

UNIVERSIDAD SAN FRANCISCO DE QUITO USFQ

Colegio de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades

**Why do Teachers Stay? Teacher Retention in Two Private
Schools in Quito, Ecuador**

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Ciencias de la Educación

Trabajo de fin de carrera presentado como requisito
para la obtención del título de
Licenciado en Ciencias de la Educación

Quito, 18 de diciembre de 2023

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**HOJA DE CALIFICACIÓN
DE TRABAJO DE FIN DE CARRERA**

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Quito, 18 de diciembre de 2023

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RESUMEN

Esta tesis aborda la crisis global de abandono docente y su impacto en los sistemas educativos. Centrándose en profesores experimentados en Quito, Ecuador, explora los factores que contribuyen a su retención en la profesión en medio de varios desafíos. Denominado retención docente, el estudio destaca que, a pesar de factores externos, se trata principalmente de una responsabilidad individual que requiere adaptabilidad y resiliencia. Si bien la motivación intrínseca es crucial, la tesis subraya la necesidad de apoyo externo, como la asistencia académica y psicológica. Se destaca que la retención sostenida depende de un equilibrio entre los esfuerzos individuales y la participación gubernamental e institucional activa.

Palabras clave: abandono docente, retención docente, crisis global, precariedad, motivación intrínseca, apoyo externo

ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the global crisis of teacher attrition and its impact on educational systems. Focusing on experienced teachers in Quito, Ecuador, it explores the factors contributing to their retention in the profession amid various challenges. Termed as teacher retention, the study emphasizes that, despite external factors, it is primarily an individual responsibility requiring adaptability and resilience. While intrinsic motivation is crucial, the thesis underscores the need for external support, such as academic and psychological assistance. It highlights that sustained retention depends on a balance between individual efforts and active governmental and institutional involvement.

Key words: teacher attrition, teacher retention, global crisis, precarity, intrinsic motivation, external support

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Chapter one: Introduction

There is a lot of evidence that supports that attrition is a phenomenon that occurs in almost all professions. However, the teacher profession is considered as an “extreme outlier”, since teachers leave the profession at alarming rates (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Teacher attrition, also known as teacher turnover, is a global issue. In some countries, it is even considered as a national crisis (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018), raising grave concerns amongst numerous stakeholders including policymakers and school leaders (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Teacher attrition refers to teachers who leave the profession by their own volition or are forced to leave even if they desire to remain in the profession (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Teacher attrition does not consider teachers that retire or transition between schools, which is another phenomenon worthy of consideration. According to numerous studies, a crucial threshold for teacher attrition occurs within the first three to five years within the profession. Indeed, in the United States recently available statistics indicate that 45-50% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Borman & Dowling, 2017), and 30% leave the field within the first three years (Brown & Wynn, 2009). Considering this alarming statistic, it is clear that this phenomenon must be studied in order to improve the education field.

According to various studies, teacher attrition occurs for several reasons. These can be divided into three categories: the external/policy factors, the personal factors, and the school factors (Nguyen, et al., 2020). The first ones refer to the employment rates, the salary, the bonuses and the alternative job opportunities (Nguyen, et al., 2020). The personal factors consider the association between attrition and teacher characteristics, like age, gender, race, career satisfaction, marriage, children, distance to school, among others (Nguyen, et al., 2020). It also examined other demographic variables such as teacher qualifications, years of experience, graduate degree, certifications, specialties, and so on. Finally, within the school

factors, there are the organizational characteristics, the school resources, the student characteristics (Nguyen, et al., 2020), the teacher support, the learning communities, and the shared values (Brown & Wynn, 2009).

While there are numerous studies that both map the extent of teacher attrition and strive to discern the reason that compel teachers to leave the profession, there are still many uncertainties regarding the topic. For instance, there is little research about teacher retention and the reasons as to why some teachers decide to remain in the profession. Moreover, there is a current regional imbalance, where most studies, literature reviews and meta-analysis focus on experiences unfolding in North America and Europe. Considering these two notable gaps, this thesis aims to bring insight into what teachers in two private schools in Ecuador believe are the reasons and/or conditions that enable them to remain in the field, despite all the difficulties, challenges, and unmet expectations.

The study was conducted in two schools which here on forth will be referred to as Green Grass School and Mountain School. Through a qualitative approach that drew on semi-structured interviews with various teachers, who had already surpassed the first five years of the profession, we were able to identify three key findings regarding teacher attrition and retention. First of all, the precarity within the teacher profession quickly became evident; in this case, it is not the context that explains or causes the precarity, the teaching profession *is* precarious, even in the private sector. Yes, teacher turnover is a more popular phenomenon in public schools and rural areas, however, the interviews revealed that the precarity of the profession (which causes teachers to leave), is also evident in the private sector. Second, despite this, in the private sector, as well as in the public sector, there are teachers who still manage to remain in the profession, and one of the reasons/ways they do so is through intrinsic forms of motivation and external (non-institutional) forms of support, which helps them cope with any adversity they may experience. Third and lastly, it became evident that

one of the biggest complaints teachers have that can ultimately make them quit is salary. To this end, teachers who remained in the profession expressed the need to hustle by finding extra jobs and sources of income in order to have and maintain a stable and decent lifestyle.

Chapter two: Literature Review

Teacher attrition

Every year, teachers from all around the world enter the teaching profession, transition between schools, and leave the education field. This last one is a phenomenon known as teacher attrition, which happens because of several reasons regarding the working conditions of this profession. As Chiong, Menzies and Meenakshi (2017) note, teaching is seen as a profession of high demand with little recognition and small financial rewards. While this is often portrayed as the overarching reasons for attrition, the phenomenon is far more complex and includes a combination of external factors, personal motives, and contextual particularities.

External or policy factors are conditions outside the school that can affect teachers (Nguyen et al., 2020). Within these conditions is the salary, the employment rate, the opportunities for growth, the legislation and regulations (Nguyen et al., 2020). These external and policy factors significantly impact teachers by shaping the overall context in which they work. Compensation and benefits directly influence teachers' financial well-being, affecting their job satisfaction and likelihood to stay in the profession.

Personal motives are the characteristics and qualifications of teachers and how these may inform the decision to leave or remain in the profession (Nguyen et al., 2020). Teacher's characteristics include the age, gender, race, marriage, number of children, career satisfaction, distance to school and whether teaching is a full-time job for them or not (Nguyen et al., 2020). On the other hand, teacher qualifications refer to whether teachers hold a graduate

degree, the years of experience, and their area of expertise. Depending on each teacher, these characteristics may compel them to leave or remain in the profession.

The last point of consideration are the contextual factors within schools, that include the characteristics of the teacher's working environment (Nguyen et al., 2020). We will explore these in greater detail because they are often highlighted in the existing literature as being the ones that most impact teacher attrition and retention. These factors can be divided into school organizational characteristics, school resources and student characteristics. The school organizational characteristics include the work environment, the grades level (preschool, elementary, middle, and high school), the administrative support, the teacher collaboration, the classroom autonomy, and the availability of professional development (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Teachers decide to leave the profession when these characteristics turn into negative experiences. Firstly, when there is a lack of a learning community. This means that the school environment does not let teachers collaborate, plan, share experiences, seek solutions, and talk to each other (Brown & Wynn, 2009). When this happens, the school climate starts to decline, and teachers start to lose interest and motivation in their work.

Furthermore, teacher attrition occurs when there is an absence of supportive leadership. This means that the school administrator does not fulfill the role of mentor, guide, assistant and is not available for questions and discussions of problems (Brown & Wynn, 2009). For a school to work and for workers, in this case teachers, to feel supported, listened and valued, instructional, operational, and strategic leadership is needed (Brown & Wynn, 2009). This implies that the leader is effective and encourages collaboration, creates opportunities for teachers to learn from other teachers, gives feedback, provides a safe net, involves everyone in meaningful decisions, resolves organizational problems, is democratic, is a role model, and is committed and passionate about his/her job (Brown & Wynn, 2009).

Regarding the school resources, there is the class size, the teaching materials, and the classroom assistant (Brown & Wynn, 2009). Teachers need to have these resources available to perform quality classes for students. Firstly, as Shin and Young say, "reduced class-size can be expected to produce increased academic achievement" (2009). If teachers have more than 20 students in their classroom, the teaching-learning process will be affected, and teachers will be more likely to leave their profession. Moreover, the statistics say that the rates of teacher attrition decrease by 15% when the teaching materials are adequate and available (Brown & Wynn, 2009). These are tools that teachers need to facilitate learning, stimulate interest, support the variety of learning styles, promote autonomous learning, and assist diversity. Finally, when teachers teach in lower grades, teacher assistants are needed to support the educational environment. They help with the classroom management, the individualized attention, the inclusive education, the monitoring, and the diverse learners (Viktorin, 2018). If teachers in lower grades do not have assistants, they will have more work and that could lead to attrition.

The last characteristic of the teacher's school environment is the student characteristics. This has to do mostly with student's achievement and behavior. The teacher's perception of their own ability to teach and the student's academic and emotional progress, raises motivation (Chiong et al., 2027). Nevertheless, it can also reduce their motivation if they think they are not doing a good job with their students. As Nguyen et al. (2020) say, students' achievement depends mostly on teachers so if they are not growing academically, the responsibility falls on the teacher. This can lead to teacher attrition because of emotional and self-esteem reasons.

These are the main characteristics that lead teachers to leave their career. It should be mentioned that the proportion of leavers has grown 18% in the last 5 years (Chiong et al., 2017), which is an alarming statistic. Moreover, teacher attrition affects the engagement of

students in the classroom because they need stability and routines. If their teacher leaves, they may feel anxiety and uncertainty, which in turn can negatively affect their academic achievement and their emotional well-being (Nguyen et al., 2020). Besides, teacher attrition means increased costs for schools because of recruitment and the need to train new teachers (Chiong et al., 2017).

Teacher Retention

Although teacher attrition has been widely studied, teacher retention, along with the reasons and conditions that enable teachers to remain in the profession, haven't been studied as much (Beck et al., 2020). According to Geiger & Pivovarova (2018), teachers stay when they feel teaching is still more rewarding than other job options they might have or can look for. Considering this, the literature suggests there are many aspects, both intrinsic and extrinsic, that make or would make the teaching profession even more rewarding compared to other jobs. However, the "solution" to attrition, meaning, what promotes retention, is not as straightforward as it might seem. In fact, according to Shuls & Flores (2020), schools that have better rates of teacher retention actually don't count with policies that are specifically directed to prevent attrition and promote retention, instead, they have policies that focus on supporting and valuing teachers.

Such policies are composed of many aspects that, evidently, make teachers feel supported and valued. There is a need for policies, programs, and principles that, when combined, promote teacher retention, such as: leadership training programs, administrative support, a culture of academic freedom, openness and trust, individualized professional development programs, mentorships/induction programs, giving teachers a voice, among others (Shuls & Flores, 2020). In general, retention is fostered when the working conditions in an institution aim to support teachers and create a productive working environment (Shuls & Flores, 2020).

Besides these aspects that can be fostered within any institution, without the need of “higher approval”, there is one very powerful incentive for retention: teacher pay and compensation (Borman & Dowling, 2017). Salary is actually one of the factors that, within working conditions, has more weight when it comes, not only to teacher retention, but also teacher recruitment and mobility (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). This is because salary is an aspect which influences and can determine not only the professional area, but the personal life as well (Maninger et al., 2011).

So far, the aspects that are said to promote teacher retention can all be categorized as extrinsic forms of motivation to remain in the profession, however, besides all of these, intrinsic motivations seem to be a crucial factor for retention (Borman & Dowling, 2017). As mentioned before, if teachers find the working conditions they desire in other jobs, they would have no reason to stay in the profession. Knowing that teachers are not the most satisfied professionals, there must be something that, despite the unmet expectations, that makes them remain in the profession. According to Beck et al (2020), among all the factors that help teachers persist in the profession, the school-based aspects are the most influential, however, this author also mentions that, independently of the working conditions, teachers who stay have a common factor: resilience. This aspect enables them to adapt, “manage the unavoidable uncertainties inherent in the realities of teaching”, be more committed, have high self-efficacy and a stronger identity (Beck et al., 2020). Additionally, Odina & Semjonova (2022) state that, despite the adversities that teachers must face in the profession, there are many teachers that decide to stay because they feel emotionally fulfilled and have managed to balance their personal life with work. This is also strongly related to the idea of resilience, emotional intelligence, and an intrinsic motivation, since these allow them to “mobilize their internal and external resources to cope with the challenges of the job” (Odina & Semjonova, 2022, p. 435).

Public and Private sector in Ecuador

Considering the context to which this study refers to, it is important to understand that attrition is a phenomenon that occurs mostly in the public sector of education. There is reduced information about how attrition is reflected in the private sector, and even less in Ecuador. Before going deeper into the topic, comprehending more about the Ecuadorian educational context is crucial, especially about the public-private divide that exists in the educational system. According to Madrid (2018), within the Ecuadorian education system, the private and the public sectors are two distinct worlds which differ in terms of socio-economic aspects, educational infrastructure, and the educational model. It is safe to say that private schools, where there is a greater concentration of high-class students, have a better “score” in terms of these three aspects which affect not only students, but teachers as well. In fact, Madrid (2018) states that, nowadays, education and inequality maintain a reciprocal relationship. A part of such inequality is based on the fact that the investments in education are far from being adequate and that resources are not being administered correctly to close the gap. According to Madrid (2018), education doesn’t seem to be a priority for the state since “the relative importance of the education budget has steadily decreased since the 1980s”.

In addition, public schools in Ecuador tend to have a very complex bureaucratic organizational structure since it is highly normalized, with a determinate hierarchy, defined tasks, and workers who have very little freedom (Manzano, 2019). These characteristics can be considered as one of the reasons why some teachers in the public sector are linked to their institution mostly because they need the job, because they “have to”, or because of the awareness of the costs of leaving. In fact, some students from various schools in the public sector perceive their teachers as disinterested and detached. In some cases, students even report that some of their teachers are violent inside the classroom, unlike higher class

students who report there are protective actions towards them (Madrid, 2018). However, it must be made clear that the blame does not fall on the teachers, since there are many external factors involved that contribute to such an outcome on teachers' performance.

On the other hand, private institutions, in general, have a flexible organizational structure which generates positive emotions in the teachers and, therefore, a high degree of involvement, compromise, and sense of belonging (Manzano, 2019). Teachers in such private schools report and appear more satisfied regarding their needs and expectations. Although what has been mentioned is not a rule nor an absolute reality, there do exist these different depictions in these "two worlds" that exist in one educational system, and, unfortunately, many of these differences go down to financial investment, and private schools are the ones that usually have a better luck in these terms (Madrid, 2018). Considering this, private schools are usually places that can offer much more in many aspects, including teacher retention, which goes hand in hand with well-being and satisfaction.

Efforts for teacher retention in Ecuador

According to article 349 of the Ecuadorian constitution: (2008)

The State shall guarantee, for the teaching staff...job security, modernization, ongoing training, and teaching and academic improvement, as well as fair pay, in accordance with their professional development, performance, and academic merits. The law shall regulate the teacher career stream and salary and promotion scale; it shall set up a national performance evaluation system and salary policies at all levels. (Ecuador's 2008 Constitution)

In order to comply with this stipulation and promote teacher retention, several efforts have been made by the Ecuadorian government. For example, various professional development and evaluation programs have been created for teachers, such as the System for Professional

Educational Development. Its objective was to "design teacher developmental courses based on needs identified through the teacher evaluation program" (Ross et al., 2019).

Moreover, in 2011 the range between the bottom and top salaries changed from the previous system that was solely based on years of service. The current range is now between \$817 to \$1,676 per month (Ross et al., 2019). Also, the law increased the salary for new teachers (Ross et al., 2019). In fact, Ecuador is the country with the second highest teacher salary (\$817) among other countries in Latin America such as Colombia, Perú, Argentina, Chile and Venezuela (Arévalo, 2023).

Additionally, in 2011, several key policies were created in the Education Law, with the objective of giving teachers support along their careers. First, there was an emphasis on pre-service teachers to better train them for the profession and a much more rigorous filter for hiring new teachers. Also, teacher performance was evaluated constantly and professional development programs with higher quality were created. Furthermore, the teaching career was restructured so teachers could be promoted based on their performance evaluation and competences (Ross et al., 2019). Despite the lack of research regarding teacher retention in Ecuador, there have been efforts, through policies and programs, that aim to be a part of the solution for teacher attrition.

Chapter three: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine what experienced teachers, in two private schools in Quito, Ecuador, believe are the reasons and/or conditions that enable them to remain in the field, despite the growing rates of teacher attrition. To address this goal, we conducted a qualitative study in Green Grass School and Mountain School amongst private school teachers. These institutions are characterized by having students that belong to the middle and high social class. Also, teachers' salaries are considerably higher than the

minimum wage and the compensation package includes other benefits such as private health insurance, transportation, and food services. Moreover, both campuses are well equipped regarding infrastructure, technology and resources. Finally, it is important to note that although the participating institutions differ in their approaches, they both engage with progressive forms of instruction and pedagogy grounded in principles of student-based learning. This includes gamification and experiential learning with a large component of nature-based and outdoor activities.

Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with ten participants. The selected sample for the interviews followed certain criteria. Firstly, it is made up by Ecuadorian teachers who work in two private schools in Quito. One of the most important aspects when selecting the sample was making sure the teachers have been in the profession for more than three years, a common threshold within the literature in determining teacher tension (Borman & Dowling, 2017). Most of the interviewees were selected because of convenience, meaning they were already known by the researchers. Additionally, this sample is not limited to an educational level or subject. Finally, the teachers were chosen regardless of their age, gender, religion, culture and social status. Interviews lasted between thirty and ninety minutes and questions focused on teacher motivation, challenges, victories, likes, dislikes, working conditions, expectations, knowledge/experience regarding teacher attrition, and advice to remain in the profession.

Once data collection was completed, we began the analysis process. Data analysis consisted of two complementary approaches. The first step was inductive and consisted of periodic team meetings to discuss emerging insights which were later formally written as analytical memos. The ideas emerging from the analytical memos were used to create a coding scheme. This allowed for the second step, which was largely deductive and entailed using the coding scheme to formally code the entirety of the data set. Through the coding

process, we were able to identify a series of themes such as experiences of precarity within the teaching profession, intrinsic forms of motivation and external forms of support, and resilience and hustle. Once themes were established, we examined their relationship in the effort to write assertions. Once assertions were written, we returned to the data set in the effort to identify any disconfirming evidence.

Chapter four: Findings

Teacher precarity

As mentioned before, teaching is seen as a profession of “high demands and low returns”, and not only regarding the economic part (Chiong et al., 2017). Teachers around the world have complaints about various aspects regarding the teaching profession, such as workload, salary, emotional exhaustion, among others. This leads us to think that teaching is a precarious career, meaning that the “employment offers compensation, hours, or security inferior to a “regular” job.” (International Labour Organization, 2023). Concerning teaching, precarious employment includes “non-standard work (temporary or part-time), low-paid, and lacking in benefits and collective representation.” (Breshears, 2019).

An area coordinator and teacher that we interviewed alluded to notions of precarity when she said:

I have a lot of work, it is very complicated. To teach, to coordinate, to accompany, to go, to observe, to plan, to monitor the progress of each student... It is too much. This year I have recess duties; I will give extracurricular classes. I don't know, I don't know how I am going to do it.

While sharing this experience, she showed a face full of concern because she had a lot of things to do and not enough time to complete all of them. She also mentioned she did not

have time for herself or doing things she likes because she even works on weekends. On weekdays she does not have the time to finish everything.

Another core teacher complained about the work that she feels teachers should not do. She talked about workload regarding factors not related to teaching and explained, “this important administrative burden that we teachers have. To fulfill these things that can sometimes take away so much time. Time and energy is your focus, that is to teach, because you are meeting administrative issues, filling papers, meeting requirements, etc.” This also has to do with workload because teachers must meet many requirements that are not related to teaching, such as parental communication, meeting administrative deadlines, participation in school committees and staff meetings, among others. It should be emphasized that it is not bad for teachers to have other responsibilities than teaching, but when these become too time consuming it can take away from their ability to prepare classes: This becomes a problem not only for themselves, but also for their students. This is the first factor of a precarious employment; excessive workload.

On the other hand, economic issues were also discussed in the interviews we made. A Spanish teacher mentioned: “I believe that salary is extremely important for professional growth and motivation. And from one thousand people, the one thousand have told me that we’re not well paid. Many people tell me “if you’re a teacher, you’re never going to be a millionaire”. And all this is true.” This ensures that some teachers know that they are underpaid and that other people with other professions also know it. Therefore, we begin to doubt the reason why teachers stay in the profession if they are underpaid, which is the second factor of a precarious job.

Finally, we encountered personal and emotional issues, like exhaustion. A core teacher said:

I think that our career is super sacrificed because we deal with human beings, and I feel that it also wears us down a lot. That's exactly why it's super-wearing. I also feel that it is a super thankless career because many people, even students, are not aware of the work we do.”

This may even be linked with burnout because as the teacher mentioned, working with human beings every day is difficult and tiring. A sports teacher mentioned with almost the same words: “I am super conscious that when dealing with humans, there will always be super strong emotional wear”. It seems that teachers are conscious about the emotional drowning that teaching involves, but they stay in the profession even knowing that. This emotional wear factor is the third one of precarious employment common to the teaching profession.

This is a side about how teachers see and understand the profession. Precarious employment in the form of low wages, unpaid work hours, and multiple job holding is pervasive in this sector and such conditions have persisted for decades (Breshears, 2019). All the things mentioned before, connect with precarity, a concept that is normalized in the teaching profession. Nevertheless, although there is an evident existence of precarity and teachers accept in some way that teaching is seen as a career of high demand and low returns, there are intrinsic and altruistic reasons that are sufficient motivators for entering and staying in teaching (Chiong et al., 2017).

Intrinsic motivations

Intrinsic motivations refer to the engagement in a certain activity without relying on external factors like rewards or pressures. People who are intrinsically motivated are driven by factors such as curiosity, personal enjoyment, or sense of satisfaction. This means that the motivation comes from within the person rather than from external sources. Some teachers stay teaching because of these intrinsic or altruistic motivations. Studies show that teachers

experience a development of altruistic and intrinsic reasons after starting to teach, meaning these reasons strengthen over time (Chiong et al., 2017).

There are many ways in which teachers can be intrinsically motivated. The first reason found in the interviews was the love of children. A music teacher mentioned:

I love children, I love working with children and I put my soul and life in classes. I like the activities and I really enjoy them, so I think that children like that too. I give them a little taste of making music, which is what I like to do. I am motivated by the one who loves what I do. I love to relate with young children, teach them Music, to develop their musical potential, that sometimes there are no children who neither believe that they cannot and then they achieve it. I like that a lot, it motivates me a lot when a child has a hard time doing an exercise and then I see that it can. It's satisfying.

This genuine love for children can be a driving force that enhances the overall teaching experience for both educators and students. Moreover, there are many factors within this intrinsic motivator, such as connection, empathy, celebration of successes, overcoming of challenges, personal growth, among others.

Another intrinsic motivator that we found in our interviews is related to an assertion that 50% of the interviewees said teaching is a vocation and not a profession. One of the interviewed teachers said:

In fact, this profession is not a profession, at least not an ordinary one, it's a vocation rather than a profession... So, if as time passes, you discover teaching is not for you, then the wisest and healthiest decision is for you to leave.

Five out of the ten interviewees had a very strong conviction that being a teacher is a vocation, and, therefore, sort of like a talent that is totally intrinsic and natural. Another

teacher said that “When the new school year starts your batteries are fully charged, but only if you have vocation, because if not, if someone doesn't like this, doesn't enjoy this, then it's always going to be an ordeal”. Although this is a strong assertion, it reflects the fact that intrinsic motivation is key and strongly tied to vocation, and that is what enables teachers who believe their experience is as bad as an *ordeal* to remain.

On the other hand, we found an unexpected intrinsic motivator. This one relates to teaching as the means, not the end. In half of the interviews, teachers mentioned that they love the subject they teach, such as sports, music, and art, but not teaching itself. Going deep into the topic, we understood that these people teach because teaching is the closest thing to pursue other things, meaning it is an outlet to pursue their passion. Digging more into this topic, we found some reasons why these teachers do not work in the areas they are interested in. The most important one for them was the salary they have in these other jobs. Talking about this, the art teacher said: “Teaching has allowed me to be close to the art world in some way or another, because there are other colleagues who studied art and who are now working in other spaces non-related to art such as offices.” The same happened with the other non-core/elective teachers, which means their intrinsic motivation has to do with the way they can stay in the field they like and enjoy the most.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that while intrinsic motivation is key, it is insufficient by itself. Intrinsic motivation cannot be the only reasons for teachers to remain. It is true that teachers may have forms of intrinsic motivation that help them stay in the profession, but this is accompanied by something else. This means, that motivation goes hand in hand with other factors, such as external support.

External Support: Forms of support

Considering what was found regarding the intrinsic forms of motivation that allow teachers to remain in the profession despite precarity, it is also important to note that external

support also plays an important role. Although based on the interviews intrinsic motivation seems to be the key and common factor for teachers who stay in the profession, some teachers do mention that one of their strategies is to find, externally (outside of their institution and besides their intrinsic motivations), forms of support or coping mechanisms. Among the interviews, such forms of support range and vary between academic support, a supportive community, psychological support, and having outlets to deal with the frustrations of the profession and “blowing off steam”.

Firstly, academic support refers to the opportunities that teachers have for professional development. Some teachers (5) said something related or similar to this statement as exemplified in the follow excerpt:

Considering the current challenges, receiving more training from the institution would be very important, especially when it comes to managing the many special cases that are present in every class. I do believe that we lack this support because we expect to receive training and to be prepared and equipped by the institution... we do have immediate (superficial) support, but it is not enough to satisfy such a great need.

Considering this, teachers who want to remain in the profession must deal with the lack of professional development offered by the institution by being “self-taught” professionals and finding other external sources of training and equipment.

Similarly, when revising the interviews, some (5) teachers mentioned how hard the day-to-day classroom reality can be and how having the knowledge to approach these difficulties is key for preventing or reducing the resulting frustration. It is true that teachers must be lifelong learners, and investigate and grow on their own, however, as seen before, teachers do expect to find such opportunities for their development inside the institution or at least as a school initiative. However, one of the interview questions was about suggestions for

new teachers who are facing the first 3-5 years of the profession when attrition occurs, and, in response, one of the teachers made the following recommendation, making it clear that this would need to happen outside of school, since she had to look for it externally. She said, "... lean on taking courses, acquiring tools, and learning about strategies that can help you manage not only behavioral aspects (regarding students), but cognitive aspects as well".

The second type of external support that appears in the interviews is having a support network. According to Brown & Wynn (2009), having a supportive community is a very important aspect for teachers and their retention, since it helps them cope with the diverse challenges within the profession. Nonetheless, based on the interviews, the reality for some teachers is very different than what it should ideally be as mentioned in the literature. One of the interviewees said, "the support you have in the institution has a great influence (in well-being), but, many times, it is the opposite ". This teacher suggested that *if* there is a community in the school, sometimes it does worse than better, and, of course, this means that sometimes there isn't a supportive community in which teachers can lean on. This same teacher said, when referring to the risk of attrition, "sometimes you have so many things on top and maybe some people don't have support or someone who can tell them 'it's ok, this will pass', and this is way they say, 'I can't deal with this any longer, maybe I should look for an alternative'".

As mentioned by the interviewees, some teachers don't have people that can help them "overcome the difficulties that many teachers struggle with, and the ones that did have someone that encouraged them are lucky and feel ready to find ways to move on". Although one of the interviewees mentioned that she did have support from her coordinators, she described it more as a "follow-up" rather than emotional support. She said: "I mean, they do tell you things like 'you should rest more' but maybe they could put an effort into training us better or creating spaces focused on teacher well-being or teacher emotional support". All of

these relate to the fact that, as mentioned by another teacher, many educators feel “alone” in the profession, which is another frustration “on top of low salaries, high demands, and feeling unprepared”, which, in the end, can lead a teacher to quit. The suggestion from this teacher for new teachers was to find someone to lean on, someone who supports and guides them before taking the decision to leave, and, as other two teachers said in the interviews, sometimes the only support they have is their family members, friends or external support groups, such as group therapy.

The third aspect regarding external support for teachers is related to mental health. Out of the ten interviewees, five of them mentioned that they sought external support regarding their mental health, both through professional help and personal initiatives and activities. For the first one, during the interview, one of the teachers commented: “I have always coped this way; just like psychologists need their own therapy, I think it is a must for teachers to have psychological therapy. I’ve always had my own psychologist, always”. This same teacher said that although there is a stigma around going to therapy, she needed it because it was the only way for her to take care of her mental health and be her best version for her students. Other teachers said that therapy is their place to “let off steam”, be vulnerable and learn strategies to maintain their well-being even when they feel overloaded and stressed out. This external form of support seems to be so important that it is categorized as “basic”, meaning that, as said by another interviewee, “if you don’t seek for support and have this emotional, therapeutic and emotional personal work and support, it will be very difficult to be a teacher”.

In terms of personal initiatives and activities, two of the teachers who were interviewed talked about having hobbies as a form of “external support”. She said: “You know what is very important, having an activity you love besides being a teacher, a hobby. This will help you shut down the teacher switch and enjoy a different thing. This allows you

to de-stress and clear your thoughts and emotions”. This teacher, as well as a few others (4) talked about how some teachers have difficulties when separating and balancing personal life with professional life. The same teacher that talked about having hobbies also said that sometimes teachers are so focused and stressed about work that they bring it home and think about it in home and don’t have a time to just forget about anything that happened and turn off the “teacher chip”.

Finally, another form of “support” that can be understood somewhat differently from the ones mentioned before but still fall into the category of external support refers to teachers who find alternatives to make more money and be, in some way, their own external financial support, since their wages are not enough. This will be further discussed in the following section.

Acceptance and Endurance: Hustle

One more aspect that was encountered during the interviews was that, considering the precarity of the teaching profession and the efforts teachers do with the factors they can control to remain in the profession and evade attrition, there is another external alternative which teachers approach once they have accepted their situation. Once teachers realize and assimilate there are many factors that they can't control and won't necessarily change, then they understand that, if they want to stay, what is left for them is endurance. One of the ways teachers manage to remain and create ways to circumvent all the obstacles, difficulties and unmet expectations within the profession is through hustle. Hustle culture is well known in the current world, and it basically stands for putting work at the center of life, but not only work, it is usually linked to long working hours, no breaks or time-off, and the sacrifices one is willing to do in order to be “successful”, productive and have a “good life” (Rozentals, 2022).

Based on the interviews, all the teachers that participated had complaints about their insufficient salary and the complications it brought to their lives. Nine out of the ten teachers found themselves in need of an extra job besides their already full-time teaching job, because their pay was not enough for the economic demands of their lifestyles (Maninger *et al.*, 2011). This phenomenon is called moonlighting, and, among the interviews, these were some of the ways in which teachers moonlight: working extra hours in their husband's companies, working as tutors or teachers after school, giving family therapy, training other teachers, selling stuff, etc. One of the teachers even said:

The idea of quitting my job as a teacher and working in a company really flirts with me because I would make so much money and with so much less effort, but I like teaching, so I just work extra hours in the company.

Other teachers also said something related to what one interviewee said: "The salary is not enough, if it weren't for the fact that I have other sources of income, I wouldn't have enough money to pay everything I have to pay for". When looking at these type of assertions and more that appeared during the interview, it is safe to say that hustling and moonlighting is an alternative that teachers choose not only to remain in the profession but to improve their living standards as well; it something some teachers must do despite the challenges of it and the consequences in their professional and personal life (Maninger *et al.*, 2011).

Chapter 5: Discussion and conclusions

Key findings

Teacher retention is predicted in many ways. According to our study, these can be divided into three main points: intrinsic motivation, external ways of support, and hustle; all of these considering the precarity that exists within the profession. The intrinsic motivation refers to the way in which teachers engage with their career with an incentive that comes

within themselves. This type of motivation includes vocation, the love for kids, teaching as an outlet to pursue their passion, among others. On the other side, extrinsic support refers to factors outside the teachers themselves that captivate them to stay in the profession. This one includes academic support, psychological therapy, support network, hobbies, external financial support, and so on. Lastly, hustle relates to acceptance and endurance of teachers. Within this one, we found moonlight, which means teachers have extra-jobs to have economic stability.

In essence, our study reveals that teacher retention happens because of the interplay of intrinsic motivation, external support, and the resilience to navigate the challenges of the profession. These three pillars help with retention even though a precarious nature of teaching exists. Moreover, this knowledge helps to understand the necessity for ongoing research and practical measures to enhance teacher longevity and effectiveness in the educational system.

Key insights

Considering the key findings mentioned above, the main takeaway becomes evident when finding the common ground between our assertions regarding teacher retention. Among the intrinsic motivations, external support, and the acceptance and endurance that teachers manifest through hustle, what unifies all these mechanisms for retention is the fact that these depend on the individuals' resourcefulness and effort. Intrinsic motivation is purely individual, personal, internal, no one can intervene in it, and finding external support and enduring roots in it. All the forms of external support and moonlighting also depend on the individual. The teachers are responsible for searching ways that allow them to stay; it is something that depends on them.

Taking this into account, along with the precarity of the profession and the dissatisfaction that teachers experience even in the private sector, it is important to understand what causes retention and who is responsible for it. Ideally, the educational

institutions and the government should take this responsibility and create policies or plans that promote retention for teachers. In fact, research shows that school-based factors are the most important and influential when fomenting retention.

Nonetheless, when looking at reality, based on the interviews and their findings, it is evident that sometimes this ideal is not fulfilled, making retention an individual responsibility. This means that teachers have to find their own ways to stay in the profession, such as moonlighting, seeking psychological help through therapy, steaming off through hobbies, and looking for professional development opportunities outside of school, all these tied to a strong intrinsic motivation. Actually, as seen before, intrinsic motivation is strongly related to and composed by resilience, a genuine love for teaching, and a true vocation. These allow teachers to persist and encourage themselves to find their own ways of retention, even when it shouldn't be entirely their responsibility.

Recommendations

Considering what has been discussed about teacher attrition and retention, and specifically focusing on the private sector in Ecuador, there are various recommendations that should be taken into account. It has been established that teacher attrition is a complex phenomenon with lots of nuances regarding its causes and "solutions". Likewise, retention, which comes as a "solution" for attrition, has its own complexities and branches out in many factors that promote it or prevent it. Also, it is important to acknowledge that attrition is a worldwide phenomenon with diverse costs that affect the educational system of any country where it's present. It is evident that, with the magnitude of teacher attrition and its effects, there is an urgent need to research and analyze this phenomenon, along with retention, in a more integral way, which includes taking into consideration more countries around the world that are affected by it. Likewise, on a smaller scale, attrition and retention should be looked at

more deeply in both educational sectors, public and private. Following this recommendation, the result would be having a bigger picture of the phenomenon and its influence, not only in places such as the United States and Europe, but around the world. In short, if this is a worldwide crisis, it should be researched as such.

Additionally, part of our findings showed that retention is an individual responsibility, meaning that, if a teacher wants to remain in the profession, he or she needs to find the ways to do so. This is strongly related to intrinsic motivation since it is the starting point that allows teachers to put an effort on finding alternatives to stay in the field. Although this is valuable and, as shown through the interviews, does work for some teachers, it would be important to do more research about how retention can not only be an individual responsibility but a collective one, referring to institutional and governmental intervention. Research revealed that school-based factors are the ones that have a bigger influence when talking about retention, and some of the biggest reasons why teachers want to leave depend on the government, such as salaries. Considering this, it would make sense to understand what is or could be the role that such entities have in being part of the “solution” through teacher retention.

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