

Navigating the Experience of DepEd Teachers' Decision to Work Abroad: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract: - This qualitative study explores teachers' experiences from the Philippines who have chosen to work internationally, focusing on their motivations, challenges, and insights. Through in-depth interviews with six participants, themes emerged related to increased salary and benefits, teaching environment and classroom support, enhanced professional and personal development, challenges, and retention strategies. The findings highlight the importance of economic incentives, supportive teaching environments, and opportunities for growth and development in influencing teachers' decisions to migrate. However, participants also identify challenges such as cultural differences, classroom management issues, and homesickness. To address retention concerns, participants advocate for improved salary, classroom support, and mental health initiatives in the Philippine education sector. This study contributes to the understanding of teacher migration dynamics and informs strategies to enhance teacher retention and address migration-related issues in education systems worldwide.

Keywords: Department of Education (DepEd), Career opportunities abroad, Retention strategies, Professional growth, Phenomenological Study

Introduction

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) is responsible for shaping the nation's future by providing its citizens with superior educational opportunities. Being the principal agency tasked with ensuring educational access and equity, DepEd is responsible for cultivating Filipino students' cognitive, practical, and ethical capacities, equipping them for active participation in society. In recent years, a significant trend has emerged among educators from the Department of Education (DepEd): an increasing number of them are seeking employment opportunities abroad. This change could be attributed to diverse factors, like the more alluring remuneration packages and benefits offered in foreign countries, along with the pursuit of an enhanced standard of living for themselves and their families. Nevertheless, the motivations behind this phenomenon extend beyond mere economic considerations.

Moreover, educators are driven by the potential for professional progression and development, enabling them to engage with innovative educational frameworks and pathways to enhance their pedagogical methodologies (Cahilog et al., 2023). Additionally, the overwhelming workload

has emerged as a significant factor prompting educators to exit the Department of Education (DepEd) (Sandmeier et al., 2022). Concerns persist regarding the potential impact of this trend on the quality of education in the Philippines, notwithstanding governmental endeavors to enhance benefits and working conditions for educators. The departure of experienced educators and the imminent possibility of teacher deficits could significantly impact the educational environment.

This qualitative study aims to investigate the real-life encounters and underlying rationales that influence educators within the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines as they pursue employment opportunities abroad. This study utilizes the phenomenological approach, and this investigation seeks to reveal the essence of the phenomenon as perceived by DepEd educators who have chosen to give up their teaching roles in the Philippines in favor of careers overseas. In-depth interviews and thematic analysis will be used in this study to provide valuable insight into the personal, professional, and socioeconomic factors that influence DepEd teachers' decision-making

processes and the causes that drive them to pursue work abroad.

The result of this study can offer insights to the Department of Education (DepEd) and other educational institutions concerning the factors propelling teacher migration and aiding in formulating strategies to tackle the matters of teacher retention in the Philippines. This seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Why is it that educators from the Department of Education opt to pursue opportunities overseas for employment?
2. What are the difficulties encountered by Department of Education teachers in their endeavors abroad?
3. In what manner can the perspectives shared by Department of Education teachers contribute to enhancing teacher retention strategies and resolving issues related to migration?

Methods And Materials

This research utilized a descriptive qualitative methodology. The study adopted a phenomenological research design, aiming to explore the subjective experiences of DepEd teachers who have transitioned to teaching abroad. Phenomenology is well-suited for investigating individuals' perceptions, meanings, and lived experiences within a specific phenomenon, allowing for an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives. The participants in this study were DepEd teachers in the Philippines who had resigned from their positions and embarked on teaching careers abroad. Snowball sampling was employed to select participants who could provide rich, detailed accounts of their experiences and motivations for leaving DepEd.

Criteria for participant selection included:

1. Former employment as a teacher within the DepEd system in the Philippines.
2. Decision to resign from DepEd and pursue teaching opportunities overseas.
3. Willingness to share their experiences and insights through in-depth interviews.

Participants were recruited through various channels, including online forums, social media groups for overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), and professional networks within the education sector. Information about the study, including its

objectives and procedures, was disseminated to potential participants, and those who were interested in taking part were asked to contact the researcher for more information.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection in the study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with the selected participants. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility in exploring participants' experiences while ensuring that key topics relevant to the research objectives were covered. Interview questions were designed to elicit detailed narratives about participants' reasons for leaving DepEd, their experiences transitioning to teaching abroad, and the challenges they encountered in their new roles. Probing questions were employed to gather additional details about particular elements of the participants' experiences, enabling an in-depth understanding of the topic that was under study. Every interview was audio recorded and verbatim transcribed. Participants received assurances that the information they provided would be kept private. A theme emerged from the collection of the findings.

Data Analysis

The researchers utilized thematic analysis to analyze the interview transcripts and identify recurring themes and patterns within participants' narratives. This involved a systematic process of coding the data, identifying key themes, and organizing them into meaningful categories. The analysis was iterative, with constant comparison of data to refine and validate emerging themes.

Ethical Considerations

All participants provided their informed consent before they started to participate in the study, and measures were implemented to preserve their anonymity and confidentiality at all times. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. The participants are provided with a sufficient amount of time to decide on their participation in the study. The presentation of findings maintained strict transparency by highlighting the viewpoints of participants in an impartial and unaltered manner.

Results

In delving into the experiences of Department of Education (DepEd) teachers from the Philippines who choose to teach internationally, the researcher embarked on a qualitative phenomenological study aimed at uncovering their motivations, challenges, and insights. Through engaging with participants, the study sought to extract valuable insights that could inform teacher retention strategies and address migration-related issues within the education sector. Five (5) main themes emerged in the study, namely (1) Increased Salary and Benefits, (2) Teaching Environment and Classroom Support, (3) Enhanced Professional and Personal Development, (4) Challenges, and (5) Retention and Strategies.

Theme 1. Increased Salary and Benefits

This theme highlights the differences in the teaching environment and the level of classroom support between the Philippines and other countries, particularly the United States. Participants noted that schools abroad are often equipped with modern facilities, advanced technology, and ample resources, which significantly enhance the teaching and learning experience. Teachers abroad receive considerable support from local governments, school districts, and private organizations. This includes access to classroom supplies, well-maintained facilities, and financial allowances for additional resources. Such support fosters a conducive learning environment and enables teachers to perform their duties more effectively and efficiently.

The main factor that influenced my decision to leave my home country is that the salary the Department of Education offers is insufficient for me to support my family, especially since my parents have a lot of medical issues. - Participant 2:

Even though the expense of going abroad is high, we cannot deny the fact that it really offers a much higher pay aside from the fact that I could bring my family with me was a major motivator. - Participant 5

Higher pay is one of the main reasons. And the experience of being in a different country. – Participant 6

Theme 2. Teaching Environment and Classroom Support

This theme highlights the differences in the teaching environment and the level of classroom support between the Philippines and host countries, particularly the United States. Participants noted that schools abroad are often equipped with modern facilities, advanced technology, and ample resources, which significantly enhance the teaching and learning experience. Teachers abroad receive considerable support from local governments, school districts, and private organizations. This includes access to classroom supplies, well-maintained facilities, and financial allowances for additional resources. Such support fosters a conducive learning environment and enables teachers to perform their duties more effectively and efficiently.

I truly felt that I am in a first world country. Having classroom supplies is not an issue since the school will provide everything for you. Plus, teachers are given an amount of \$300 per school year to purchase the supplies we need in our classroom.

Being a teacher here in the USA receives a lot of support from the local government, the school district, and private organizations. – Participant 2

The US education system places a strong emphasis on inclusivity and diversity, with efforts to accommodate students with special needs and promote multicultural education. – Participant 4

Theme 3. Enhanced Professional and Personal Development:

This theme delves into the opportunities for professional and personal growth that teaching abroad offers. Many Participants reported that working in an international setting has positively influenced their career trajectory, providing them with new development opportunities that were not available in the Philippines. Exposure to diverse educational systems, teaching methodologies, and student populations broadens their perspectives and enhances their competencies as educators. Additionally, professional development is actively supported through regular seminars and training sessions. The experience of working abroad also contributes to personal growth, increasing teachers' confidence and enabling them to establish a global network of professional contacts. *Teaching abroad has influenced my career trajectory and goals. It has opened up new opportunities for professional growth and*

development that I may not have had if I stayed in the Philippines. My experience abroad has also broadened my perspective on education and how it can be approached, which has led me to set higher standards for myself as an educator. - Participant 1
Working in an international setting has exposed me to diverse educational systems, teaching methodologies, and student populations. Working abroad has enabled me to establish connections with educators from around the world. - Participant 4

My professional life has improved, I think. I've learned so many things here that I never thought I would learn and grow from moving here and teaching abroad. - Participant 5

Theme 4: Challenges:

Despite the numerous benefits, teachers working abroad also face significant challenges. Participants identified cultural differences, adapting to new work environments, and managing homesickness as major hurdles. Classroom management can be particularly challenging due to differences in student behavior and attitudes toward authority. For instance, some Participants noted that students abroad may have different perspectives on learning and respect for teachers, which can complicate classroom dynamics. Additionally, dealing with misbehavior and adjusting to different educational systems requires significant effort and adaptability, making the transition to teaching abroad a complex and demanding process.

I saw significant differences in the education system, culture, and way of life here. – Participant 2
Classroom management is the biggest challenge given that students here are way different from the students in the Philippines given their culture, language, and misbehavior. - Participant 4

Most of the kids here don't have default respect for their elders. You have to earn their respect. - Participant 5

Theme 5. Retention and Strategies:

This theme focuses on strategies to retain teachers in the Philippines and mitigate the brain drain caused by migration. Participants emphasized the need for higher salaries and better incentives to make teaching in the Philippines more attractive. Improving the working environment, reducing administrative burdens, and providing adequate classroom support are also crucial measures.

Addressing these issues could enhance job satisfaction and reduce the desire to seek opportunities abroad. Furthermore, fostering a supportive and positive work culture, especially for new teachers, is essential to prevent discouragement and burnout. By implementing these strategies, the Philippines can better retain its skilled educators and strengthen its educational system.

They need to raise the salary of the teachers in the Philippines, give more classroom support, and give importance to mental health. Teachers in the Philippines are just overworked but underpaid. – Participant 1

Our teachers in the Philippines are overworked yet underpaid. One thing to encourage them to stay is to at least give them the proper salary and incentives that they deserve. Another is providing them a supportive work environment, especially for the new teachers who are discouraged already from working in DepEd due to the toxic work environment - Participant 2

Discussion

The findings of this study shed light on the multifaceted experiences of Department of Education (DepEd) teachers from the Philippines who choose to teach in other countries. The exploration of their motivations, challenges, and insights unveils critical considerations for both policymakers and educators in addressing migration-related issues and enhancing teacher retention strategies.

One of the prominent themes that emerged from the study is the attraction of increased salary and benefits associated with teaching abroad. The participants highlighted the financial opportunities available overseas compared to the limited salary prospects in the Philippines. This finding resonates with existing literature on teacher migration, which emphasizes the role of economic factors in shaping educators' decisions to seek employment abroad (Findlay, 2011). Moreover, the emphasis placed on improved compensation and better accommodation underscores the importance of addressing salary disparities and providing adequate support to educators within the local context (Huttunen et al., 2019).

Another significant theme is the differential teaching environment and classroom support observed between the Philippines and abroad. Participants highlighted disparities in access to resources, technology, and support systems, emphasizing the need for investment in educational infrastructure and teacher support programs (Grant & Sachs, 2016; Abojon et. al., 2023, Derasin et. al., 2021). The favorable teaching conditions described in international settings underscore the importance of creating conducive learning environments that facilitate effective teaching practices and promote positive student outcomes (Day & Sachs, 2015).

Furthermore, the study revealed the transformative impact of teaching abroad on professional and personal development. Participants emphasized the opportunities for growth, learning, and global networking afforded by international teaching experiences. This aligns with previous research indicating that such experiences contribute to career advancement, enhanced teacher efficacy, and holistic development (Hanson & Aspinall, 2017; Van Dinther et al., 2014).

However, alongside the benefits, participants also highlighted various challenges associated with teaching abroad, including cultural differences, classroom management issues, and student misbehavior. These findings underscore the importance of providing adequate support and training to educators transitioning to international settings, as well as fostering intercultural competence and inclusive teaching practices (Parekh & Chaturvedi, 2019).

Finally, the study identified retention strategies aimed at addressing migration-related issues and improving teacher satisfaction within the local context. Participants advocated for higher salaries, reduced workload, and supportive work environments as key retention measures. These findings highlight the need for systemic reforms, administrative changes, and policy interventions to attract and retain qualified educators in the Philippines (Clements & Shade, 2019).

This study provides valuable insights into the experiences of DepEd teachers from the Philippines who choose to teach internationally. By uncovering their motivations, challenges, and retention

strategies, the study informs efforts to address migration-related issues and enhance teacher retention within the education sector. Moving forward, policymakers and stakeholders must prioritize the implementation of comprehensive retention strategies and support mechanisms to ensure the availability of qualified educators and the provision of quality education for all.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that various variables, including higher compensation, benefits, enhanced teaching conditions, and possibilities for professional growth drive teachers from the Philippines who migrate to work overseas. Nevertheless, obstacles such as cultural disparities, difficulties in maintaining classroom order, and instances of student misconduct all provide a formidable challenge. To tackle these problems, it is necessary to implement complete retention methods, such as increasing compensation and offering additional classroom support. This study enhances our comprehension of teacher migration and its global implications.

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