

Reading the Signs: Experiences of School Heads on Predicting Teacher Attrition

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Abstract: This study sought to determine their experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights related to managing teacher turnover in public schools. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the study involved ten school heads, five who participated in in-depth interviews (IDI) and five in a focus group discussion (FGD). Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their administrative experience and involvement in managing teacher concerns. Data were collected through an interview guide and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed. Findings revealed both positive and challenging experiences among school heads. Positive experiences included proactive awareness in identifying early signs of attrition, strengthened teacher-school head relationships, and empowered decision-making through data-driven observation. Challenges centered on difficulty detecting subtle disengagement, limited institutional support, and emotional strain from losing dedicated teachers. Coping mechanisms included mentoring and reflection, collaboration with fellow leaders, and emotional resilience. Insights emphasized that observation builds early awareness, collaboration strengthens management, and resilience sustains emotional balance.

Keywords: School Heads, Teacher Attrition.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study sought to examine how school leaders recognized early signs of teachers' intent to leave and the strategies they used to address the issue. It aimed to deepen understanding of teacher retention dynamics and generate insights that could inform effective interventions. The findings were intended to support school administrators, policymakers, and educators by providing practical approaches to strengthen teacher retention and maintain continuity in education.

Teacher attrition has emerged as a significant concern across global, national, and local contexts, driven by multiple systemic challenges. In countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, increased teacher turnover has been linked to pandemic related pressures, heavy workloads, health concerns, and persistent shortages in subject areas such as STEM, all of which have disrupted teaching continuity and student learning. In the Philippines, studies have shown that while teachers often demonstrate strong commitment and job satisfaction, factors such as working conditions, compensation, administrative support, mentorship, and opportunities for professional growth strongly influence their decision to stay or leave. Reports from both private and public schools highlight that insufficient support systems, limited

resources, and high workloads particularly affect early career teachers and those in disadvantaged areas. At the local school level, the loss of experienced educators further strains remaining staff and learning environments, underscoring the urgent need for targeted administrative support, improved working conditions, and sustained professional development to strengthen teacher retention.

The significance of this study arises from the growing problem of teacher attrition and its negative effects on the quality of education. Although existing research has identified various factors that influence teachers' decisions to leave, limited attention has been given to the perspectives of school heads and the strategies they use to prevent attrition. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how school leaders recognize early indicators of teachers' intent to leave and how they respond to these signs, with the goal of contributing to more effective and proactive teacher retention strategies.

This study seeks to examine how school heads recognize early warning signs of teachers' intentions to leave and the strategies they use to prevent possible attrition. By exploring the perspectives and experiences of school leaders, the research aims to identify indicators of teacher turnover and the proactive actions taken to strengthen retention. The

findings are intended to inform school administrators, policymakers, and other education stakeholders in designing evidence based approaches that support teachers, improve job satisfaction, and promote workforce stability in schools.

The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What are the experiences of school heads in addressing teacher attrition?
- What coping mechanisms do school heads employ to manage teacher attrition?
- What insights can be generated from the experiences of school heads in addressing teacher attrition?

The literature review emphasized that school heads played a vital role in reducing teacher attrition through strong leadership, supportive systems, and improvements in the work environment. Studies showed that leaders who promoted positive school cultures, provided professional development, ensured fair compensation, and offered mentorship and flexible working arrangements significantly improved teacher satisfaction and retention. Effective administrative support, open communication, recognition of teachers' contributions, and shared decision making were also identified as key factors influencing teachers' commitment to their schools, particularly in high need settings. Moreover, leadership practices were found to directly affect both teacher retention and student learning outcomes, as supportive environments reduced burnout and encouraged long term commitment.

In examining teacher attrition, this study drew on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory to explain how job satisfaction and dissatisfaction stem from different sources. The theory highlighted that motivators such as recognition and achievement encouraged teachers to remain in the profession, while inadequate hygiene factors like salary and working conditions contributed to dissatisfaction and potential turnover. This framework allowed for a balanced analysis of the conditions that influenced teachers' decisions to stay or leave. In addition, Mason and Matas' Four-Capital Theory was used to provide a broader perspective by examining how human, social, structural, and positive psychological capital collectively shaped teacher retention and attrition.

II. METHOD

In conducting this qualitative study on school heads' perceptions of teacher attrition, the research was guided by the assumption that multiple realities existed within the educational context. This view recognized that each school head held distinct understandings of teacher attrition shaped by personal experiences, institutional settings, and professional interactions. Acknowledging these varied perspectives allowed for a more comprehensive examination of the factors influencing teacher turnover and supported the development of context specific intervention strategies, thereby capturing the complexity of the phenomenon under study.

This study on school heads' perceptions and intervention strategies related to teacher attrition was guided by key philosophical assumptions that shaped the research process and interpretation of findings. It adopted a constructivist ontological stance, recognizing that multiple realities existed based on school heads' varied experiences and contexts. Epistemologically, the study followed a subjective approach, viewing knowledge as co constructed through close interaction between the researcher and participants. Axiologically, the researcher acknowledged the influence of personal values and biases and practiced reflexivity to ensure that participants' perspectives were fairly represented. In terms of rhetoric, the study employed clear and accessible language to make the findings meaningful and relevant to educational leaders and stakeholders.

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological research design to examine school heads' perceptions and intervention strategies related to teacher attrition. Phenomenology was used to understand and describe the lived experiences of school leaders and the meanings they attached to those experiences. This approach allowed for an in depth exploration of their subjective perspectives, helping to capture the complexity of their views on teacher turnover and the factors shaping their decisions and actions within educational leadership settings.

This study used purposive sampling to select 10 current school heads from Harden Joyce Integrated School in Jose Abad Santos 1 District, with five participating in in depth interviews and five taking part in a focus group discussion. Participants were deliberately chosen to ensure they could provide rich and relevant insights into teacher attrition, consistent with qualitative research practices. Inclusion criteria required that participants were serving school heads, had at least three years of leadership experience, and were assigned within the specified district to ensure contextual relevance. This sampling approach enabled the study to capture informed and experience based perspectives on school heads' views and intervention strategies regarding teacher attrition.

In this study, an interview guide was utilized as the primary research instrument to guide the data collection process. The guide outlined key topics and questions to be discussed during the interviews, ensuring consistency across participants while still allowing flexibility in the way questions were asked. This approach supported a thorough exploration of participants' perspectives and enabled the researcher to ask follow up questions and probe deeper into important issues as they emerged during the conversations.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

School heads reported both positive and challenging experiences in addressing teacher attrition. They noted that early identification of warning signs and open communication allowed timely interventions and strengthened trust with teachers, while data informed practices helped guide support efforts. However, they also

struggled with recognizing subtle disengagement, limited institutional support, and the emotional impact of losing

experienced teachers, which affected morale, school operations, and student learning.

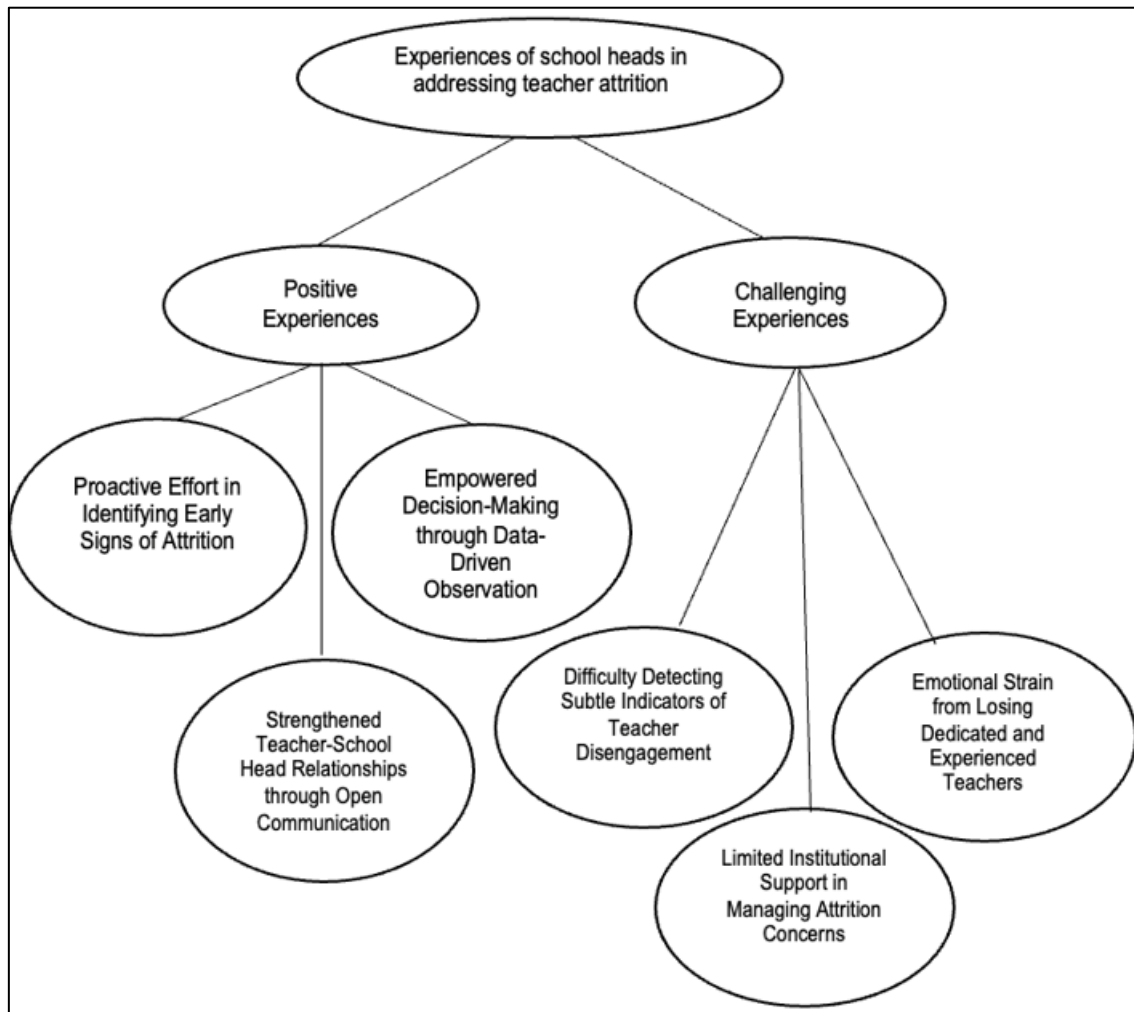


Fig 1 Experiences of School Heads in Addressing Teacher Attrition

In terms of coping mechanism, the School heads managed teacher attrition by using both practical and emotional coping strategies. They improved observation and communication through mentoring and reflective leadership to identify early warning signs and respond effectively. Collaboration with fellow school heads and supervisors provided shared strategies, support, and reduced professional isolation, while emotional resilience and peer support helped them cope with the emotional demands of teacher turnover.



Fig 2 Coping Strategies of School Heads to manage Teacher Attrition

The experiences of school heads provided important insights into effective ways of managing teacher attrition. Careful observation allowed leaders to recognize early signs of disengagement, while collaboration with other administrators and supervisors supported shared decision making and emotional reinforcement. Equally important was the development of resilience, as maintaining emotional stability enabled school heads to lead effectively despite ongoing staff turnover, underscoring the value of proactive, collaborative, and emotionally grounded leadership in addressing attrition challenges.

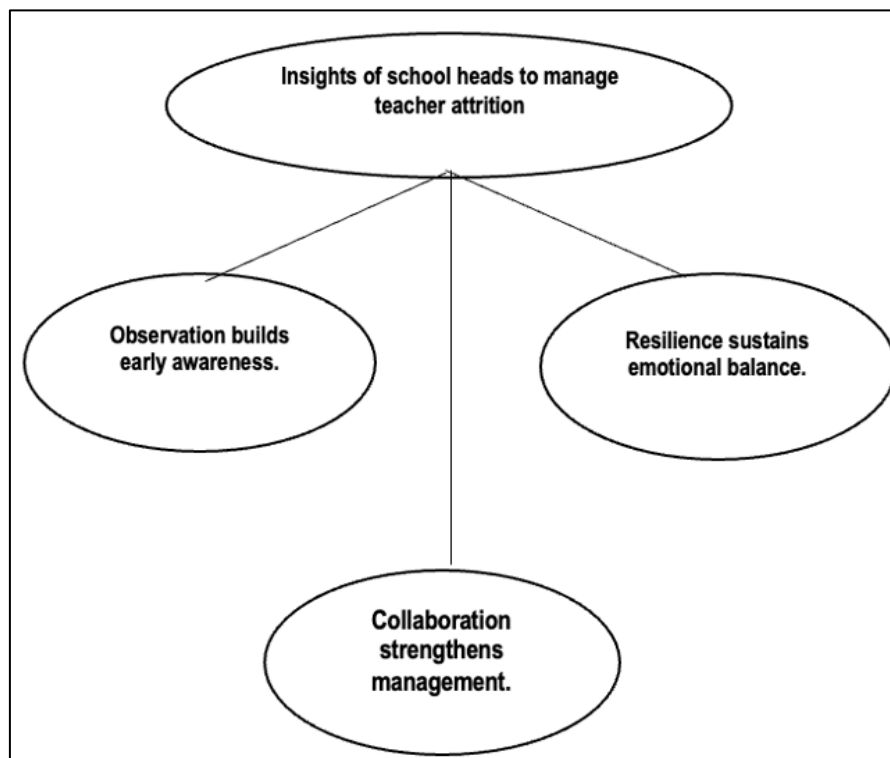


Fig 3 Insights of School Heads to Manage Teacher Attrition

The findings addressing the three research objectives showed that school heads experienced both opportunities and challenges in managing teacher attrition. They demonstrated proactive leadership by recognizing early warning signs, fostering open communication with teachers, and using data informed observations to guide decisions, yet they also struggled with subtle disengagement cues, limited institutional support, and the emotional impact of losing committed teachers. To cope, school heads strengthened their mentoring, observation, and communication practices, relied on collaborative networks with fellow administrators for shared strategies and emotional support, and cultivated resilience to maintain motivation and composure. From these experiences, they gained key insights that early observation enables timely intervention, collaboration enhances effective management, and emotional resilience is essential for sustaining leadership amid ongoing teacher turnover.

The findings across the three research objectives emphasized that proactive, emotionally grounded, and collaborative leadership was essential in addressing teacher attrition. Early identification of disengagement and open communication helped school heads maintain workforce stability, yet institutional constraints and emotional demands highlighted the need for stronger systemic support and leadership training from education authorities, particularly in emotional intelligence, early intervention, and teacher well being. The coping strategies employed by school heads showed that effective attrition management extended beyond administrative functions and relied heavily on collaboration, mentoring, reflection, and resilience, underscoring the value of professional support networks and shared accountability.

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