NAVIGATING MIGRATION: FROM THE VIEWS OF TEACHER TEACHING ABROAD

Joylen B. Ellan[1], Elizabeth D. Dioso[2]

[1] Cogonon Integrated School, New Bataan, Davao de Oro, 8804 Philippines
[2] Assumption College of Nabunturan, Nabunturan, Davao de Oro, 8804 Philippines

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study focused on the emotional, professional, and personal variables that influenced the decisions of teachers who were moving overseas, examining their experiences, difficulties, and insights. The study sought to comprehend the difficulties faced throughout the relocation, the coping mechanisms used, and the fundamental causes of teacher migration. Six (6) teacher participants participated in in-depth interviews on their personal experiences leaving the Department of Education (DepEd) to work abroad. While describing problems including homesickness, cultural transition, classroom management issues, and emotional strain, participants also highlighted motives like greater pay, better work settings, prospects for career advancement, and better work-life balance. Despite these challenges, educators learned coping mechanisms such as maintaining relationships with family, praying, taking care of themselves, and creating supportive networks. While teaching overseas proposed career advancement and financial security, there are also many drawbacks such as social isolation and familial separation. In conclusion, the study emphasizes how essential it is to address DepEd's promotion system's inefficiencies, enhance financial incentives, and create encouraging learning settings to lower teacher attrition and keep highly qualified teachers in the Philippines.

Keyword: *Educational administration, Teacher migration, Experiences of teachers migrating abroad, Challenges in teaching abroad, Coping mechanisms, Insights gained, qualitative research, Phenomenology*

1. INTRODUCTION

Maintaining a stable and high-quality educational system is severely hampered by the worrying trend of teacher migration in the Philippines. According to estimates, thousands of teachers leave the public school system each year, which raises the teacher turnover rate to about 10% annually [1]. This alarming pattern may result in a teacher shortage, especially in underserved and rural areas, which would ultimately lower educational standards. Low pay, a demanding workload, a lack of support from administrators and lawmakers, and unfavorable working conditions are some of the factors causing this migration.

In Australia, approximately 30% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years, largely due to unsustainable workloads, lack of support, and poor work-life balance [2]. The high rate of teachers migrating abroad poses a significant challenge to educational quality and stability, necessitating targeted support and retention strategies. Similarly, research revealed that teacher migration rates have increased significantly since 2010, with 30.4% of teachers leaving the state sector in 2020–2021 [3]. It is also highlighted that teacher shortages and migration are particularly acute in rural and remote areas, with 71% of teachers reporting that they are considering leaving the profession due to workload and burnout [3]. These findings underscore the need for urgent attention to address the complex factors driving migration globally.

Furthermore, teacher migration is a pressing concern in Davao de Oro, Philippines, where the rural and mountainous terrain poses significant challenges to teacher retention. Approximately 20% of teachers in the province leave the profession within the first three years of teaching, citing reasons such as lack of job security, inadequate facilities, and limited opportunities for professional growth [4]. The province's remote and hard-to-reach areas are particularly affected, with some schools experiencing teacher vacancy rates as high as 50% [5]. This alarming trend highlights the need for targeted interventions and support systems to address the complex factors driving teacher migration in Davao de Oro.

With this, teacher migration in the Philippines is significantly influenced by challenging working conditions, including large class sizes and inadequate resources [6], which contribute to high levels of stress and burnout [7], underscoring the need for systemic support and reforms to retain teachers. Considering these challenges, it is essential to investigate the reasons behind teacher migration in Davao de Oro and to identify strategies to address this issue. This study aimed to understand the challenges and motivations of teachers migrating abroad to help policymakers and school administration develop effective strategies to improve teacher retention.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to navigate the views of teachers who decided to teach and migrate abroad through qualitative-phenomenological research design. It explored the experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights of six purposively selected teachers. Through conducting in-depth interview or IDI, this study aimed to better understand the insights they have gained from their choice to teach overseas, including the professional and personal development they have experienced, the cultural and pedagogical adjustments they have made, and the strategies they have used to overcome obstacles. The goal of this study was to offer a comprehensive grasp of the realities of teaching overseas and the strategies used by teachers to deal with the opportunities and difficulties that accompany it.

1.2 Review of Related Literature and Studies

Teacher migration, both internal (leaving the profession) and external (transferring to another school or district), has emerged as a critical issue in the education sector, affecting school stability and student outcomes [8,9]. Attrition rates remain high, with nearly 40% of teachers leaving within the first five years of service [10]. Recent data shows a migration rate of 9.88% in 2023–24—lower than the previous year's 11.5% but still above the seven-year average of 8.64% [11]. Such turnover disrupts student learning, increases class sizes, and burdens schools with higher recruitment and training costs [12,13].

Several factors contribute to teacher migration, including inadequate administrative support, poor working conditions, low salaries, lack of professional autonomy, and burnout [14,15]. Local economic conditions and compensation strongly influence retention, and shortages often hit high-poverty schools hardest [13]. Burnout—caused by chronic stress, lack of control, and overwhelming workloads—is one of the strongest predictors of attrition. Addressing these challenges requires systemic interventions, such as better leadership, manageable workloads, and improved work environments.

For teachers migrating abroad, job satisfaction is pivotal in their decision to remain in the profession. Positive student relationships, cultural adaptation, and professional identity contribute to satisfaction and retention [16,17]. However, challenges like cultural differences, language barriers, and unfamiliar curricula can undermine teacher confidence and performance [18,19]. Teachers who successfully adapt their teaching styles to the host country's educational system are more likely to succeed. Support systems—mentorship programs, peer coaching, and targeted professional development—are essential in facilitating adaptation and reducing stress.

Professional development opportunities are a recurring factor in improving teacher retention, both domestically and abroad. Training in curriculum development, instructional strategies, classroom management, and cultural competence enhances teacher capability and adaptability [20]. Language support, including language classes and peer mentoring, helps teachers overcome communication barriers, fostering better relationships with students and colleagues [21]. Teachers who engage in ongoing professional learning tend to feel more confident, competent, and committed to their roles.

Coping mechanisms also play a vital role in teacher resilience. Strategies such as seeking mentorship, engaging in professional growth, practicing self-care, and building cultural competence help educators manage the stresses of teaching in challenging contexts [16,22]. Resilient teachers—those who adapt flexibly and learn from challenges—are more likely to stay in the profession. Wellness programs, collaborative school cultures, and teacher autonomy further enhance retention and job satisfaction [23,24].

Policy recommendations emphasize competitive compensation, comprehensive benefits, and incentives for retention [25]. Schools and policymakers are urged to invest in teacher development, foster supportive work environments, and provide flexible work arrangements [26]. Cultural competence and language support are particularly critical for

migrant teachers, while school-level interventions such as peer mentoring and collaborative planning can mitigate feelings of isolation.

Ultimately, addressing teacher migration requires a multifaceted approach that integrates structural reforms, targeted support systems, and teacher empowerment. By prioritizing well-being, professional growth, and workplace satisfaction, education systems can reduce attrition, enhance stability, and improve learning outcomes for students. Without such measures, both domestic and international teacher shortages will continue to hinder educational quality and equity worldwide.

1.3 Theoretical Lens

This study was anchored in Self-actualization Theory of Abraham Maslow (1943). The theory of self-actualization posits that individuals strive to realize their full potential and pursue personal growth. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, self-actualization is the highest level of human need, encompassing creativity, problem-solving, and self-fulfillment. In the context of teacher attrition, this theory suggests that teachers who feel unfulfilled or undervalued in their profession may seek opportunities abroad where they can realize their potential. Research has shown that many teachers migrate abroad in search of better working conditions, professional development opportunities, and personal growth (Chang, 2020).

Moreover, a study by Bryant and Wong (2022) found that Filipino teachers who migrated to countries like Singapore and the United States reported higher levels of job satisfaction and self-actualization due to better resources, support, and opportunities for career advancement. These findings suggest that teachers' decisions to migrate are often driven by a desire for self-actualization and personal fulfillment.

Furthermore, the relevance of Self-actualization Theory to teacher attrition is further supported by a study by Gafoor and Akhilesh (2021), which found that teachers who felt empowered and supported in their professional growth were more likely to stay in the profession. Conversely, teachers who felt stifled or undervalued were more likely to leave (Gafoor & Akhilesh, 2021).

In addition, Maslow's Self-actualization Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding teacher attrition and migration. By recognizing the importance of personal growth and fulfillment in teachers' careers, policymakers and educators can work to create supportive environments that foster self-actualization and reduce attrition. As suggested by a study by Liu and Onwuegbuzie (2019), this can involve providing opportunities for professional development, autonomy, and recognition, ultimately helping to retain teachers and promote educational quality.

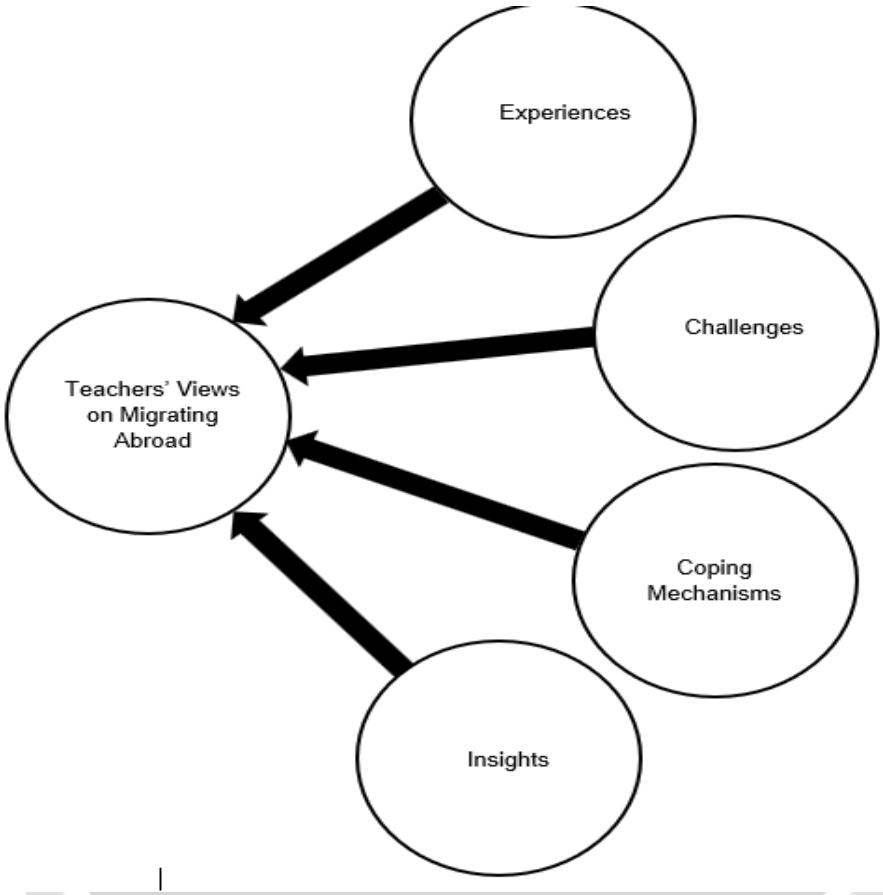

Fig -1: Conceptual Framework

1.4 Research Questions

The questions were intended to gather information on the understanding of the research participants in navigating migration from the views of teachers teaching abroad. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of teachers in deciding to teach abroad?
2. What are the challenges encountered by the teachers in deciding to teach abroad?
3. How do these teachers cope with the challenges they faced?
4. What insights do these teachers gain from their experiences and challenges they encounter?

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This research employed qualitative study using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of teachers who have left or are considering leaving their positions in the Department of Education (DepEd). The data was collected using in-depth interviews (IDI), which provided a comprehensive and holistic picture of the

challenges, motivations, and coping mechanisms of these teachers. Qualitative research is the most appropriate approach for this study because it allows for an in-depth examination of the complex and nuanced experiences of the research participants [27].

Moreover, phenomenology was a suitable approach for this study because it allowed for a detailed examination of the experiences and perspectives of teachers. According to Creswell [28], phenomenological research aims to capture the essence of an experience by describing the lived phenomenon. By using this approach, this study will be able to generate themes from the varied perspectives of the participants regarding their lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights that were gained from their situations. This provided a rich and different understanding of the complex issue of teacher migration.

2.2 Research Locale

This research was conducted in New Bataan, Davao de Oro. Davao de Oro. New Bataan, established on June 18, 1968, by Republic Act No. 4756, presents a diverse and geographically varied landscape. The primary research focus was on the prevalence and nature of bullying within the elementary schools of the selected barangays.

New Bataan is a landlocked municipality in the province of Davao de Oro. The municipality covers 554.17 square kilometers (213.97 square miles), accounting for 12.15% of Davao de Oro's total area. The total population as of the 2020 Census is 51,466. This accounted for 6.71% of the entire population of Davao de Oro province, or 0.98% of the overall population of the Davao Region. Based on these numbers, the population density is calculated as 93 people per square kilometer or 241 people per square mile.

New Bataan is bounded by the District of Compostela in the north, District of Maragusan in South, District of Bagannga in East, the District of Nabunturan in the West. It is one of the municipalities of Davao de Oro and the people celebrate its founding anniversary every 18th day of June. The local government marks its cultural event named as Sal'upongan Festival which is celebrated every 10th day of August. There are 16 barangays in New Bataan, namely, Cabinuangan (the central barangay) where New Bataan National High is located, Andap, Bantacan, Fatima, Magsaysay, Cogonon, Panag, San Roque, Katipunan, Pagsabangan, Mangangit, Batinao, Manurigao, Kahayag and Tandawan and Camanlangan where Tanadawan Integrated School and Camanlangan National High School are located respectively.

2.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, a qualitative data analysis method, was used in this study. Research questions were posed to the six participants during the interview process using virtual notes and zoom recordings. There were no closed-ended questions.

Analysis began after data gathering. To ensure that the research records were thorough, accurate, and detailed, the researcher reviewed, created, and documented the data that had been gathered. Thematic analysis was utilized to further assess the results and detect patterns and discrepancies among the responses once enough data has been gathered through in-depth interviews. At this point, the responses were grouped into themes and categorized.

3. FINDINGS

The responses were subjected to content analysis where the themes across all responses were drawn. In keeping with the research ethics for qualitative research, codes had been used to conceal the identities of the research participants. The presentation of the result was done according to the order of specific research questions used in this study.

3.1 What are the experiences of teachers in deciding to teach abroad?

This section presents the results to the 1st major research question; 'What are the experiences of teachers in deciding to teach abroad?' Three specific research questions were used to gather data and information for this major research question. The questions were intended to gather information on the understanding of the research participants in navigating migration from the views of teachers teaching abroad.

Specific Research Question 1.1
The themes in this section were coming from the specific research question 1.1 'What were your experiences in deciding to teach abroad?' The responses generated six themes: considering work-life balance in decision, lots of paper and non-teaching related works, not well-compensated hard work, having mixed emotions in deciding, not an easy decision, very difficult decision.

Specific Research Question 1.2
This section presents the results to the specific research question 1.2 'What specific experiences did you find overwhelming in teaching abroad?' under the 1st major research question 'What are the experiences of teachers in deciding to teach abroad?' The following themes served as results, which were: culture shock, adjusting to new environment, quite difficult topics, paperwork, processes and leaving family behind, very structured system, being away from comfort zone, less workload with good salary.

Specific Research Question 1.3
This section presents the results to the specific research question 1.3 'What made you decide to teach abroad?' under the 1st major research question 'What are the experiences of teachers in deciding to teach abroad?' The following themes served as results, which were: salary and stress, personal growth and work-life balance, better opportunities, to be with sister abroad, family situations, burnout.

3.2 What are the challenges encountered by the teachers in deciding to teach abroad?

This section presents the results to the 2nd major research question 'What are the challenges encountered by the teachers in deciding to teach abroad?' Two specific research questions were used to collect data for this question the experiences of teachers migrating abroad.

Specific Research Question 2.1
The themes derived from the responses of the research informants to the specific research 2.1 'What challenges did you encounter in deciding to teach abroad?' are presented in this section. The themes were: burden of leaving home and facing the unknown, stress from documents and application process, financial constraints, language barrier and classroom management, lack of confidence and self-doubt, time constraints.

Specific Research Question 2.2
This section presents the results to the specific question 2.2 'What specific challenges did you find difficult to handle?' After subjecting the responses to content analysis, the following themes were drawn: homesickness and new environment adjustments, classroom management, pressure, social isolation, lack of financial, lack of confidence and self-doubt.

3.3 How do these teachers cope with the challenges they faced?

This section presents the results on the viewpoints of the research participants of the community relations functions or responsibilities of school principals or heads. This was the gist of the 3rd major research question, 'How do these teachers cope with the challenges they faced?' Two specific research questions were utilized to gather data and information.

Specific Research Question 3.1
In this section, the themes created were from the responses to specific research question 3.1, 'How did you cope with the challenges you faced?' The following were the themes: through staying connected with family, through prayer, making journal, through family as inspiration, through financial motivation, through self-care, through resourcefulness, flexibility and staying positive, community engagement.

Specific Research Question 3.2
Presented in this section are the themes drawn from the responses to the specific question 3.2, 'How did you utilize support systems to cope with the challenges of teaching in the new environment?' The following themes were created: establish constant connection to the community, and act as a public servant.

3.4 What insights do these teachers gain from their experiences and challenges they encounter?

The results in this section were from the responses to the specific research questions used to gather data for the 4th major research question, 'What insights do these teachers gain from their experiences and challenges they encounter?' Two specific research questions were utilized to collect data and pieces of information.

Specific Research Question 4.1
The themes created in this section were from the responses to the specific research question 4.1, 'What insights do these teachers gain from their experiences and challenges they encounter?' The themes were importance resiliency and adaptability, discomfort as a catalyst, importance of support and determination, importance of kindness and doing job well, importance of asking gods' guidance.

Specific Research Question 4.2
This section presents the themes for the specific question 4.2, 'What recommendations do you give to improve teacher retention and address the root causes of teacher attrition in the Department of Education?' This is under the 4th major research question 'What insights do these teachers gain from their experiences and challenges they encounter?' From the responses, the following themes were drawn: provide competitive compensation and benefits, provide a career development pathway, reduce excessive workload and access to mental health, provide adequate classroom resources, provide a conducive learning environment, create a positive and respectful work environment, provide emotional and financial support, provide school assistant staffs, stop non-academic extracurricular activities provide work-life balance.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study emphasizes how important it is to comprehend the multifaceted factors of teacher attrition by using the experiences of educators who have made the decision to relocate overseas. Their experiences demonstrated that in spite of their financial incentives and professional goals, they encountered significant challenges like homesickness, social isolation, culture shock, difficult transitions to new educational systems, and mental stress from being away from their families. These findings emphasize how complex migration decisions are, involving not just professional factors but also intensely personal and psychological challenges. While there are many advantages of teaching overseas, there are also many drawbacks, like handling homesickness, adjusting to new work situations, and cultural difficulties.

Through a variety of coping strategies, such as maintaining relationships with their families, practicing self-care and prayer, journaling, forming supportive professional networks, and getting involved in Filipino communities overseas, participants showed resilience in the face of these challenges. In addition to assisting them in adjusting to their new surroundings, these strategies demonstrated the value of readily available social and emotional support networks for teachers.

Policymakers and other education stakeholders can benefit greatly from the viewpoints obtained from this study. To address teacher attrition, an education system that provides equitable pay, less work, mental health support, and worthwhile career development possibilities must be established. Salary modifications alone won't cut it. Enhancing these elements can promote educators' professional development and work satisfaction while lowering the push factors that cause relocation. In the end, these results might guide the creation of comprehensive programs for teacher support, enhanced workplace regulations, and cooperative initiatives between communities, policymakers, and school administrators. These initiatives are essential to making sure educators feel appreciated, encouraged, and inspired to keep helping the country's students in their local settings.

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BIOGRAPHIES

	Joylen B. Ellan resides in Purok 4 Andap, New Bataan, Davao de Oro. She completed her Bachelor of Secondary Education majoring in English, from Legacy College of Compostela (2010–2013), Currently, she is pursuing a Master of Arts in Education majoring in Educational Administration at Assumption College of Nabunturan (2024–2025). Since 2018, Joylen has been serving as a Teacher I at Cogonon Integrated School under the Department of Education and promoted as Teacher II at on July 2025 at the same institution. Her research interests include educational administration and the views of teachers teaching abroad.