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## **PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' PLAN TO WORK ABROAD AND DECISION TO STAY WORKING: BASES FOR POLICY RECOMMENDATION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study explored the reasons for public elementary school teachers' plan to work abroad and their decision to stay working abroad as bases for policy recommendations. Eight are planning to work abroad, and eight working abroad served as my participants. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed six reasons why teachers plan to work abroad: financial constraints & economic pressure, heavy workload & systemic strain in public schools, limited professional growth & promotion opportunities, desire for international exposure & skill development, family responsibility as a driving force, and work-life balance & well-being consideration. For working abroad: financial stability & enhanced compensation, professional growth & career advancement, focused teaching & efficient workload, family & personal considerations, supportive work environment & well-being, and exposure to a well-resourced educational system. The study concludes that a policy recommendation is necessary to strengthen compensation, reduce workload, improve working conditions, and implement stronger retention strategies to reduce teacher migration.

**Keywords:** *Public Elementary Teachers, Plan to Work Abroad, Policy Recommendation*

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## INTRODUCTION

Teacher migration is becoming an important phenomenon affecting education systems worldwide, particularly in the developing world, including the Philippines. At the elementary level, teaching staff, especially public school teachers, first enter the education system at the primary level. However, numerous teachers encounter a combination of professional and personal difficulties that compel them to consider teaching abroad. Research shows that teachers' migration intentions are influenced by economic factors, career stagnation, workload, and a lack of support from their home countries' education systems (Moon & Young, 2021; Taylor & Walden, 2024).

In the Philippines, teaching in public schools is associated with numerous challenges, including low salaries, an increasing burden of administrative responsibilities, excessively large classes, limited opportunities for professional growth, and inadequate access to training. When these circumstances are combined, there is an impetus for teachers to consider teaching in other countries where remuneration, working conditions, and recognition of professionalism are more favorable (Goza, 2023). The existing international market for professionally qualified teachers adds to the incentive for teaching abroad for Filipinos, especially in the regions of Asia, the United States, and the Middle East.

Teachers who migrate to another country choose to remain there because of the improved quality of life, better work–life balance, modernized teaching tools available in different countries, and greater potential to advance their careers. Research on labor migration indicates that when a person experiences favorable working and living conditions

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abroad, the likelihood of return migration decreases, unless there are drastic changes in the labor market in the person's country of origin (Akkus & Çinkir, 2022). For the teaching profession, migration decisions are also influenced by family considerations and concerns about professional satisfaction and future security.

The ongoing migration of public elementary school teachers is a significant problem for the Philippine educational system, as it exacerbates the teaching shortage, increases the burden on remaining teachers, and threatens the continuity of teaching. Therefore, understanding teachers' experiences, motivations, and the reasons behind their decision to migrate to work abroad is important for educational leaders and policymakers. Qualitative methods provide this opportunity by offering a comprehensive understanding of teachers' motives, the meaning of their actions, and the circumstances that influence their decisions (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Considering these circumstances, the present research, from a qualitative perspective, aims to understand the motivations of public elementary school teachers in the Philippines for their plans to work overseas and for their decisions to remain employed overseas. This study aims to identify factors that will inform policies to address teacher retention and the adequacy and improvement of the Teacher Support System (TSS) in public elementary schools in the Philippines.

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## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research method, research design, participants of the study, data-gathering procedures, research instrument, and data analysis in this study. The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons for public elementary school teachers' planning to work abroad and their decision to stay working abroad as bases for policy recommendations.

### Research Method

The study employed a descriptive research design with in-depth interviews. During the interview, participants were given time to reflect on a set of questions regarding a specific topic while seated. Through the participants' answers to the questions, the primary or essential points of view of the participants on a particular subject in a social context were to be obtained.

### Research Design

A phenomenological research design was utilized in the study. One philosophical method for conducting qualitative research was phenomenology. Phenomenology focuses on the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from a first-person perspective. The central aim of phenomenology is to investigate and describe phenomena as they are consciously experienced, without resorting to theories about their causal explanations or being influenced by unexamined preconceptions (Biemel and Spiegelberg, 2024).

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## Participants of the Study

The participants of this study were eight (8) purposely selected public elementary school teachers who are planning to work abroad and eight (8) teachers who are already working abroad and decided to stay. These participants must have teaching experience as public elementary school teachers under the Department of Education. Teachers included in the group planning to work abroad were those who had already initiated formal applications to work overseas, such as submitting employment applications, processing documents, or applying through recruitment agencies.

Meanwhile, teachers included in the group working abroad were those who had at least one (1) year of teaching experience abroad at the time of the study.

## Sampling Design

In the study, a purposive sampling design was used. A non-probability sample chosen with consideration for the study's purpose and the population's characteristics is known as a purposive sample. Judging, selecting, or subjective sampling are some names for purposeful sampling (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2007).

## Research Instrument

An interview schedule developed by the researcher was the primary research tool utilized in this study. 10 targeted questions that focused on the study's goal were included in the interview schedule. These questions were asked of the participants during the in-depth interview.

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The interview schedule had undergone a validity test and was improved by incorporating all the suggestions of the adviser, dean, and members of the validators.

With the participants' consent, voice and video recorders were used for data collection and recording.

### Validity of the Research Instrument

Before the determination of the validity of the interview schedule made by the researcher, the adviser, Dean of the Graduate School, then a panel of jurors who were considered for their expertise in the field of research, testing, and assessment, and English, were requested to validate each question for review and modification.

The appropriateness, significance, accuracy, and utility of conclusions drawn by researchers are referred to as validity. According to Creswell & Creswell (2022), content-related evidence of validity involves format and content that align with the description of variables and the sample of subjects to be measured. It also aids in verifying the questionnaire's items.

Using the appropriate Good and Scates form (Appendix C), the panel of validators' comments, modifications, and suggestions about the interview schedule were taken into consideration.

### Data Gathering Procedures

To conduct the study, the researcher obtained permissions from the adviser, the Graduate School, the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent, the Office of the District Supervisors, the School Heads, and the individual participants. For the first group of participants, the researcher personally visited schools/community/place convenient for them.

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For the second group of participants, the researcher sent a self-administered interview guide and then scheduled an online interview convenient for them.

Before conducting the interview, the researcher obtained informed consent from the participants by having them sign a waiver or permission form related to the study.

To comprehensively capture the interviewee's statements, both voice and video were supplied in addition to in-depth interviews. The researcher consolidated all the collected data after a series of interviews.

### Data Analysis

Using a thematic approach, the information gathered was analyzed. Analysis of qualitative data can be done through thematic analysis. Transcripts of interviews are one example of a set of texts to which it is typically employed. According to Braun and Clarke's (2023) six-phase thematic analysis framework, which includes (1) familiarization with data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) writing the report, the researcher extensively scrutinizes the data to find recurring themes, which are subjects, concepts, and meaning styles.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study sought to find out the reasons for public elementary school teachers' plan to work abroad and their decision to stay working as a basis for policy recommendations.

The research method utilized in the study was qualitative method using in-depth interviews. The research design was the narrative approach with Thematic Analysis.

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The researcher made research questionnaires was used and validated by the experts. For participants who are currently based in the Philippines, a face-to-face interview was conducted at a time and place convenient to them. For participants who are currently working abroad, a self-administered interview guide was utilized. For recording and capturing every aspect of the in-depth interview, audio and video recordings were used as well.

To conduct the study, permission was secured by the Schools Division Superintendent and Public School District Supervisor. Permission to conduct was also secured from the school heads where these teachers were assigned.

The researcher conducted the study with permission from each of the respondents. The researcher went to the participants' place of employment and communities to conduct the interview. For participants abroad, an online interview was scheduled at their convenience.

After conducting the interviews, the researcher collected and analyzed all the data and answers gathered. A thematic approach was used to examine the information gathered.

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The following are the findings of the study:

Based on the responses from the in-depth interview, reasons public elementary teachers plan to work abroad were financial constraints & economic pressure, heavy workload & systemic strain in public schools, limited professional growth & promotion opportunities, desire for international exposure & skill development, family responsibility as a driving force, and work-life balance & well-being consideration.

For participants working abroad, these were the reasons of teachers why teachers decided to stay: financial stability and enhanced compensation, professional growth and career advancement, focused teaching and efficient workload, family and personal considerations, supportive work environment, well-being and exposure to well-resourced educational system.

The policy recommendations based on results were address financial constraints and enhance compensation, manage workload and reduce systemic strain, enhance professional growth and career advancement opportunities, facilitate international exposure and skill development, support family and personal considerations, improve work environment and resources and comprehensive retention strategy.

Based on the findings, the following insights were drawn:

The combination of personal and systemic factors explains why public elementary teachers make plans to migrate and work abroad. Given the economic burden, increased workload, fewer chances for promotion, and a lack of system support, teachers are pushed to seek employment opportunities abroad. Teachers seek professional advancement,

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international experience, and better work-life balance, and plan to migrate for economic reasons and personal and professional growth opportunities. Family obligation or responsibility is a major factor and shows that the caregiving and providing roles of teachers are significant. These insights imply that teacher migration is a response to structural issues and not a lack of commitment to the profession. Overseas teachers cite a number of factors that make working abroad appealing. These include better pay, greater opportunities for advancement, lighter workloads, and positive organizational culture. If the Philippine educational system wants to keep these teachers in the country, the system must provide comparable or better educational benefits. This education system must include improvements in teacher pay, clearly defined opportunities for advancement, manageable workloads, and a more positive organizational culture. If a system meets the teachers' needs and supports their teaching efforts, the system should reduce the number of teachers migrating and increase the number of teachers working in the educational system.

## CONCLUSION

In light of the findings and insights arrived at in this study, the following recommendations are highlighted:

The Systems Approach Theory should be applied to address the educational needs of the teachers, their students, and the educational system. The teachers, students, and educational system must include improved educational pathways and structures. These initiatives should include clear mentorship objectives, professional organization mentorship,

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and family support and educational system activities. These adjustments would reduce the migration of teachers and improve their professional and family needs.

Improving local teaching conditions would aid teacher retention and should be the focus of the school administrators and the Department of Education. Improved local teaching conditions include more competitive pay, clear paths to promotion, less work-related stress, and overall better working conditions. If local teaching conditions improve, teaching would become more appealing to prospective teachers who are looking to work overseas.

The Department of Education and relevant policymakers should develop a comprehensive teacher retention strategy that integrates financial incentives, professional development programs, workload management, well-being support, and improved school resources. The strategy should also consider teachers' family and personal responsibilities to ensure sustainable employment and professional satisfaction.

To validate the results of the present investigation, parallel studies must be conducted in a wider scope and consider other variables not mentioned in this study.

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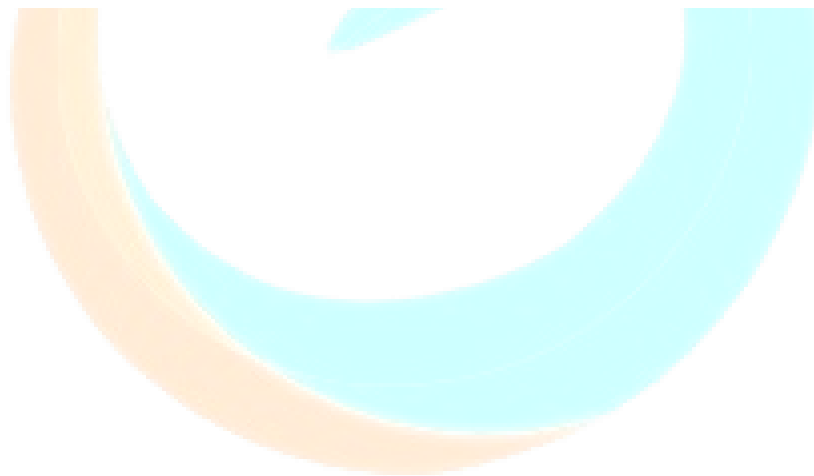
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