

The Will to Stay: Traversing the Experiences of Private School Teachers

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Abstract— This study explored the will to stay: traversing the experiences of private school teachers during the school year 2023-2024. The qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry method of research was utilized in the study. Eight private school teachers were purposively chosen as the participants of the study. An in-depth interview using the interview guide questions and focus group discussion were used to gather significant information. The study employed the thematic analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Findings revealed that the private school teachers have different reasons that made them to stay in their jobs namely: Faith-based Christian working environment, Passion and commitment to teaching, Improvement of students' learning, and United and supportive school culture. There were four emerged themes on the experiences that compelled teachers to stay in the private school: Small class size as an avenue for sound learning; Desire for spiritual nourishment; Compassion to help learners and equip their mental and spiritual aspects; and Unique leadership practices of the school head. There were four themes emerged on recommendations and suggestions to the administration to increase the retention program: Salary increase and incentives; Seminars to enhance teachers' skills and improve school facilities; Regular meetings, visitation of school board members, and classroom observation.

Keywords— 'Will to Stay:' experiences: private school teachers: retention

I. INTRODUCTION

Teacher retention is a critical factor in ensuring the stability and quality of education in private schools. It directly influences instructional continuity, student performance, and institutional effectiveness (Chen & Chen, 2018; Grzywacz et al., 2019). While private schools offer advantages such as smaller class sizes and greater instructional autonomy (Cabrera & Serrano, 2018; Arroyo et al., 2019), teachers also encounter challenges including job insecurity, limited benefits, and resource constraints (De Leon, 2018; Gosh et al., 2020), which may affect their decision to remain in the profession.

Globally, studies indicate that teacher retention is influenced by multiple factors such as salary competitiveness, professional development opportunities, work environment, and work-life balance (Borman & Dowling, 2022; Grzywacz et al., 2014). In developing contexts, including the Philippines, additional factors such as institutional support, compensation structure, and access to professional growth further shape teachers' employment decisions (Catindig et al., 2023; Legaspi & Fernandez, 2022). Although salary remains an important factor, it is not the sole determinant of teacher

retention, as job satisfaction and institutional commitment also play significant roles.

In the context of Malaybalay City Division, private school teachers often operate under contractual arrangements, which may lead to higher mobility and turnover after contract completion. Despite this, some teachers remain in their institutions due to professional commitment, teaching satisfaction, and positive work environments. However, there is limited empirical evidence explaining why certain teachers choose to stay while others leave, particularly in private Christian school settings. This study is anchored on Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory (1966), the Perceptual Contrast Effect Theory (Sherif et al., 1958), and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Moreover, existing literature has largely focused on Catholic schools and quantitative determinants of retention, with limited exploration of teachers' lived experiences and contextual motivations in Christian private education. This gap highlights the need for a more in-depth understanding of teacher retention from the perspective of those directly involved in private school instruction.

This study therefore aims to examine the factors influencing teacher retention in private Christian schools, focusing on salary and incentives, institutional culture, professional development opportunities, and teaching experiences. The findings are expected to provide insights that may assist school administrators and policymakers in strengthening teacher retention strategies and improving the sustainability of private education.

II. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design was utilized in the study, precisely a phenomenology approach using semi-structured interviews. The study was conducted within the Division of Malaybalay City established through DepEd Order No. 50, s. 2002. The study's participants were eight (8) purposefully chosen teachers from the four (4) private Christian schools of Malaybalay City Division. This study utilized semi-structured interview guides and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with open-ended questions to gather in-depth qualitative data. Upon approval of the research instruments, data collection commenced through a series of sequential steps: securing permission, coordinating schedules, and conducting interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The interpretation of the data obtained from interviews and Focus Group Discussions were involved using thematic analysis. Thematic

analysis is a qualitative method employed for the examination of data. Using the method provided by Braun and Clarke (2006), this study would perform thematic analysis as part of analyzing the data. The analysis included the implementation of six phases.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Problem 1: What made the private school teachers remain in teaching jobs?

TABLE 1: Reasons for the 'will to stay' of private school teachers

Meaning Unit	Emergent Theme (Reasons and motivations)
Attributing the ability to navigate workplace stress and uncertainties to a steadfast trust in Christian principles	Faith-based Christian working environment
Sustained practice on the importance of humility, compassion, and selflessness among Christian colleagues	
Trust and reliance on higher guidance emerge as essential components of the Christian working environment	
Sense of belongingness is evidenced in the workplace	Passion and commitment to teach
Responsibility towards shaping the student's learning is evident	
The love and passion of teaching	
Reflecting teachers' commitment to continuously enhancing skills and knowledge to better serve students	Improvement of student's learning
Inspired by the progress of student's learning	
Opportunities to address learning loss	
Acknowledging the input in promoting continuous Improvement among students	United and supportive school culture
Sense of camaraderie among both students and staff, fostering a united school culture	
Surrounded by Christians who are dedicated to doing the work with understanding	
Sustained interest in working in a hassle-free culture	
Provision of administrative support on extra-curricular activities	

Table 1 shows the main reasons private school teachers choose to stay in their schools. Four major themes emerged: faith-based work environment, passion for teaching, students' learning progress, and supportive school culture. First, many teachers valued the Christian work environment. They described the school as peaceful, respectful, and guided by Christian values. This environment helped reduce conflict, strengthen relationships, and increase their desire to remain in the school. Second, teachers expressed strong passion and commitment to teaching. They shared that love for teaching and helping students motivated them to continue despite challenges. Teaching was viewed not only as a job but also as a calling. Third, teachers gained fulfillment from seeing students improve academically, especially in reading and writing. Student progress encouraged them to continue investing effort in their work. Fourth, participants emphasized the importance of a united and supportive school culture. Many described the school as a family where teachers feel valued, supported, and encouraged by colleagues and administrators. This positive environment contributed to job satisfaction and long-term commitment. Regarding salary, responses were mixed. Some teachers believed salary increase is necessary for retention, especially due to rising living costs. Others stated that salary was not the main reason for staying, emphasizing relationships, personal fulfillment, and service instead.

Table 1 reveals that teachers' decision to stay in private schools is influenced more by intrinsic and organizational factors than by salary alone. Based on the sentiments of most participants, salary was not the primary reason why teachers chose to remain in the profession. This finding supports the studies of Silletto (2018), Stern and Wagner (2016), Sumipo (2020), and Legaspi and Fernandez (2022), which found that remuneration alone does not determine employee or teacher retention. Teachers often remain because they are satisfied with other aspects of their work. Sumipo (2020) further explained that intrinsic motivational factors are stronger forces that build school loyalty among teachers. The findings are also supported by Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory (1966), which states that salary is a hygiene factor that prevents dissatisfaction but does not necessarily create long-term motivation. Instead, motivators such as recognition, meaningful work, and personal growth produce stronger job satisfaction and commitment. Another important result of the study is the role of positive school culture. Participants valued supportive relationships, unity, and a sense of belonging. This confirms the findings of Deal and Deal (2018) and Garcia and Weiss (2019), which showed that schools with collaborative cultures, professional support, and teacher autonomy have higher teacher retention rates. The theme of passion and commitment to teaching was also evident. Teachers stayed because they loved teaching and were dedicated to helping learners. This supports Gumarang (2021), who found that private school teachers remain in the profession because of their passion for teaching and desire to create effective learning environments. Moreover, the study highlights two distinct factors: a faith-based Christian work environment and fulfillment from the improvement of students' learning. These findings expand existing literature by showing that spiritual values and seeing student progress can strongly motivate teachers to remain in private schools. Problem 2: What are the experiences that compelled teachers to stay in the private school?

TABLE 2: Lived experiences of teachers in the private school

Meaning Unit	Emergent Theme (Meaningful experiences of private school teachers)
Intimate learning has allowed more personalized attention and fostered meaningful teacher-student interactions	Small class size as an avenue for sound learning
Smaller class sizes tailored instructional methods	
Enjoyed addressing individual learning needs for focused and effective learning	
Integration of prayer and spiritual practices into daily work routines has a transformative impact on attitudes and approaches to professional challenges	Desire for spiritual nourishment
Sought spiritual wisdom and cultivated a richer understanding of spiritual growth	
Reinforce spiritual growth through shared experiences and discussions	
Expressed a deep understanding of the unique challenges learners face and a sincere desire to provide holistic support	Compassion to help learners and equip their mental and spiritual aspects
Serve as role models who inspire not only academic excellence but also mental and spiritual flourishing	
School head adopts practices that empower teachers and staff	
Actively engaging in supportive and hands-on practices, demonstrating a commitment to serving the needs of teachers	Unique leadership practices of school head

Table 2 presents the lived experiences of private school teachers that influenced their decision to stay. Four themes emerged: small class size, spiritual nourishment, compassion for learners, and supportive leadership. First, teachers

appreciated the small class size because it allowed more one-on-one interaction, closer monitoring, and better support for students' individual needs. With fewer students, teachers were more confident and effective in delivering instruction. Second, participants highlighted the value of spiritual nourishment through daily devotions, Bible studies, and chapel activities. These practices strengthened their faith, provided motivation, and helped them remain positive and committed to their work. Third, teachers expressed strong compassion for learners, especially those needing academic and personal support. Helping struggling students improve in reading, behavior, and spiritual growth gave teachers a sense of fulfillment and purpose. Fourth, teachers emphasized the importance of supportive leadership. School heads were described as caring, organized, and encouraging. Their guidance, communication, and concern for teachers' well-being contributed to higher morale and job satisfaction.

Table 2 shows that teachers' lived experiences in private schools strongly influence their decision to stay. Key factors identified were supportive leadership, spiritual nourishment, compassion for learners, and manageable class size. One major finding is the importance of the leadership practices of school heads and administrators. This result is consistent with Scott (2021), who concluded that leadership style is a crucial factor in teachers' decision to stay or resign. Positive relationships with school leaders create trust, motivation, and long-term commitment among teachers. The findings also suggest that leaders in Christian schools are often accommodating and supportive because of the integration of faith-based values. In such settings, leadership can shape school culture, strengthen teamwork, and build a sense of shared mission among teachers, students, and parents. This reflects principles of servant leadership, where leaders prioritize service, empathy, and the welfare of others. Such leadership practices can improve teacher morale and job satisfaction. Another important result is teachers' desire for spiritual nourishment through devotions, Bible studies, and faith-centered activities. This finding may be explained by Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which states that individuals remain motivated when their needs for relatedness, competence, and purpose are met. Faith-based practices may strengthen teachers' sense of meaning and belonging. Teachers also expressed compassion for learners, especially in helping students improve academically, mentally, and spiritually. This reflects teachers' intrinsic motivation and commitment to holistic education.

Problem 3: What recommendations could be proposed to the administration to increase teacher retention in private schools?

Table 3 presents the recommendations of teachers for improving retention programs in private schools. Four major themes emerged: salary increases and incentives, professional development, improved facilities, and stronger administrative support. First, many participants emphasized the need for salary increases and better incentives. Teachers believed that competitive compensation and benefits would help attract and retain qualified educators, especially compared with opportunities in public schools. Second, teachers recommended more seminars and training programs. They viewed professional development as important for improving teaching skills, adapting to changing learner needs, and increasing motivation to

remain in the profession. Third, participants suggested improvement of school facilities, particularly larger, more comfortable, and well-ventilated classrooms. Better facilities were seen as beneficial for both teachers and students by creating a more effective learning environment. Fourth, teachers highlighted the importance of regular meetings, classroom observations, and visits from administrators or board members. They wanted more communication, feedback, and opportunities to express concerns. Strong administrative presence and support were viewed as essential to teacher growth and satisfaction.

TABLE 3: Lived experiences of teachers in the private school

Meaning Unit	Emergent Theme (Recommendations to increase retention of private school teachers)
Recognition of financial remuneration as a key factor in motivating and retaining employees	Salary increase and incentives
The importance of competitive compensation emphasizing the role of salary increase in attracting and retaining teachers to stay	
Needs of professional development through seminars to improve classroom practices	Seminars to enhance teachers' skills
Desire for seminars that facilitate networking and knowledge exchange among teachers	
Acknowledging the role of skill-enhancing seminars in boosting morale and a sense of empowerment among teachers	
The need to have improved school facilities on the overall learning	Improvement in school facilities
Provision of a well-ventilated classroom	
Importance of regular meetings involving school board members, creating opportunities for open communication and collaborative decision-making	Regular meetings, visitation of school board members, and classroom observation
Value of school board visitations to classrooms, fostering a culture of accountability	
Regular classroom observation as a constructive mechanism for identifying strengths, addressing challenges, and promoting continuous enhancement of teaching practices	

Table 3 reflected the recommendations of teachers to strengthen retention programs in private schools. The findings show that teachers gave importance to salary increase, professional development, improved facilities, and supportive supervision as key strategies for encouraging them to stay. The strongest recommendation was salary increase and incentives. Teachers recognized that fair compensation can improve commitment, motivation, and job satisfaction. This supports Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory (1966), which identifies salary as a hygiene factor that reduces dissatisfaction. Although salary may not be the main reason teachers stay, inadequate pay can lead to turnover. This finding is also consistent with Catindig et al. (2023), who noted that compensation remains a significant consideration in teacher retention. Another major theme was the need for seminars and training opportunities. Teachers valued continuous learning and skill enhancement, showing their desire for professional growth. This supports Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000), which explains that individuals remain motivated when opportunities for competence and development are present. It also aligns with Woods (2016), who emphasized that career advancement and training influence retention. Teachers also recommended improved school facilities, particularly classrooms and teaching spaces. A better

physical environment can reduce stress, improve teaching effectiveness, and increase satisfaction. Adequate facilities are essential for both teacher performance and student learning. Lastly, teachers highlighted the value of regular classroom visitation, observation, and meetings with administrators. They viewed supportive supervision as a way to receive feedback, express concerns, and strengthen communication. This finding supports Scott (2021), who found that leadership support and positive supervision practices contribute to teacher retention.

IV. CONCLUSION

The private school teachers of Malaybalay City Division have unique reasons, motivations, and experiences that sustained their commitment to stay. Despite the different viewpoints on the impact of distinct factors, private school teachers were able to stick to the heart of the matter. Generalizing from the rich tapestry of experiences shared by the private school teachers, it becomes evident that the 'will to stay' is a complex interplay of diverse factors. Furthermore, this study has captured the rich experiences that motivate private school teachers to forge a long-term connection with their institutions, reflecting a multifaceted interplay of professional and personal elements in their decision-making process.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and generalizations herein presented, the following recommendations are given:

1. School administrations should implement a competitive salary structure that reflects the dedication and expertise of teachers, addressing a fundamental aspect of job satisfaction and commitment.
2. The administrators should establish and prioritize ongoing professional development programs tailored to the evolving needs of teachers, fostering a culture of continuous learning and growth.
3. School leaders can increase the retention rate of teachers in private schools by presenting themselves as faithful role models, doer of the word, and testimony of dedicated Christian leaders.
4. The board of trustees must invest in fostering a conducive work environment by addressing infrastructure needs, providing adequate resources, and promoting a collaborative and inclusive school culture.
5. To sustain the interest of teachers, the school should create a communication channel that is clear and transparent between the school administration and teachers, ensuring that teachers feel valued, heard, and included in decision-making processes.
6. The school should develop and implement recognition programs to acknowledge and appreciate teachers' contributions, promoting a culture of gratitude and motivation.

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