” (recognition is insufficient) reflect the absence of acknowledgment for their contributions, leaving many educators feeling invisible within the system. Herzberg’s (1959) Two-Factor Theory underscores that motivators such as recognition, achievement, and advancement are critical for sustaining professional satisfaction. Even when hygiene factors like salary and working conditions are addressed, the absence of recognition undermines morale and weakens professional identity.

Reyes (2021) found that undervaluation is a significant factor in migration intentions, as teachers actively seek environments where their contributions are respected and rewarded. Similarly, Santos and Dizon (2022) emphasize that limited recognition intensifies the likelihood of migration, reinforcing the perception that overseas employment offers not only financial stability but also professional dignity. Frianeza et al. (2024) add that systemic inefficiencies, including weak professional development systems, exacerbate feelings of stagnation and undervaluation, leaving teachers with few opportunities to grow or be acknowledged. These career advancement-related push factors identified in Table 9 intersect with emotional, professional, and cultural pressures discussed in earlier tables. Teachers who feel professionally stagnant also experience emotional exhaustion, financial dissatisfaction, and cultural expectations to migrate, creating a convergence of pressures that reinforce their intentions.

Maslach and Leiter (2016) highlight that burnout is not merely an individual issue but a systemic outcome of organizational cultures that fail to support teachers. In this context, the lack of recognition becomes more than a professional grievance—it is a structural deficiency that drives educators to seek overseas opportunities where merit-based promotion, structured recognition, and continuous professional development are more accessible. Addressing recognition gaps within DepEd is therefore essential, not only to sustain teacher motivation but also to counteract migration intentions that stem from undervaluation and systemic neglect.

Asis (2006) and Parreñas (2001) emphasize that migration in the Philippine context is often framed as a moral responsibility to uplift the family, a cultural narrative deeply embedded in social expectations. This framing intersects with professional stagnation, creating a powerful push toward overseas employment. When teachers feel undervalued and constrained by limited career advancement opportunities, the cultural valorization of migration as a path to success and familial upliftment intensifies their intentions to leave. Reyes (2021) and Frianeza et al. (2024) similarly note that systemic inefficiencies—such as opaque promotion systems, favoritism, and weak professional development structures—compound feelings of undervaluation, reinforcing the appeal of migration as both an economic and cultural solution.

Globally, limited career advancement is recognized as a significant driver of teacher migration. OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) report that teachers across countries often seek overseas employment due to slow promotion processes and lack of recognition, which undermine professional identity and motivation. Bense (2015) adds that career stagnation frequently outweighs intrinsic motivation, prompting educators to pursue opportunities abroad where their contributions are more visibly acknowledged. Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) highlight that Filipino teachers in foreign contexts report clearer career pathways, structured recognition, and merit-based promotion systems, reinforcing migration intentions. These findings suggest that the problem is not unique to the Philippines but part of a broader global trend where teachers gravitate toward systems that provide dignity, fairness, and professional growth.

Frianeza et al. (2024) recommend strengthening professional development systems to provide teachers with opportunities for growth and recognition. Lopez and Ballescas (2020) highlight the importance of structured recognition and merit-based promotion to provide teachers with dignity and respect within the local context. Reyes (2021) emphasizes the need for institutional recognition to counter feelings of undervaluation, while Santos and Dizon (2022) highlight the importance of addressing career stagnation.

Promotion opportunities within the Department of Education (DepEd) were widely viewed by participants as slow, unclear, and sometimes influenced by favoritism. Teachers expressed discouragement that their efforts and years of service were not adequately rewarded, reinforcing perceptions of professional stagnation. This lack of transparent and merit-based advancement created frustration and diminished motivation, pushing educators to consider overseas employment where career pathways are perceived to be more structured and equitable.

These findings align with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959), which emphasizes that motivators such as achievement, recognition, and advancement are essential for job satisfaction. When these motivators are absent, employees experience dissatisfaction despite the presence of basic hygiene factors such as salary. In the Philippine context, Reyes (2021) found that limited career mobility is a significant factor influencing teacher attrition, while Santos and Dizon (2022) highlighted that favoritism and lack of recognition contribute to professional disengagement.

Globally, comparative studies reinforce this perception. The OECD (2019) reported that countries with transparent promotion systems and merit-based recognition, such as Singapore and Finland, have stronger teacher retention rates. Similarly, UNESCO (2021) emphasized that professional growth opportunities are critical to sustaining teacher motivation and reducing migration. For Filipino teachers, the belief that foreign systems provide clearer pathways for advancement and recognition strengthens migration intentions, as overseas employment is seen to achieve professional dignity and career fulfillment.

Findings feature that career stagnation is not merely an individual frustration but a systemic issue. Addressing this requires reforms in promotion processes, ensuring transparency, meritocracy, and recognition of teacher contributions. Without such reforms, professional push factors will continue to drive educators toward overseas opportunities.

## 9. Comparison of Professional Growth Opportunities

A comparative analysis of professional growth opportunities between DepEd teachers in Zambales and those working abroad, revealing stark contrasts in how career development is structured and valued. The open codes highlight narratives such as *“May training pero kulang”* (There is training, but it is insufficient), *“Abroad mas*

*malinaw ang career path at training*” (Abroad, the career path and training are clearer), and *“Kulang po ang recognition dito”* (Recognition here is lacking). These responses point to recurring frustrations with the local system, where professional development is often generalized, repetitive, and inconsistently scheduled. Teachers reported limited access to external training, a lack of specialization, absence of mentoring, and insufficient incentives, all of which contribute to feelings of stagnation and undervaluation. In contrast, overseas contexts were described as offering structured career ladders, updated training aligned with global standards, mentoring programs, and dedicated time for professional development, reinforcing migration intentions.

The first major theme, *insufficient professional development*, underscores how DepEd’s fragmented training programs fail to equip teachers with the skills and credentials necessary for career advancement. Frianeza et al. (2024) emphasize that weak professional development systems exacerbate dissatisfaction, leaving teachers with few opportunities to grow. The second theme, *comparative disadvantage*, highlights how teachers perceive foreign systems as superior, offering clearer pathways and merit-based recognition. Lopez and Ballescas (2020) observed that Filipino educators abroad often experience structured recognition and continuous training, which contrasts sharply with the stagnation they face locally. Finally, the *recognition gap* reflects the absence of acknowledgment for teachers’ contributions in the Philippines, a factor that Herzberg’s (1959) Two-Factor Theory identifies as a critical motivator for job satisfaction. Without recognition, even adequate hygiene factors such as salary and working conditions cannot sustain morale.

These themes illustrate how professional stagnation, comparative disadvantage, and lack of recognition converge to intensify migration intentions among teachers in Zambales. The findings suggest that retention strategies must go beyond salary adjustments and workload management to include reforms in professional development, transparent career pathways, and institutional recognition. By addressing these gaps, DepEd can begin to counteract the systemic pressures driving educators abroad and foster a more supportive environment that values teachers as professionals and contributors to national development.

Teachers consistently reported that professional development opportunities in DepEd are insufficient, reflecting a systemic gap that undermines both professional growth and motivation. The statement *“May training pero kulang”* (There is training, but it is insufficient) captures the perception that while programs exist, they are inadequate in scope, frequency, and relevance. Additional open codes such as *“Madalas po general ang training, hindi naka-focus sa subject area”* (Training is often general, not focused on the subject area) and *“May training pero minsan paulit-ulit lang ang topics”* (There is training, but sometimes the topics are repetitive) underscore the lack of specialization and redundancy in existing programs. Teachers expressed frustration that seminars are often generic, repetitive, and not tailored to their instructional needs, leaving them unprepared to address evolving classroom challenges. Frianeza et al. (2024) emphasize that weak professional development systems in the Philippines exacerbate dissatisfaction, as teachers perceive limited opportunities for skill enhancement and career advancement. Globally, UNESCO (2021) stresses that continuous, specialized, and updated professional development is essential for sustaining teacher motivation and retention. In contrast, Filipino teachers abroad often report access to structured training aligned with global standards, mentoring programs, and clear career pathways (Lopez & Ballescas, 2020; Garcia, 2025). This comparative disadvantage reinforces migration intentions, as overseas employment is perceived to offer not only financial rewards but also meaningful professional growth. Addressing these gaps requires reforms that institutionalize specialized training, ensure consistency, and link professional development to career progression, thereby restoring teacher confidence and reducing the appeal of migration. Frianeza et al. (2024) emphasize that systemic inefficiencies in the Philippine education system exacerbate dissatisfaction, as professional development programs are often poorly designed and inconsistently implemented. The open code *“Hindi po regular ang seminars, minsan taon ang pagitan”* highlights the inconsistency of training schedules, with some teachers waiting years between seminars. This irregularity undermines continuous professional growth, leaving teachers feeling stagnant.

The statement *“Kulang po ang support para makapag-attend ng external workshops”* further emphasizes limited access to external opportunities. Teachers reported that institutional support for attending external workshops is minimal, restricting their ability to expand knowledge beyond DepEd’s offerings. UNESCO (2021) stresses that continuous professional development is essential for sustaining teacher motivation and retention, yet local systems often fail to provide adequate support.

In contrast, teachers reported that professional growth opportunities abroad are clearer and more structured. The statement *“Abroad mas malinaw ang career path at training”* reflects the perception that overseas contexts provide well-defined career pathways. The additional open codes—*“Abroad may malinaw na ladder system para sa promotion”* and *“Mas updated po ang training abroad, naka-align sa global standards”*—highlight the structured ladder systems and globally relevant training available abroad.

Lopez and Ballescas (2020) observed that Filipino educators abroad often experience merit-based recognition and structured promotion, contrasting sharply with the stagnation they face locally. Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) similarly highlight that Filipino teachers in foreign contexts report greater access to training and development, contributing to professional satisfaction.

The statement *“May mentoring at coaching programs abroad”* underscores the supportive systems available to teachers overseas, highlighting how structured guidance contributes to professional growth and career development. Teachers reported that mentoring and coaching programs abroad provide not only instructional support but also personalized career pathways, reinforcing their sense of achievement and recognition. This contrasts sharply with the Philippine context, where mentoring is often absent or informal, leaving teachers to navigate professional challenges largely on their own. The open code *“Mas binibigyan ng oras ang teachers abroad para sa development”* (Teachers abroad are given more time for development) further emphasizes the importance of dedicated time allocation for professional growth. Overseas systems often integrate professional development into the work schedule, reducing workload conflict and allowing teachers to focus on skill enhancement without sacrificing personal well-being. UNESCO (2021) stresses that structured mentoring and time-bound professional development are essential for sustaining teacher motivation and retention, while Lopez and Ballescas (2020) observed that Filipino educators abroad benefit from clearer career ladders and mentoring programs aligned with global standards. Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) similarly highlight that access to mentoring and coaching abroad contributes to greater professional satisfaction, reinforcing migration intentions. These findings suggest that mentoring and time allocation are not supplementary benefits but central motivators that shape teacher retention. For DepEd, institutionalizing mentoring systems, ensuring dedicated time for professional development, and linking these opportunities to career progression are critical reforms to counteract professional stagnation and reduce the appeal of overseas employment. OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) report similar patterns, where structured professional development systems sustain teacher motivation and retention. Bense (2015) adds that comparative disadvantage in professional growth opportunities is a common driver of teacher migration, as educators seek environments that provide clearer pathways and supportive systems.

Teachers consistently reported that recognition is lacking locally, with the statement *“Kulang po ang recognition dito”* (Recognition here is lacking) reflecting the absence of acknowledgment for their contributions. Additional open codes such as *“Minsan po hindi napapansin ang achievements ng teachers”* (Sometimes the achievements of teachers are not noticed), *“Kulang po ang incentives para sa mga nag-eexcel”* (There are insufficient incentives for those who excel), *“Hindi po sapat ang appreciation mula sa admin”* (Appreciation from administrators is inadequate), and *“Kulang po ang career guidance at mentoring dito”* (Career guidance and mentoring are lacking here) underscore the recognition gap. Teachers expressed frustration that their achievements are overlooked, incentives are insufficient, appreciation from administrators is weak, and career guidance is absent, leaving them feeling undervalued despite their dedication.

Herzberg’s (1959) Two-Factor Theory emphasizes that motivators such as recognition and achievement are critical for sustaining professional satisfaction. Without recognition, teachers experience dissatisfaction even if hygiene factors such as salary and working conditions are addressed. Reyes (2021) found that undervaluation is a significant factor in migration intentions, as teachers seek environments where their contributions are respected, while Santos and Dizon (2022) similarly emphasize that limited recognition intensifies migration likelihood. In contrast, teachers reported that recognition abroad is more structured and merit-based. Lopez and Ballescas (2020) observed that Filipino educators overseas often experience clearer recognition systems, with achievements acknowledged and rewarded.

Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) highlight that Filipino teachers in foreign contexts report greater professional dignity and respect, reinforcing migration intentions. The professional growth-related push factors identified in Table 10 intersect with emotional, professional, and cultural pressures discussed in earlier tables. Teachers who feel professionally stagnant also experience emotional exhaustion, financial dissatisfaction, and cultural expectations to migrate, reinforcing their intentions. Maslach and Leiter (2016) highlight that burnout is not merely an individual issue but a systemic outcome of organizational cultures that fail to support teachers. Thus, recognition gaps within DepEd are not isolated concerns but part of a broader structural problem that undermines teacher morale and intensifies migration intentions. Addressing these gaps through institutional reforms—such as merit-based recognition, structured incentives, and mentoring programs—would be essential to sustaining teacher motivation and reducing the appeal of overseas employment.

Asis (2006) and Parreñas (2001) emphasize that migration in the Philippine context is often framed as a moral responsibility to uplift the family, a cultural narrative deeply embedded in social expectations. This framing intersects with limited professional growth opportunities, creating a powerful push toward overseas employment. When teachers feel undervalued and constrained by systemic inefficiencies, the cultural valorization of migration as a path to success and familial upliftment intensifies their intentions to leave. Reyes (2021) and Frianeza et al. (2024) similarly note that opaque promotion systems, favoritism, and weak professional development structures compound feelings of stagnation and undervaluation, reinforcing migration as both an economic and cultural solution.

Globally, comparative disadvantage in professional growth opportunities is recognized as a significant driver of teacher migration. OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) report that teachers across countries often seek overseas employment due to limited professional development and recognition in their home systems, which undermine professional identity and motivation. Bense (2015) adds that comparative disadvantage frequently outweighs intrinsic motivation, prompting educators to pursue opportunities abroad where their contributions are more visibly acknowledged. Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) highlight that Filipino teachers in foreign contexts report clearer career pathways, structured recognition, and merit-based promotion systems, reinforcing migration intentions. These findings suggest that the problem is not unique to the Philippines but part of a broader global trend where teachers gravitate toward systems that provide dignity, fairness, and professional growth.

Teachers in Zambales acknowledged that while DepEd provides training programs, these were often perceived as insufficient, irregular, or lacking depth. Respondents emphasized that professional development opportunities locally were limited in scope and did not always translate into tangible career advancement. This perception reinforced feelings of stagnation, as teachers believed their contributions were undervalued and inadequately recognized. In contrast, they viewed foreign education systems as offering structured, merit-based, and accessible pathways for professional growth, including continuous training, mentorship, and clearer promotion processes. The comparative disadvantage between local and overseas contexts thus magnifies migration intentions, as teachers perceive foreign systems not only as financially rewarding but also as professionally dignifying. Addressing these gaps requires institutional reforms that prioritize transparent promotion criteria, equitable access to specialized training, and structured recognition systems. By embedding these motivators into the organizational culture, DepEd can begin to counteract the convergence of professional, emotional, and cultural pressures driving migration, ultimately fostering a more supportive environment that values teachers both as professionals and as individuals.

This comparative disadvantage magnifies the attractiveness of migration, as teachers increasingly perceive overseas employment as offering not only financial stability but also professional dignity and growth. The findings resonate strongly with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959), which identifies recognition and advancement as critical motivators for job satisfaction. When these motivators are absent, dissatisfaction inevitably grows, even if hygiene factors such as salary and working conditions are addressed. Locally, Santos and Dizon (2022) found that Filipino teachers often feel excluded from meaningful professional development, with training programs perceived as compliance-driven rather than growth-oriented. This lack of depth and relevance in training reinforces feelings of stagnation, as teachers believe their contributions are undervalued and inadequately recognized.

Frianeza et al. (2024) recommend strengthening professional development systems to provide teachers with opportunities for growth and recognition, emphasizing that weak training structures exacerbate dissatisfaction. Lopez and Ballescás (2020) highlight the importance of structured recognition and merit-based promotion, noting that these reforms would restore dignity and respect to teachers within the local context. Reyes (2021) further emphasizes the need for institutional recognition to counter feelings of undervaluation, while Santos and Dizon (2022) stress that addressing career stagnation is essential to reducing migration likelihood. Together, these studies point to the necessity of reforms that go beyond financial incentives, focusing instead on systemic changes that empower teachers professionally.

The findings ultimately underscore that professional growth opportunities are not merely supplementary but central to teacher retention. Addressing this requires reforms that make training programs meaningful, transparent, and directly tied to career advancement. Teachers must be given access to specialized seminars, mentoring programs, and structured career ladders that align with global standards. Recognition systems should be institutionalized to ensure that achievements are acknowledged and rewarded fairly, reducing the comparative disadvantage that drives migration intentions. By embedding these motivators into the organizational culture, DepEd can begin to counteract the convergence of professional, emotional, and cultural pressures that push teachers abroad. In doing so, the system not only strengthens teacher morale but also fosters long-term retention, ensuring that educators remain committed to contributing to national development rather than seeking opportunities overseas.

## 10. Challenges and Struggles in Migration Decision-Making

Results reveal that despite strong motivations to migrate, teachers encountered profound emotional and psychological struggles in their decision-making process. Verbatim accounts such as “*Nakakaramdam po ako ng guilt na iiwan ang mga estudyante*” (I feel guilty about leaving the students) illustrate the moral and emotional toll of migration choices. Teachers expressed guilt over leaving their learners, reflecting the deep relational bonds and sense of responsibility inherent in the teaching profession. This finding aligns with Day and Gu (2010), who argue that teachers’ professional identities are closely tied to emotional investment in learners, making separation particularly difficult. Beyond guilt, teachers also reported feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, particularly about family separation and adapting to unfamiliar environments. These emotional struggles highlight that migration decisions are not purely economic or professional but deeply personal, requiring resilience to navigate moral dilemmas and psychological stress.

The narratives suggest that migration intentions are shaped by a complex interplay of professional dissatisfaction and emotional obligations. While teachers recognize the potential benefits of overseas employment, they simultaneously grapple with the ethical responsibility of serving their students and communities. This duality reflects Lee’s Push-Pull Migration Theory (1966), which acknowledges that alongside economic and professional push-pull factors, personal and emotional struggles significantly influence migration choices. Battistella (2018) further emphasizes that Filipino migrants often face psychological stress during transitions, balancing aspirations for better opportunities with the emotional costs of leaving loved ones. Thus, the findings from Table 11 underscore that migration is not a straightforward decision but a multidimensional process, where guilt, fear, and anxiety complicate intentions. Addressing these challenges requires not only institutional reforms to reduce professional dissatisfaction but also psychosocial support systems that help teachers manage the emotional weight of migration decisions.

It captures the emotional, psychological, and social struggles teachers in Zambales face when considering or preparing for migration, revealing that the decision is far more complex than a simple economic calculation. The open codes highlight narratives such as “*I feel guilty about leaving the students,*” “*I feel fear and anxiety,*” and “*I fear separation from my family.*” These sentiments are further reinforced by accounts of sadness about leaving colleagues, cultural adjustment anxiety, family-related guilt, decision-related stress, job insecurity abroad, financial obstacles, discrimination fears, and uncertainty about social support systems overseas. Collectively, these responses converge into two major themes: emotional and psychological struggles, and social challenges in migration.

Teachers consistently reported feelings of guilt, sadness, and anxiety when contemplating migration. The statement *“I feel guilty about leaving the students”* reflects the moral burden teachers carry, as they worry about abandoning their learners despite systemic frustrations. Reyes (2021) emphasizes that while teachers often feel undervalued locally, they still maintain a deep sense of responsibility toward their students, which intensifies the emotional complexity of migration decisions. This guilt illustrates the tension between professional dissatisfaction and moral obligation, making migration a deeply conflicted choice.

The statement *“I feel sad about leaving my friends and colleagues at work”* highlights the anticipated social disconnection teachers face. Frianeza et al. (2024) note that professional communities provide essential emotional support, and leaving them creates psychological strain. Teachers expressed concern that migration would sever bonds with colleagues who serve as sources of encouragement and solidarity, compounding feelings of isolation. These findings underscore that migration decisions are not only shaped by economic and professional push factors but also by emotional and social costs. Maslach and Leiter (2016) argue that burnout is a systemic outcome of organizational cultures that fail to support teachers, and in this case, migration emerges as both an escape from systemic burdens and a source of new emotional challenges. Addressing these struggles requires not only institutional reforms to reduce professional dissatisfaction but also psychosocial support systems that help teachers navigate the emotional and social dimensions of migration.

Teachers also expressed cultural adjustment anxiety, as reflected in the statement *“I worry if I can adapt to a new culture.”* This concern highlights the uncertainty of navigating unfamiliar norms, values, and practices, which Parreñas (2001) emphasizes as a central challenge in migrant adaptation. Such anxiety is often compounded by family-related guilt, with teachers worrying that their families might feel abandoned, as captured in *“I feel guilty that my family might think I abandoned them.”* These overlapping pressures illustrate how migration decisions are not only professional but deeply personal, involving emotional negotiations between responsibility to family and the pursuit of better opportunities.

Decision-related stress was also evident in the statement *“Sometimes I cannot sleep thinking if my decision is right.”* This insomnia reflects the psychological toll of migration choices, where uncertainty about outcomes leads to prolonged worry and fatigue. Maslach and Leiter (2016) argue that burnout and stress are multidimensional, encompassing emotional exhaustion, decision fatigue, and diminished resilience. For teachers, the migration decision becomes a source of chronic stress, as they weigh the risks of leaving against the potential benefits abroad.

Teachers further reported fears of family separation, job insecurity, financial obstacles, discrimination, and lack of support overseas. The statement *“I fear separation from my family”* underscores the emotional cost of migration, resonating with Asis (2006), who emphasizes that family separation is a central challenge in Philippine migration, with left-behind families experiencing emotional strain and loneliness. These findings reveal that migration is not simply a matter of economic rationality but a multidimensional process shaped by cultural anxieties, psychological burdens, and social costs. Addressing these struggles requires not only institutional reforms to reduce professional dissatisfaction but also psychosocial support systems that help teachers manage the emotional and relational complexities of migration.

The response *“I fear that the job abroad might not be stable”* highlights teachers’ concerns about job security, reflecting the uncertainty that migration entails. Docquier and Rapoport (2012) argue that migration involves significant economic risks, as overseas employment may not guarantee long-term stability. For teachers, this fear is particularly pressing because leaving a relatively secure, though undervalued, position in the Philippines for an uncertain role abroad can create anxiety about sustainability and future prospects. This concern illustrates that migration decisions are not purely motivated by financial gain but are also shaped by apprehensions about stability and security.

Financial obstacles were also evident in the statement *“I worry about expenses and debt for the placement fee.”* Teachers expressed concern about incurring debt to finance migration, highlighting the paradox of migration as both an opportunity and a burden. Reyes (2021) found that financial dissatisfaction often drives migration intentions, yet the costs of migration itself—such as placement fees, loans, and other expenses—can be

overwhelming. This financial strain adds another layer of complexity, as teachers must weigh the potential benefits of higher salaries abroad against the immediate risks of indebtedness and financial vulnerability.

Discrimination fears were captured in the statement *“I fear discrimination and unfair treatment in another country.”* Garcia (2025) and Cabato (2026) highlight that Filipino educators abroad often face vulnerability to discrimination, reinforcing the social challenges of migration. Teachers worry about being treated unfairly due to their nationality, race, or migrant status, which can undermine their sense of dignity and belonging. These fears, combined with concerns about job insecurity and financial obstacles, reveal that migration is not a straightforward solution but a multifaceted decision fraught with risks. Addressing these issues requires not only systemic reforms to reduce local dissatisfaction but also stronger support systems to prepare teachers for the challenges of working abroad.

The statement *“I am not sure if I will find a support system there”* underscores teachers’ uncertainty about social support abroad, reflecting fears of isolation and vulnerability. Lopez and Ballezas (2020) observed that Filipino educators often rely heavily on kinship networks and collegial relationships for emotional and practical support, and the absence of such systems overseas intensifies feelings of loneliness. This concern highlights that migration is not only a professional and economic decision but also a deeply social one, where the lack of familiar networks can create psychological strain and hinder adaptation.

The struggles identified in Table 11 intersect with emotional, professional, and cultural push factors discussed in earlier tables, showing how migration intentions are shaped by multiple layers of pressure. Teachers who feel emotionally burdened by guilt and anxiety also face professional stagnation, financial dissatisfaction, and cultural expectations to migrate. This intersection creates a multidimensional rationale for migration, where the desire for better opportunities abroad is counterbalanced by fears of emotional disconnection and social vulnerability. Reyes (2021) emphasizes that undervaluation locally intensifies migration intentions, yet teachers remain conflicted due to their strong relational ties and responsibilities at home.

Maslach and Leiter (2016) highlight that burnout is not merely an individual issue but a systemic outcome of organizational cultures that fail to support teachers. When combined with migration-related struggles such as uncertainty about social support, family separation, and discrimination fears, burnout intensifies the push toward overseas employment. Teachers perceive migration as both an escape from systemic neglect and a risk-laden journey into unfamiliar environments. Addressing these challenges requires not only institutional reforms to reduce professional dissatisfaction but also psychosocial support systems that prepare teachers for the emotional and social realities of migration. Strengthening recognition, mentoring, and community-building locally, DepEd can mitigate the comparative disadvantage and reduce the emotional burden that drives teachers to seek support abroad.

Asis (2006) and Parreñas (2001) emphasize that migration is often framed as a moral responsibility to uplift the family. Teachers in Zambales echoed this sentiment, noting that financial dissatisfaction and workload stress make overseas employment more appealing, despite emotional and social challenges.

Emotional and social struggles are significant drivers of migration decisions. OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) report that teachers across countries face emotional exhaustion, family separation fears, and cultural adjustment challenges when migrating. Bense (2015) adds that emotional and social struggles often outweigh intrinsic motivation, prompting teachers to seek opportunities abroad despite risks.

Frianeza et al. (2024) recommend strengthening support systems within schools to provide teachers with emotional and social stability, emphasizing that collegial networks and mentoring programs can buffer stress. Reyes (2021) highlights the importance of addressing burnout to counter migration intentions, while Lopez and Ballezas (2020) stress the need for structured recognition and mentoring to restore dignity and respect within the local context. Together, these findings suggest that retention strategies must go beyond financial incentives, embedding emotional and social support into the organizational culture. By doing so, DepEd can reduce the comparative disadvantage that drives teachers abroad and foster a more sustainable environment for professional and personal well-being.

Beyond guilt, participants reported fear of the unknown and anxiety about family separation, highlighting the personal risks and uncertainties associated with migration. These findings resonate with Sussman (2010), who noted that migration decisions often involve identity negotiation and emotional resilience, as individuals must adapt to unfamiliar cultural and professional contexts. Similarly, Battistella (2018) emphasized that Filipino migrants frequently face psychological stress during the transition, balancing aspirations for better opportunities with the emotional costs of leaving loved ones. The narratives also reveal that migration is not purely transactional or economically driven but deeply personal, requiring resilience to navigate fears, uncertainties, and moral dilemmas. This complexity reflects Lee's Push-Pull Migration Theory (1966), which acknowledges that alongside economic and professional push-pull factors, personal and emotional struggles significantly shape migration intentions.

Findings underscore that migration decisions among DepEd teachers are multidimensional. While economic and professional factors provide strong incentives, emotional struggles—guilt, fear, and anxiety—complicate the process, making migration a deeply human experience. Addressing these challenges requires not only institutional reforms but also psychosocial support systems that help teachers manage the emotional weight of migration decisions.

## **12. Proposed Retention Plan for Teachers**

This framework addresses the emotional, cultural, and professional push factors influencing DepEd teachers' migration intentions. It adopts a holistic, multi-dimensional approach aimed at improving teacher satisfaction, motivation, and long-term commitment.

The proposed Teacher Retention Plan or Project S.T.A.Y. (Support, Transform, Advance, Yield, Engage, Sustain) was systematically developed based on the key findings of the study, particularly the identified emotional, cultural, and professional push factors influencing DepEd teachers' migration intentions.

The proposed framework, PROJECT S.T.A.Y., is designed to address the multifaceted push factors—emotional, cultural, professional, and economic—that drive DepEd teachers in Zambales to consider overseas employment. By focusing on Support, Transform, Advance, Engage, and Sustain, the framework provides a holistic retention strategy that aligns with both global best practices and local realities.

### **1. Support: Mental Health and Well-being**

The first pillar emphasizes mental health programs, peer support groups, and well-being assessments. Teachers in Zambales reported emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and guilt (see Table 4), which resonate with Maslach & Leiter's (2016) multidimensional model of burnout. Providing structured mental health support directly addresses these emotional push factors.

Kyriacou (2018) stresses that teacher stress is often linked to workload and undervaluation, while Reyes (2021) highlights that burnout is a critical driver of migration intentions in the Philippine context. By institutionalizing peer support and counseling, PROJECT S.T.A.Y. seeks to mitigate emotional strain, thereby reducing the appeal of migration as an escape from psychological burdens.

### **2. Transform: Streamlining Administrative Duties**

The second pillar focuses on reducing administrative burdens and promoting work-life balance. Teachers consistently reported that excessive paperwork and overlapping deadlines (see Table 8) contribute to stress and poor work-life balance. Frianeza et al. (2024) emphasize that systemic inefficiencies in the Philippine education system exacerbate workload pressures, undermining instructional quality.

Streamlining reporting requirements and limiting non-teaching tasks, PROJECT S.T.A.Y. aligns with international recommendations from UNESCO (2021), which stress the importance of reducing administrative overload to sustain teacher motivation. This transformation directly addresses workload-related push factors, positioning teaching as a more sustainable profession locally.

### **3. Advance: Clear Promotion Paths and Professional Development**

The third pillar addresses professional stagnation by establishing clear promotion pathways, training scholarships, and leadership programs. Teachers reported slow promotion, favoritism, and lack of recognition (see Tables 6 and 9), which Santos & Dizon (2022) identify as critical push factors for migration.

Lopez & Ballescas (2020) observed that Filipino educators abroad often experience structured career ladders and merit-based recognition, contrasting sharply with local stagnation. PROJECT S.T.A.Y. seeks to replicate these global best practices by institutionalizing transparent promotion criteria and expanding access to professional development. Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory underscores that recognition and achievement are essential motivators; thus, this pillar directly addresses the recognition gap highlighted in Table 10.

### **4. Engage: Societal Recognition and Family Involvement**

The fourth pillar emphasizes engagement through teacher success stories, family involvement, and positive societal recognition. Teachers reported cultural pressures to migrate, with communities equating overseas employment with success (see Table 5). Asis (2006) and Parreñas (2001) emphasize that migration is often framed as a moral responsibility to uplift the family, reinforcing cultural push factors.

Promoting teacher success stories locally and engaging families in recognition programs, PROJECT S.T.A.Y. seeks to counter cultural narratives that valorize migration. Reyes (2021) highlights the importance of institutional recognition, while Tantay, Monticillo, & Derasin (2024) emphasize community-based interventions that celebrate local educators. This pillar reframes teaching as a respected and dignified profession within the community, reducing cultural pressures to migrate.

### **5. Sustain: Monitoring and Policy Adjustment**

The final pillar focuses on sustainability through retention surveys, policy adjustments, and attrition monitoring. Docquier & Rapoport (2012) argue that brain drain is a systemic issue requiring continuous monitoring and adaptive policies. PROJECT S.T.A.Y. institutionalizes feedback mechanisms to ensure that interventions remain responsive to evolving teacher needs.

OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2021) emphasize that retention strategies must be adaptive and data-driven. By embedding monitoring and evaluation, PROJECT S.T.A.Y. ensures that retention policies are not static but evolve with changing contexts, thereby sustaining long-term teacher satisfaction and reducing migration intentions.

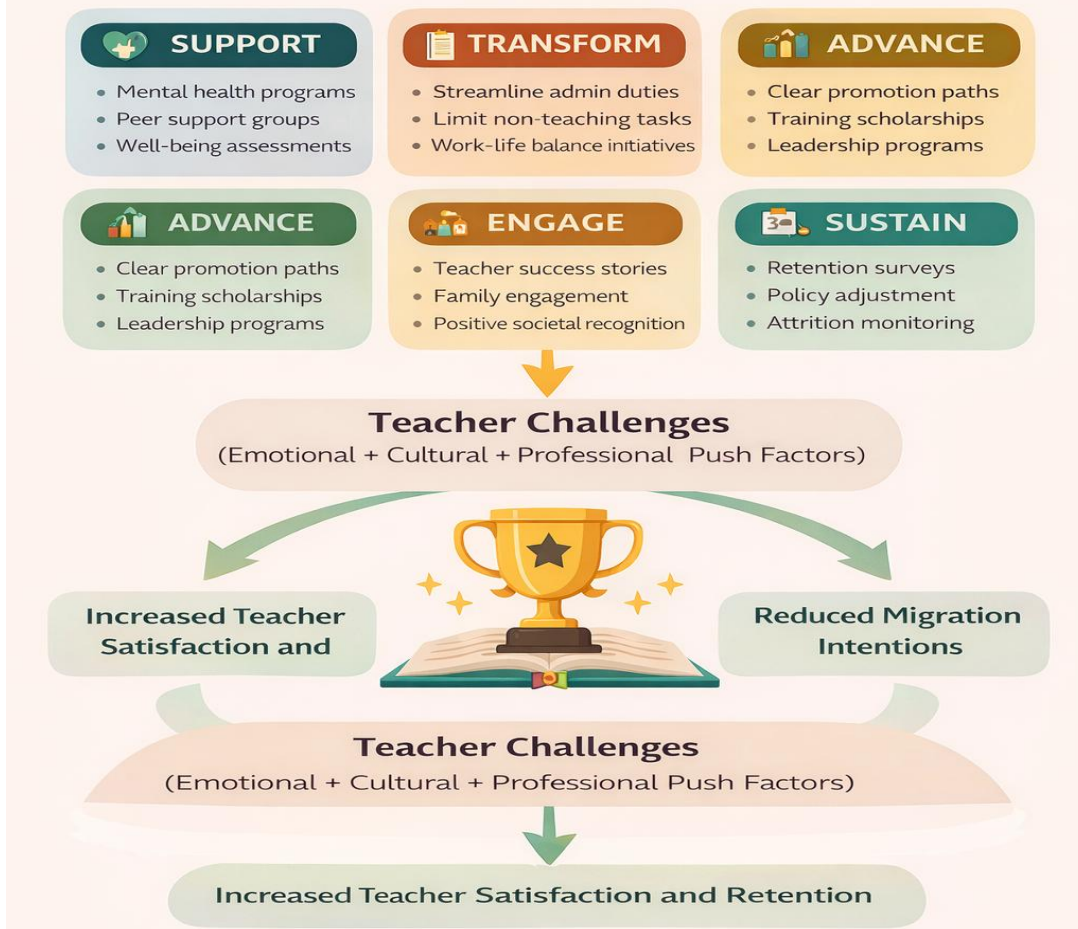
PROJECT S.T.A.Y. integrates emotional, cultural, professional, and economic dimensions into a unified retention framework. Emotional support addresses burnout; workload transformation reduces stress; career advancement counters stagnation; engagement reframes cultural narratives; and sustainability ensures adaptive policies.

Aligning with global best practices (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2021) and addressing local realities (Reyes, 2021; Frianeza et al., 2024; Santos & Dizon, 2022), PROJECT S.T.A.Y. positions itself as a robust intervention for teacher retention in Zambales. It reframes teaching as a dignified, sustainable, and respected profession, reducing the appeal of overseas employment and mitigating brain drain.

# PROJECT S.T.A.Y.

Support, Transform, Advance, Yield **Teacher Retention**

A comprehensive teacher retention framework based on addressing emotional, cultural, and professional push factors influencing DepEd teachers' migration intentions.



## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the researcher concluded that:

1. The participants represented a wide range of teaching experience, from early-career educators to veteran teachers with more than fifteen years of service. This diversity revealed that migration intentions are not confined to one career stage but cut across novice and experienced teachers alike. The findings suggest that systemic issues in DepEd—such as compensation, workload, and career stagnation—affect teachers regardless of tenure, making migration a shared consideration across demographic profiles.
2. Teachers described their personal and professional journeys as marked by undervaluation, emotional exhaustion, and frustration with systemic inefficiencies. Many expressed that despite years of service, recognition and opportunities for growth remained limited. These lived realities reinforced the perception that overseas employment offers dignity, respect, and professional fulfillment, in contrast to the stagnation and undervaluation experienced locally.
3. The study revealed three interconnected push factors. Emotionally, teachers reported burnout, stress, and guilt, which made migration appear as an escape toward environments prioritizing well-being. Culturally, migration was framed as a marker of success and prestige, with families and communities equating overseas work with upliftment, thereby pressuring teachers to leave. Professionally, slow promotion, favoritism, salary stagnation,

and limited professional development created a sense of career stagnation. Together, these push factors formed a multidimensional rationale for migration.

4. Teachers consistently viewed compensation as inadequate, with stagnant salaries and insufficient benefits failing to meet family needs. Workload was described as heavy, with excessive administrative tasks and overlapping deadlines spilling into personal life, causing stress and illness. Career advancement opportunities were perceived as slow, inequitable, and lacking transparency, with favoritism undermining merit-based recognition. These conditions collectively diminished motivation and reinforced migration intentions.

5. Teachers reported that professional development in DepEd was insufficient, repetitive, and inconsistent, with limited access to external workshops. In contrast, overseas contexts offered structured career ladders, updated training aligned with global standards, mentoring programs, and dedicated time for professional growth. Recognition gaps were evident locally, while abroad teachers experienced greater respect, incentives, and support. This comparative disadvantage made overseas employment more attractive.

6. Teachers encountered emotional, psychological, and social struggles as they contemplated migration. Emotional exhaustion, guilt about leaving students, and anxiety about uncertain futures were common. Socially, teachers faced community expectations and familial pressures, which both motivated and burdened their decisions. Psychologically, the tension between professional stagnation locally and opportunities abroad created dilemmas that intensified stress during the migration decision-making process.

7. Based on the findings, the study proposes PROJECT S.T.A.Y. (Support, Transform, Advance, Yield Teacher Retention) as a holistic retention framework. This intervention plan addresses emotional well-being through mental health programs, transforms workload by streamlining administrative duties, advances career mobility through clear promotion paths and professional development, engages communities by reframing cultural narratives and recognizing teacher success, and sustains retention through continuous monitoring and adaptive policy adjustments. Grounded in both local realities and global best practices, PROJECT S.T.A.Y. provides a comprehensive strategy to mitigate brain drain and sustain the teaching workforce in Zambales.

The study concludes that a convergence of emotional strain, cultural pressures, professional stagnation, inadequate compensation, excessive workload, limited career advancement, and weak institutional support drives teacher migration intentions in Zambales. Teachers perceive overseas employment as offering dignity, recognition, financial stability, and structured growth, in stark contrast to local conditions marked by undervaluation and systemic inefficiencies. Addressing these push factors through holistic interventions like PROJECT S.T.A.Y. is essential to retaining teachers and strengthening the Philippine education system.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the foregoing conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were advanced:

1. It is recommended that retention strategies be tailored to the diverse career stages of teachers. Early-career educators should be provided with mentoring and induction programs, while mid-career and veteran teachers should be offered leadership opportunities and recognition for long service. This differentiated approach ensures that teachers across all tenure levels feel valued and supported.

2. Schools should strengthen institutional recognition by acknowledging teachers' contributions through awards, incentives, and appreciation programs. Professional experiences must be enhanced by reducing administrative burdens and providing opportunities for meaningful classroom innovation. By improving both personal and professional experiences, teachers will be less inclined to seek fulfillment abroad.

3. To address emotional strain, mental health programs and peer support groups should be institutionalized. Cultural pressures can be reframed by promoting teacher success stories locally and engaging families in recognition initiatives. Professional stagnation must be countered through transparent promotion systems, merit-based recognition, and continuous professional development opportunities.

4. Teachers should be provided with competitive salaries, comprehensive benefits, and clear progression in pay scales. Workload must be managed by streamlining reporting requirements and limiting non-teaching tasks, allowing educators to focus on instruction. Career advancement opportunities should be clarified through structured promotion pathways and leadership development programs.
5. DepEd must strengthen its professional development programs by offering specialized, updated, and globally aligned training. Mentoring and coaching systems should be established locally to replicate the supportive structures available abroad. Recognition gaps must be addressed by institutionalizing incentives and appreciation programs, ensuring that teachers feel respected and valued within the Philippine system.
6. Retention strategies should include counseling and career guidance services to help teachers navigate emotional, psychological, and social struggles related to migration. Family engagement programs can provide support networks that anchor teachers locally, while institutional recognition can reduce feelings of undervaluation and isolation.
7. The study recommends the implementation of PROJECT S.T.A.Y. (Support, Transform, Advance, Yield Teacher Retention) as a comprehensive retention framework. This plan integrates emotional support, workload transformation, career advancement, cultural engagement, and sustainability through monitoring and policy adjustment. By addressing the multidimensional push factors identified in the study, PROJECT S.T.A.Y. offers a holistic and adaptive strategy to mitigate brain drain and sustain the teaching workforce in Zambales.
8. By including participants from multiple regions to enhance the transferability of findings across different educational contexts. Future research should incorporate longitudinal approaches to track teacher migration intentions and decisions over time, reducing reliance on retrospective recall. Strengthening methodological rigor through clearer explanations of coding procedures and inter-coder agreement would improve trustworthiness. In addition, deeper integration of Lee's Push-Pull Theory of Migration and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation into the discussion would enhance theoretical alignment with findings.

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