

More Than Just a Paycheck: The Real Needs of Filipino Educators

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Teaching in the Philippines is often described as a noble profession, yet the realities that Filipino educators face every day reveal how little society truly supports them. Behind the chalkboards and lesson plans are teachers stretched to their limits not only from workload, but from a system that demands much yet gives so little in return. Their struggles are not just financial; they are emotional, mental, and deeply human. Many teachers walk into classrooms tired, anxious, and unsure if they can keep going. It's time we stop romanticizing sacrifice and start recognizing what they genuinely need in order to stay, grow, and succeed in their profession.

Most public school teachers juggle multiple responsibilities beyond their teaching load. They are expected to serve as community workers, guidance counselors, administrative aides, and even surrogate parents to students who lack support at home. These added roles are not backed by additional compensation or resources, yet they are treated as non-negotiable expectations. Bongco and Ancho (2019) emphasized that excessive workloads, combined with limited institutional support, reduce teaching quality and contribute to job dissatisfaction. Many times, teachers spend their own salaries to buy chalk, markers, or classroom decorations just to create an engaging learning environment. The emotional weight of always giving, with very little in return, slowly chips away at their motivation and well-being.

While many stay out of love for their students, love alone cannot mend exhaustion or fill empty pockets. What makes this situation more painful is the silence that surrounds it. Many teachers have grown used to the idea that hardship is part of the profession and that raising concerns will make them appear weak or ungrateful. This culture of silence and forced endurance has normalized suffering. It discourages honest conversations and leaves little room for meaningful change. Guimary et al. (2022) observed that poor working conditions and emotional burnout directly affect student outcomes, revealing a cyclical issue that needs immediate attention. The quiet departure of teachers who once had big dreams should not be dismissed as an individual decision, it is a symptom of a broken system that is long overdue for repair.

Solving this crisis means starting with real listening and urgent action. The government must not only raise salaries but also ensure that compensation is consistent and on time. Financial security should be viewed as a basic right for educators, not a reward. Teachers also deserve well-equipped classrooms, fair teaching loads, and mental health programs to help them cope with stress. Castro et al. (2024) found that teachers handling multiple subject areas without proper training often experience anxiety and reduced performance, especially in rural schools. Professional development should be empowering and relevant, not just routine seminars or checklists. Francisco et al. (2024) noted that teachers burdened with ancillary tasks often suffer from burnout, especially when their growth is limited to generic training rather than context-specific development. These practical improvements can directly impact the energy and effectiveness that teachers bring into their classrooms.

Philippine organizations must also step in. Civil society groups, non-profits, and private companies can support schools through resources, training workshops, and mental health initiatives. Lasco et al. (2024) emphasized that in some communities, teachers are also relied upon as informal health workers, handling responsibilities far beyond their training and capacity. This further highlights the urgent need for cross-sector collaboration and support. Local government units can offer additional support through transportation allowances or housing aid, especially for teachers assigned to remote areas. There is room for collaborative programs that center teacher needs and celebrate their work, not just once a year during World Teachers' Day, but every day

Filipino teachers don't ask for luxury; they ask for dignity and respect. They deserve a system that does not constantly expect them to perform miracles without tools, time, or support. When we begin to take their struggles seriously and implement lasting solutions, we are not only protecting a profession, we are protecting the future of the next generation. Let us act while there are still educators willing to stay. Because once they leave, rebuilding trust and motivation becomes a harder task.

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