

Underpaid and Undervalued: The Quiet Crisis Among Teachers

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There is a quiet crisis growing in our schools. It is not caused by a single event, but by years of unmet needs, ignored concerns, and growing pressure placed on Filipino educators. Every day, teachers walk into their classrooms bearing the invisible weight of unpaid overtime, lack of proper support, and an environment that does not treat them with the respect they deserve. Despite being the heart of the education system, they are often the most overlooked. The message this sends is painful: their work matters, but their well-being does not.

Many teachers begin their journey full of hope and passion. They choose to teach because they want to make a difference in the lives of their students. But as months turn into years, reality hits. They are paid barely enough to get through the week. They are made to teach overcrowded classes in poorly maintained rooms. On top of lesson plans and grading, they are tasked with clerical work and community tasks that eat into their personal time. Over time, their health, both physical and mental, starts to suffer. What was once a calling becomes a burden too heavy to carry alone. Magtalas (2024) emphasized that excessive workload and pressure directly contribute to burnout and reduced work performance among teachers. This burnout is compounded by constant administrative responsibilities and the emotional toll of multitasking, which was also evident in the study by Malquist et al. (2023), who explored how prolonged stress has diminished morale in secondary teachers since the onset of the new normal.

It is not surprising that many educators have chosen to leave the system entirely. Some move abroad, searching for better pay and work conditions. Others shift careers, disheartened by years of being treated as expendable. And yet, the government response remains slow and inadequate. Budget discussions rarely center teachers' welfare. Conversations about education often focus on performance scores without asking what kind of support the teachers themselves receive. This disconnect reveals how far we are from a system that truly values its workforce. According to Anog et al. (2024), job dissatisfaction and lack of institutional commitment are major factors in teacher attrition. When left unaddressed, these factors result in higher turnover and a continuous cycle of teacher shortages. The urgency becomes even clearer in the context of global transitions to remote teaching, where Mosleh et al. (2022) reported increased burnout and stress among educators due to a lack of preparedness and personal boundaries during online instruction, a factors that also resonate with Filipino teachers.

Change must begin with recognizing teaching as a professional career that deserves proper compensation and protection. The government must push for salary adjustments that reflect current living standards, especially for those in high-cost areas. Delays in salaries and lack of benefits must be addressed immediately. Safe, functional classrooms must be a given, not a privilege. Guidance counselors and teaching aides should be hired so teachers can focus on teaching. Providing them with the right environment is not a luxury, but a requirement for quality education. As Tarraya (2024) argued, current workload policies fail to truly address the impact of

excessive responsibilities on teachers' effectiveness, calling for a revision that centers on teacher well-being, not just compliance.

Organizations in the Philippines can act where national support is slow. Mental health groups can hold workshops for teachers. Non-profits can help fund classroom needs. Even small-scale community efforts such as appreciation events or food assistance, can show teachers that they are seen and valued. Media can also play a role by telling real stories of Filipino teachers instead of glorifying overwork as "dedication." Teachers should be honored for their service, not for how much they can endure. Supporting teachers is a long-term investment in national progress. When educators are empowered, they stay longer, teach better, and inspire more. If we continue to neglect them, we will keep losing them and with them, the chance for better classrooms and better futures. It is time to stop treating their struggles as normal and start creating solutions that show they matter.

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