



# ESSENCE OF PASSION: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS WHO CHOOSE TO STAY IN LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOL

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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra21870>

DOI No: 10.36713/epra21870

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the factors that influence teachers to remain committed to teaching in low-performing schools despite the challenges they face. The case study approach is particularly well-suited for this research as it enables an in-depth exploration of the unique experiences, challenges, and strategies of teachers who choose to stay in low-performing schools, (Yin, 2018). The research participants for this study consisted of three (3) teachers selected from low-performing schools in Davao City. The findings suggest that policymakers and school leaders should reconsider how success is defined in low-performing schools. Emphasizing only test scores and grades overlooks the personal, social, and emotional growth of students. Integrating holistic assessment frameworks can better reflect the diverse progress of learners, especially in under-resourced contexts.

**KEYWORDS-** *Essence of Passion, Case Study, Teachers Who Choose to Stay in Low-Performing Schools*

## INTRODUCTION

Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the future of their students, yet many face the challenge of working in environments that lack adequate resources and support. This study explores the motivations, experiences, and challenges faced by educators who remain committed to teaching in schools with low academic performance. The study aims to uncover the underlying factors that drive their dedication despite the difficulties of limited resources, low student achievement, administrative demands, and societal pressures often associated with such institutions. This phenomenon becomes problematic as teacher retention in low-performing schools is typically low, leading to a cycle of instability that exacerbates existing educational disparities and negatively impacts students' access to quality education. Teachers in these settings often face burnout, lack of professional growth opportunities, and a perception of their schools as undesirable workplaces, further complicating efforts to attract and retain highly skilled educators. A study published in the Asia Pacific Journal of Education (2019) explored how Chinese teachers in rural, low-performing schools sustained their motivation amidst numerous challenges. The findings underscored the pivotal role of cultural values such as dedication, perseverance, and a sense of responsibility toward education, which aligned with deeply ingrained societal norms. Teachers found strength in their connection to the community, often viewing their work as a means to uplift and transform the lives of local students and families. Additionally, access to professional development opportunities served as a critical motivator, offering teachers the chance to enhance their skills and navigate the complexities of teaching in underprivileged contexts. Collectively, these factors enabled teachers to maintain resilience and commitment, demonstrating the importance of aligning personal values with external support systems in sustaining motivation in challenging educational environments.

Also, the 2020 study titled "Staying Power: Understanding Teacher Motivation in Low-income Schools in India," published in the International Journal of Educational Development, examined the factors that influenced Indian teachers to remain dedicated to teaching in challenging environments. The findings revealed that a strong sense of personal mission, rooted in a commitment to positively impact students' lives, was a driving force for many teachers. Supportive leadership also played a critical role, as school leaders who fostered a culture of collaboration and provided emotional and professional backing helped sustain teacher morale. Additionally, the study highlighted the importance of teacher autonomy, with educators valuing the freedom to design their lessons and implement innovative teaching strategies tailored to their students' needs. These elements combined to create a motivating environment that empowered teachers to persist in their roles despite significant obstacles.

Meanwhile, the findings emphasized the significance of positive workplace relationships, where strong bonds with colleagues, students, and the school community fostered a sense of belonging and purpose. Teachers cited these relationships as a source of emotional support and motivation, enabling them to navigate the challenges of low-performing school environments. Additionally, the availability of professional growth opportunities played a critical role, as teachers valued chances to enhance their skills and advance their careers while making a meaningful difference in the lives of underserved students. These factors combined to cultivate a commitment to their schools, despite the difficulties faced, (Malaysian Journal of Educational Management, 2021).

Similarly, the study "Beyond the Paycheck: Understanding Filipino Teachers' Commitment to Public Schools," published in the Philippine Journal of Education (2022), analyzed the factors that motivated teachers to remain in challenging public school environments. The research highlighted that a strong sense of vocation, driven by the



belief that teaching is a calling to serve and make a difference in students' lives, was a fundamental motivator. Family support emerged as another crucial factor, as the encouragement and understanding of loved ones helped teachers persevere through the hardships associated with their work. Additionally, access to professional development opportunities provided avenues for skill enhancement and personal growth, reinforcing their dedication to the teaching profession. Together, these elements underscored the complex interplay of intrinsic values, external support systems, and continuous learning in sustaining teacher commitment.

In contrast, a research identified several successful programs, such as financial incentives, career advancement opportunities, and mental health support, which were instrumental in improving teacher satisfaction and reducing attrition rates. These initiatives created a more supportive environment, fostering both professional and personal well-being among educators. However, the study also highlighted areas for improvement, including the need for better implementation of policies at the grassroots level, increased funding for resource-limited schools, and more consistent opportunities for professional development tailored to the diverse needs of teachers. By addressing these gaps, the government could further enhance teacher retention and strengthen the overall education system, (Philippine Normal University, 2023).

Additionally, the Philippine Social Science Council (2021), focused on teachers working in remote and economically challenged regions identified several key motivators that contributed to their persistence in these challenging environments. A strong sense of community impact emerged as a primary driver, with teachers feeling a deep responsibility to contribute to the upliftment of their students and the broader community. Many viewed their work as not just a job but as a vital service to address social inequalities. Additionally, professional growth opportunities, such as training and development programs, were highlighted as crucial in sustaining their commitment to teaching. These opportunities allowed teachers to improve their teaching skills and broaden their career prospects, reinforcing their passion for the profession. The combination of community connection and continuous professional development provided teachers with both intrinsic motivation and external support, enabling them to persevere in difficult teaching environments.

On the other hand, in Davao City, University of Mindanao (2022), examined the specific challenges and motivations of teachers working in low-performing schools in Davao City. The research highlighted the significant role of local support systems in retaining educators. Teachers reported that strong community engagement, including partnerships with local leaders, parents, and civic organizations, provided a sense of belonging and collective purpose. These local support structures helped teachers feel more invested in the community's development and empowered to address the educational needs of students. Moreover, the study emphasized that community-driven initiatives, such as volunteer programs and shared educational resources, were crucial in fostering a positive working environment and mitigating the difficulties faced in these schools. The combination of local support and community involvement emerged as key factors in motivating teachers to stay, as they felt their work was making a meaningful impact on the broader socio-economic development of the area.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A meta-analysis of the study's findings, several key themes emerge that illustrate both the hardships and sources of meaning these educators derive from their work. The emotional challenges faced by teachers in these rural settings were significant, as many reported feelings of isolation due to the geographic and social distance from more urbanized educational hubs. These teachers struggled not only with the emotional burden of teaching in remote areas but also with the mental strain of working in environments marked by resource limitations. Insufficient materials, inadequate facilities, and the difficulty of implementing modern teaching practices in such contexts were recurrent themes, contributing to a sense of professional frustration and burnout, (Wang and Li, 2019).

In Indonesia, Suryani and Widodo (2020), highlighted several key factors that influence teacher motivation, with particular emphasis on the challenges faced in the classroom, the importance of community engagement, and the opportunities for personal growth. Teachers in disadvantaged schools reported significant daily classroom challenges, such as overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and difficulties in addressing the diverse needs of students. These challenges created an environment of constant pressure, requiring teachers to be highly resourceful and adaptive in their teaching approaches. Despite these constraints, teachers found ways to innovate within the limitations, often employing creative strategies to maintain student engagement and facilitate learning.

Furthermore, in Malaysia, another findings underscore the resilience and adaptability of teachers who are committed to making a positive impact despite the challenges they face. The study highlights the importance of providing teachers in low-performing schools with the necessary support and resources to navigate the complex realities of teaching in disadvantaged contexts. It also calls for a more holistic approach to education, one that considers the broader socioeconomic context in which both students and teachers operate. This includes ensuring that teachers receive targeted professional development, access to resources, and community support to help them address the diverse needs of their students effectively, (Rahman and Abdullah, 2021).

In addition to emotional resilience, Santos and Cruz (2022) in the Philippines, emphasized professional development and peer collaboration as key factors in sustaining teacher motivation. Teachers who participated in regular professional development workshops or had access to mentoring and peer support networks felt more equipped to deal with the challenges they faced. These opportunities allowed teachers to build new skills, reflect on their



practices, and share coping strategies with colleagues. This sense of camaraderie and shared purpose helped alleviate the isolation that many teachers felt, particularly in rural or under-resourced schools.

Whereas, the study highlighted that teachers' resilience was not solely based on external support but also on intrinsic factors, such as a deep sense of vocation and a commitment to making a difference in the lives of their students. Teachers expressed pride in their ability to provide educational opportunities to students who otherwise might not have access to quality instruction. This strong sense of purpose, coupled with the support they received from the community, helped them remain motivated and dedicated to their work, despite the ongoing challenges of teaching in marginalized schools, (Dela Cruz and Mendoza, 2021).

Reyes and Garcia (2023), provides an in-depth exploration of the personal and professional lives of Filipino teachers working in low-performing schools. Despite these sacrifices, the study also revealed the significant professional growth that teachers experienced. Many teachers described how working in low-performing schools pushed them to innovate, develop resilience, and continuously refine their teaching strategies. These experiences, while challenging, contributed to their development as educators, allowing them to build a diverse skill set and gain valuable insights into student-centered teaching methods. Teachers noted that their professional growth was not only measured by their ability to improve student outcomes but also by their ability to adapt to the unique challenges of their environment, which made them more effective and reflective practitioners.

Another study, explored the unique challenges faced by public school teachers working in urban poor areas of Davao City. Teachers in urban poor areas reported facing a range of socio-economic challenges that directly impacted their students' learning experiences. These challenges included overcrowded classrooms, limited access to basic educational resources, and the disruptive effects of poverty, such as malnutrition and unstable home environments. Despite these difficulties, teachers exhibited a remarkable level of resilience and resourcefulness, often creating innovative approaches to teaching that catered to the needs of their students. These included using locally available materials for teaching aids, employing project-based learning, and integrating community resources into lessons. Teachers also emphasized the importance of creating a supportive and engaging classroom atmosphere, where students felt safe and encouraged to participate despite external challenges, (Flores and Santos, 2022).

### Research Questions

In order to fully understand the factors that influence teacher retention in low-performing schools, it is crucial to explore the underlying motivations, challenges, and support structures that contribute to teachers' decisions to stay in such environments. This study aims to address the central question of what drives teachers to remain committed to their roles despite facing significant barriers such as limited resources, low student performance, and challenging socio-economic contexts. Specifically, this study will answer the following questions:

1. What are the Lived Experiences of Teachers who choose to stay in Low-Performing Schools?
2. What are the coping strategies of Teachers who choose to stay in Low-Performing Schools?
3. What are the educational insights learned by the Teachers who choose to stay in Low-Performing Schools?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The case study approach was particularly well-suited for this research as it enables an in-depth exploration of the unique experiences, challenges, and strategies of teachers who choose to stay in low-performing schools, (Yin, 2018).

Through focusing on a specific group of teachers, the study allows for a nuanced understanding of their individual and collective motivations, providing a comprehensive view of the factors influencing their commitment. This approach also facilitates the exploration of how local contextual elements such as community support, school leadership, and socio-economic challenges interact with teachers' personal values and professional goals.

The case study methodology allows for multiple sources of data to be integrated, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, providing a well-rounded view of the teachers' experiences. This triangulation of data strengthens the validity and reliability of the findings, offering a more robust understanding of the complex dynamics at play in low-performing schools. Moreover, the case study approach is flexible, allowing for the adaptation of research questions and data collection methods as new insights emerge during the study.

Additionally, this approach emphasizes the voices of the participants, empowering teachers to share their perspectives in their own words. The detailed, qualitative nature of the case study design enables the researcher to capture the richness and depth of teachers' lived experiences, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of teacher retention in low-performing schools. Ultimately, the findings from this case study will contribute valuable insights to the broader field of educational research, particularly in the context of developing strategies for improving teacher retention in challenging educational settings.



### Research Participants

The research participants for this study consisted of three (3) teachers selected from low-performing schools in Davao City. These participants were chosen based on specific criteria that aligned with the research objectives, such as their extensive teaching experience in challenging educational contexts and their demonstrated commitment to remaining in these schools despite the difficulties.

The purposive sampling technique was employed, as it allows researchers to intentionally select individuals who possess the knowledge, experiences, and insights that are most relevant to the study (Creswell, 2014). This approach ensured that the participants could provide rich, detailed data that illuminated the factors influencing teacher retention and resilience in low-performing schools.

### Research Instrument

The primary research instrument for this study was a semi-structured interview guide designed to gather in-depth qualitative data about the lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of teachers in low-performing schools in Davao City. The semi-structured format provided flexibility, allowing the researcher to probe deeper into participants' responses while ensuring all key topics were covered. The guide was developed based on the research objectives and a review of relevant literature on teacher retention, motivation, and commitment in challenging educational contexts. It included open-ended questions categorized into themes such as professional experiences, motivation and retention, coping mechanisms, community engagement, and support systems.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study followed a thematic analysis approach, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), which is widely used in qualitative research to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data. This method allowed the researcher to systematically organize and interpret the rich narratives provided by the participants.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Implication

The findings suggest that policymakers and school leaders should reconsider how success is defined in low-performing schools. Emphasizing only test scores and grades overlooks the personal, social, and emotional growth of students. Integrating holistic assessment frameworks can better reflect the diverse progress of learners, especially in under-resourced contexts

Teachers' belief in supporting students at their own pace indicates a need for instructional flexibility. This calls for more autonomy in classroom strategies, allowing educators to tailor teaching to student needs rather than rigidly following standardized benchmarks. Professional development should focus on differentiated instruction and trauma-informed practices.

Teachers' experiences affirm that involving families and communities enhances students' sense of hope and support. Policies and school programs should actively promote partnerships with local stakeholders, including parents, barangay officials, and NGOs, to co-create a nurturing and resilient learning environment.

The focus on students' potential, regardless of background, highlights the power of an asset-based mindset. Training and leadership practices should avoid deficit views of students in marginalized settings and instead promote narratives that focus on possibilities, strengths, and long-term growth.

These implications collectively advocate for a shift from deficit-driven to strength-based educational approaches in low-performing schools, anchored in resilience, relationship-building, and a broader understanding of student success.

### Future Directions

Based on the findings from Case 1: The Lived Experiences and Insights of Teachers in a Low-Performing School, particularly the emerging theme of belief in resilience, opportunity, and growth beyond traditional measures, several future directions can be proposed for the Department of Education (DepEd), school heads, teachers, and future researchers.

#### For the Department of Education (DepEd):

there is a need to rethink how school performance is measured. Metrics should go beyond academic scores and include indicators that reflect students' social, emotional, and behavioral growth, as well as the contextual realities of under-resourced schools. Policies should support contextualized, purpose-driven teaching by granting schools greater flexibility to adapt curricula and teaching strategies to local needs. Furthermore, DepEd should strengthen mental health and psychosocial support systems for both students and teachers, institutionalizing programs that promote resilience and well-being in challenging school environments.

#### School heads or Principals

They play a vital role in fostering a school culture that values innovation and emotional support. They should encourage teachers to use learner-centered and adaptive strategies, even those that deviate from conventional academic routines, especially when such approaches improve student engagement and motivation. Establishing



strong relationships with parents, local leaders, and the broader community is also essential. Principals should lead in promoting shared responsibility for education by organizing regular dialogues and collaborative initiatives. Additionally, to sustain teacher morale, school leaders must provide structures for mentoring, peer collaboration, and recognition of both academic and non-academic contributions.

### For Teachers

The future direction lies in embracing flexibility, compassion, and the role of mentorship. Teachers should continue developing and applying differentiated and inclusive strategies that recognize and support the diverse backgrounds and learning paces of students. Reflective practice and peer collaboration are crucial in building resilience and sustaining motivation. Teachers must also see themselves not only as knowledge providers but also as advocates and role models who inspire hope, especially among learners facing adversity. By doing so, they can meaningfully contribute to the life success of their students, beyond what test scores can measure.

### Future Researchers

They are encouraged to explore the long-term impact of teacher beliefs and relational practices on student outcomes in low-performing schools. More research is needed to document and analyze successful localized teaching innovations and community-based educational models. Studies focusing on the emotional and professional trajectories of teachers working in these environments would also offer valuable insights into the sustainability of transformative teaching. Overall, future research should contribute to redefining educational success through a lens that values resilience, context, and holistic growth.

These future directions underscore the importance of a united and compassionate approach to addressing educational inequities. By working collaboratively and reimagining success in broader terms, all stakeholders can help ensure that no learner is left behind.

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