

Challenges Faced by Former Teachers in Transitioning to Non-Education Industries

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges experienced by teachers who transitioned from education to non-teaching industries. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, the study examined the personal stories of ten former teachers in Manila, Philippines who shifted into various non-educational careers. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand the difficulties they faced throughout the transition process. The findings revealed that participants encountered financial instability, heavy workloads, emotional exhaustion, and limited career growth while still in teaching. During the transition, they struggled to adapt to new work environments, adjust to corporate culture, address skills gaps, manage emotional stress, and navigate unclear job expectations and unfamiliar social dynamics. After entering their new roles, participants continued to face professional identity loss, emotional adjustment difficulties, cultural differences, social isolation, job stress, and uncertainty. The study highlights the complex emotional and professional struggles that educators experience when changing careers. Based on these findings, the study recommends that teacher education programs incorporate career adaptability and transferable skills training to better prepare teachers for both educational and non-educational roles. It also recommends that educational institutions, including the Department of Education, strengthen support systems such as mentoring, counseling, and clearer career advancement pathways to improve teacher retention and address the root causes of attrition.

Keywords: teacher attrition, career shift, professional identity, career transition, non-education industry, narrative inquiry



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INTRODUCTION

The global teaching profession is facing an escalating crisis. According to UNESCO's 2023 Global Report, approximately 44 million teachers will still be needed by 2030 to meet global demand for primary and secondary education, despite progress made since earlier projections of 69 million (UNESCO, 2023). In the Philippines, the Department of Education reported a decline in personnel from 879,793 at the end of 2022 to 858,318 by December 2023 which reflect a net loss of 21,475 public school staff members (DepEd, 2023). Additionally, around 1,500 Filipino teachers migrate abroad each year in search of better financial opportunities and professional growth (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, 2023). This rising attrition threatens not only the stability of the

educational workforce but also the quality of learning and student outcomes. As teachers serve as the central drivers of learning, human development, and nation-building, their growing exodus from the profession poses significant risks to both educational systems and broader societal progress.

While educators leave teaching for diverse reasons, many embark on career transitions to rediscover purpose and align their work with evolving values. Such transitions often require professionals to reinvent their personal brand and reassess their professional identity – an intentional process supported by management studies on personal branding (Gorbatov et al., 2018; Sull et al., 2022). Crossing occupational boundaries also involves reshaping one's professional identity, a phenomenon well documented in career theory (Sullivan & Al

Ariss, 2021). Psychological frameworks further highlight the role of mindset: Carol Dweck's growth mindset theory asserts that individuals who view abilities as malleable are more adept at learning and adapting – key to managing career changes – while those with a fixed mindset often experience greater anxiety, identity uncertainty, and emotional strain (Dweck, 2019a; Masdonati et al., 2022; Öztemel & Yıldız-Akyol, 2021; Villarama et al., 2025a). In the Philippine context, where many teachers face financial strain, limited career progression, and heavy tasks and workloads, possessing a growth mindset and proactively managing personal branding can significantly influence their capacity to successfully navigate career transitions.

However, effective self-branding and the application of well-considered career transition strategies can help individuals manage the stress of change and foster a more positive, forward-looking outlook (Rensburg & Ukpere, 2014). In the Philippine context, teacher attrition has become increasingly prevalent as more educators seek alternative careers in response to financial pressures, limited career growth, and mounting workloads. Understanding the complex factors that influence these transitions is essential to developing targeted support systems and practical interventions that can ease the process for teachers contemplating a shift beyond the classroom.

LITERATURES

Career development plays a key role in both personal and professional fulfillment. As individuals advance in their careers, they often experience greater satisfaction and broader opportunities for growth (Gustafsson et al., 2018a; Blustein et al., 2019; Villarama et al., 2024a). However, for teachers, opportunities for promotion and advancement remain limited, which contributes to professional dissatisfaction and frustration (Miller, 2019). This concern is widely recognized in global education systems, as teacher retention continues to be a persistent challenge linked to limited career progression (Ingersoll, Merrill & Stuckey, 2018).

Globally, many teachers who leave the profession remain within the broader education sector, such as administrative roles, childcare, tutoring, or educational management. Worth and McLean (2022) report that approximately 72% of teachers who leave state-sector teaching stay in education-related roles, while only a small percentage successfully shift to managerial or professional careers outside education. Villar et al. (2022) further emphasize that while some individuals are willing to take risks and explore new paths, fully transitioning into entirely different industries remains difficult, especially after years of specialization in teaching.

In the Philippine context, teacher attrition reflects both international patterns and local challenges. Teachers in public schools face heavy workloads, large class sizes, administrative burdens, and financial constraints that add to job dissatisfaction (Abao, 2020; David et al., 2020; Villarama et al., 2024a). Compared to teachers in other countries, many Filipino educators also experience economic hardship, as salaries often fail to keep pace with the rising cost of living (Cahapay, 2021). These financial and workload-related pressures contribute to emotional exhaustion and burnout, which further drive intentions to leave the profession.

Beyond financial and workload factors, the emotional dimension of leaving teaching plays a critical role in career transitions. Beijgaard et al. (2004) highlighted that teachers' professional identity is strongly linked to their personal identity, making career transitions emotionally difficult. Teachers often view their profession not just as employment but as part of who they are. In the Philippine setting, Cahapay (2021) found that Filipino teachers experience significant emotional conflict, identity struggles, and even guilt when leaving teaching, as they detach from the close-knit school communities and relationships they have built over time.

While multiple studies have examined why teachers leave the profession, there remains limited research focusing on what happens after teachers move into non-educational

industries, especially in the Philippine setting. Most existing studies primarily explore economic or workload factors but offer little insight into the emotional, social, and professional adjustments teachers undergo after transitioning. Duyag, Refugio, and Cardeno (2025) contribute to this discussion by examining career progression challenges through narrative inquiry, highlighting the personal struggles of teachers attempting to move forward in their careers. More empirical research is needed to further understand these transitions and to inform educational policies, teacher training, and other support systems that can assist educators not only in retention but also in successful career shifts when necessary.

METHODS

Research Design. This study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry approach to explore the lived experiences of former teachers who transitioned into non-educational industries. Narrative inquiry allowed participants to share personal stories, reflect on their journeys, and construct meaning from their career transitions. This approach provided rich, in-depth insights into the complex emotional, psychological, and professional processes involved in shifting careers from education to other industries.

Participants. The participants of the study were former teachers who shifted careers outside of teaching. A total of ten (10) participants currently employed in non-teaching roles within various industries in Manila, Philippines were included. Purposive sampling was used to deliberately select individuals who could provide rich, relevant insights into the career transition process. To be eligible, participants were required to meet the following inclusion criteria: (1) at least 15 years of teaching experience in the education sector, and (2) successful transition into a non-education-related profession or industry. This sampling approach ensured that participants had sufficient experience to meaningfully reflect on the challenges, competencies, and opportunities involved in their career shifts.

Instrument and Data Collection. Data were gathered through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews designed to explore participants' lived experiences while allowing flexibility for in-depth discussions. To ensure convenience, accessibility, and safety, all interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom meetings, enabling participants to engage from locations of their choice. The use of Zoom as the exclusive interview platform was selected for its reliability, user-friendliness, and its ability to produce high-quality video recordings appropriate for qualitative research.

With participants' informed consent, all interviews were video recorded, capturing both verbal narratives and non-verbal cues that enriched the contextual understanding of the data. Following each interview, the video recordings were manually transcribed verbatim by the researcher to preserve the authenticity of participants' language, tone, and expressions. The transcriptions were reviewed multiple times to ensure accuracy and completeness. To protect participant confidentiality and maintain anonymity, each participant was assigned a unique pseudonym.

Data Analysis. The transcribed interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. The researcher began by thoroughly reading the transcripts to become familiar with the data. Initial codes were then generated inductively, identifying meaningful phrases, patterns, and significant statements emerging directly from participants' narratives. These initial codes were carefully reviewed and organized into broader categories that captured shared experiences. Themes were subsequently searched for, refined, and clearly defined to represent the challenges, competencies, and opportunities encountered by participants throughout their career transitions. Finally, the themes were named and organized to produce a coherent narrative of the findings. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis, reflexive journaling and peer consultation were conducted throughout the entire coding and interpretation process.

Ethical Considerations. Prior to data collection, ethical approval for the study was obtained. Participants were provided with a detailed explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, and ethical safeguards, including confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any point. Written informed consent was secured from all participants prior to the interviews. Data were securely stored and anonymized throughout the research process to protect participants' identities.

Reflexivity. Given the nature of narrative inquiry, the researcher acknowledges their own positionality and potential influence on data collection and interpretation. As a professional with experience in the education sector, the researcher remained aware of possible biases and assumptions during the study. Reflexive journaling was consistently maintained to document personal reflections, monitor subjectivity, and enhance self-awareness throughout the research process. This reflexivity ensured that participants' narratives were interpreted authentically and ethically, minimizing researcher influence on the findings.

RESULTS

This section presents the narratives of former teachers who have transitioned into careers outside the field of education. Through narrative inquiry, the study explored several key themes, focusing on the challenges experienced throughout their career transitions. The analysis identified three main themes: (1) challenges before transition; (2) challenges during transition; and, (3) challenges after transition. These themes captured participants' experiences as they navigated the decision to leave teaching, adjusted to new professional environments, and faced ongoing personal and professional adjustments in their new roles. The discussion is grounded in the reflections of these former educators, who shared their personal and professional journeys. Their stories illustrate how they navigated the complexities of career change, adapted to new work environments, and redefined their professional identities beyond the classroom.

Theme 1. Challenges before the Transition

The journey from teaching to new career paths has not been easy for many educators. Before transitioning into industries outside of education, they faced numerous challenges – both professional and personal. Many grappled with financial instability, overwhelming workloads, and emotional exhaustion. The decision to leave the classroom was a difficult and complex one. Yet, common themes emerged in their stories: financial insecurity, limited opportunities for career advancement, burnout, and the emotional toll of stepping away from a profession that had been central to their identity.

Challenge 1. Financial Instability and Low Salary. For many participants, financial instability was a major factor that influenced their decision to leave teaching. Mark, a 39-year-old elementary mathematics teacher with 16 years of experience, explained: "*Low salary medyo mataas na nga ang sahod ng mga teacher ngayun but then there are a lot of things that we need to spend for a lot of things to do lalong lalo na nga sa aming mga kabataan that they need na lot of support.*" (The salary is somewhat higher now, but there are many expenses and responsibilities, especially with children who need a lot of support.) Sarah, a 43-year-old secondary social studies teacher, also stated: "*Low salary talaga, kahit mahirap, nagdesisyon akong lumabas na lang.*" (The salary is really low. Even though it's difficult, I decided to just leave.) For these teachers, the combination of financial strain and stagnant career growth became a primary motivation for leaving the profession.

This finding aligns with existing research emphasizing that low salaries, limited financial security, and restricted promotion opportunities remain key drivers of teacher attrition globally and in the Philippine context (Aridan et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2019a; Hitka et al., 2021a; Mabaso & Dlamini, 2017; Torres et al., 2025). Furthermore, this supports Dweck's (2019b) theory on adaptability, suggesting that when external financial pressures exceed perceived rewards, even individuals with high

commitment may seek career alternatives that offer greater security.

Challenge 2. Heavy Workload and Emotional Exhaustion. In addition to financial concerns, many participants described overwhelming workloads and emotional exhaustion as significant factors influencing their decision to leave teaching. Anna, a 40-year-old secondary biology teacher, reflected on how the demands of her role led to burnout: *"I encountered what I call a professional identity shift,"* she shared, explaining how responsibilities such as lesson preparation, grading, and classroom management severely affected her physical and mental well-being. David, who taught elementary English for 15 years, expressed similar sentiments, stating: *"High workload talaga."* (The workload is really high.) James, who eventually shifted to a position as a plumbing site supervisor, described the toll on his personal life: *"It was overwhelming—my workload. I had no time for myself or my family."*

The continuous pressure to balance instructional, administrative, and extracurricular responsibilities without sufficient support led to emotional exhaustion for many participants. These findings are consistent with existing literature recognizing excessive teacher workload as a major contributor to burnout and attrition. Gavin and McGrath-Champ (2024) emphasize that growing administrative demands, coupled with limited institutional support, often leave teachers with insufficient time for personal recovery. Similarly, Schellings et al. (2023) and Saks et al. (2022) highlight that overwhelming workload directly diminishes teacher well-being, productivity, and job satisfaction, while Puspitasari et al. (2024) note that burnout stemming from workload pressures ultimately affects educational quality and student outcomes. The participants' experiences in this study affirm existing global and local literature, reinforcing the well-established link between unsustainable workloads and teacher burnout, attrition, and compromised educational quality.

Challenge 3. Struggles with Work-Life Balance. A common frustration among participants was

the persistent struggle to achieve a healthy work-life balance. Mark reflected on the difficulty of spending quality time with his family due to the demands of his job, stating: *"To spend with the family, but of course, kailangang magtutungan."* (To spend time with the family, but of course, we need to help each other.) Despite his strong desire to be present for his loved ones, the unrelenting demands of teaching made it nearly impossible to achieve the work-life balance he yearned for. James expressed similar sentiments, sharing: *"I didn't have much time for my family, not even for myself."*

The inability to disconnect from work and find time for personal fulfillment was a constant source of stress for many teachers, contributing to their growing dissatisfaction with the profession. This struggle is consistent with existing research. Gustafsson et al. (2018b) and Villarama et al. (2024b) emphasized that teachers frequently face significant challenges in maintaining work-life balance, particularly when their responsibilities extend beyond typical working hours. The ongoing pressure to remain accessible to students, parents, and administrative demands reduces opportunities for rest and personal activities. Similarly, Chenevey (2008) identified work-life imbalance as a key factor in teachers' decisions to leave the profession in favor of careers offering more flexible schedules. The participants' experiences in this study affirm these previous findings, reinforcing the established link between work-life imbalance, teacher dissatisfaction, and career attrition.

Challenge 4. Emotional and Professional Identity Struggles. Leaving behind a profession that had shaped their identity was a deeply emotional challenge for many participants. Sarah, who transitioned to a role as a Senior Customer Service Associate, spoke candidly about the emotional weight of this change, stating: *"I encountered what I call a professional identity shift."* For many, the role of a teacher had been central to their sense of self for years. Letting go of that role led to questioning their identity and sense of purpose. Anna also shared her internal struggle: *"It's*

hard to leave the classroom after years of being a teacher—you start to miss it."

The emotional burden of walking away from a career they had invested so much of themselves in was not easily overcome. For many participants, teaching was more than just a job; it was a vocation and a core part of their personal identity. The transition from teaching to new professions often involved a profound sense of professional loss. This emotional attachment made career change more difficult, often accompanied by guilt, self-doubt, and internal conflict. Rivera and Martinez (2022) similarly noted that leaving a long-held profession can result in emotional strain, identity conflict, and a deep sense of personal loss. The participants' experiences in this study affirm these findings, highlighting that professional identity struggles are a significant emotional barrier in career transitions for teachers.

Challenge 5. Lack of Career Growth and Stagnation. A significant factor influencing many teachers to leave the profession was the lack of career growth within the education sector. John, who transitioned to a role as a crop supervisor after teaching elementary agriculture for 19 years, shared: *"The lack of job security made me realize that I needed to explore other avenues."*

The absence of career advancement opportunities left many educators feeling stagnant, prompting them to seek alternative careers where they could experience personal and professional development. Nguyen et al. (2019b) highlighted that many teachers leave the profession due to limited career progression and advancement opportunities. The frustration of reaching a ceiling in their careers, coupled with concerns about job security, motivated these educators to pursue new industries where they could take greater control of their professional futures. This aligns with findings from Hitka et al. (2021b), who emphasized that career growth involves ongoing skill development, professional training, expanding networks, and actively pursuing new goals. Shaito (2019) further

stressed the importance of self-assessment, goal-setting, and targeted skill enhancement as part of the career development process.

John also spoke candidly about the additional challenge of adjusting to new work environments after leaving teaching. He explained: *"For me, adjusting to corporate culture can be a significant challenge for someone transitioning from teaching to working in industry. As a teacher, the environment is typically more structured, focused on education, and centered around student-teacher interactions. One of the challenges is the work environment: in teaching, the daily routine is predictable, with set hours and a focus on lesson plans. Corporate work, on the other hand, can be less structured, with variable hours, more meetings, and different expectations for collaboration."*

This transition from the predictable structure of teaching to the dynamic and fast-paced nature of corporate settings posed significant adjustments for many participants. Finally, some participants also expressed that their motivation to pursue overseas opportunities was influenced not only by financial factors but also by systemic challenges in the local education system. As Mabaso and Dlamini (2017) observed, while economic incentives such as higher salaries and comprehensive benefits attract teachers to work abroad, deeper institutional issues contribute to these migration decisions. The participants' experiences affirm previous research indicating that limited career advancement opportunities, job insecurity, and the rigidity of educational career structures contribute substantially to teacher attrition and migration. These findings reinforce global and local concerns about systemic barriers to long-term professional growth within the teaching profession.

Theme 2. Challenges During Transition

Transitioning from the classroom to a new industry role was far from easy. Teachers who once thrived in the structured and familiar environment of education suddenly found themselves navigating unfamiliar territory.

Their journeys were marked by challenges such as acquiring new skills, adapting to different workplace cultures, and coping with the emotional weight of leaving behind a professional identity they had cultivated for years.

Challenge 6. Adapting to a New Work Environment and Corporate Culture. Adjusting to the corporate world proved to be a significant challenge for many participants. After years of working in the structured and predictable environment of teaching, the shift to fast-paced, deadline-driven roles in the private sector was disorienting. Mark, who is now a Monitoring and Data Analytics Specialist Supervisor, shared: *"Ahm, the transition to a corporate environment was challenging. The pace and the expectations were completely different from teaching."* It was not only about learning new technical skills but also about adapting to entirely different workplace norms and expectations.

James, who transitioned from teaching elementary TLE to becoming a plumbing site supervisor, echoed this struggle: *"Wala ko idea kung unsay akong gibuhat. It was difficult, not knowing exactly what was expected of me. Oh, na-shock ko."* (I had no idea what I was doing. It was difficult, not knowing exactly what was expected of me. I was shocked.) His experience reflects the common theme of feeling unprepared and out of place during the transition into an unfamiliar work culture.

According to Jackson et al. (2024), transitioning into corporate environments involves adapting not only to new physical settings but also to a major shift in organizational culture, norms, and role expectations. The absence of clear structures and defined job roles can leave individuals feeling disconnected and uncertain. Similarly, Lee and Kim (2020) and Gurion et al. (2025) observed that individuals moving from structured educational environments into corporate roles often encounter reduced supervision and greater autonomy, which can contribute to feelings of professional insecurity and anxiety. The participants' experiences affirm these findings, demonstrating that

adapting to new work environments and corporate cultures presents significant psychological and professional challenges for former educators.

Challenge 7. Skill Gaps and the Need for New Competencies. Many teachers faced a steep learning curve as they discovered that their teaching experience did not always directly translate to their new roles in industry. Lisa, who became a Senior Specialist in Planning and Support, shared: *"I didn't realize how much I needed to learn. I had to quickly adapt and acquire new skills in planning and project management... Ahm... it was overwhelming at times."* The demand for new competencies was particularly challenging in roles requiring technical expertise or specialized training. John, now working as a crop supervisor, admitted: *"Daghan kaayo kog mga bag-o nga natunan. I wasn't prepared for all the technical details involved in the work. Ah, it was harder than I thought."* (I learned a lot of new things. I wasn't prepared for all the technical details involved in the work. It was harder than I thought.)

These skill gaps became a persistent source of stress as participants worked to keep pace with the demands of their new roles while simultaneously acquiring unfamiliar competencies. This challenge is supported by Kim et al. (2024), who found that individuals undergoing career transitions frequently struggle with acquiring new skills, particularly when shifting between distinct professional fields. The urgency to develop technical expertise in a short period can lead to increased stress, self-doubt, and feelings of inadequacy during the adjustment process. Furthermore, Goh et al. (2025) emphasized that professional development requires continuous learning and sustained commitment—a process that can feel daunting for transitioning teachers as they juggle new responsibilities while building unfamiliar competencies. The participants' experiences affirm these findings, highlighting that skill gaps and the demand for rapid competency development present significant emotional and professional challenges during career transitions.

Challenge 8. Dealing with the Emotional Impact of Transition. For many participants, the emotional impact of leaving behind a profession that had shaped their identity for years was a significant hurdle to overcome. Anna, a former biology teacher who became a staff nurse, reflected on how much she missed the classroom, stating: *"I missed the students. I missed teaching. It was hard to leave that behind. I still think about it sometimes. Oh, I did not expect the emotional toll."* The emotional void was equally pronounced for David, who transitioned from teaching elementary English to becoming a Human Resources supervisor. He shared: *"I thought I would easily adjust, but I realized how much I missed the classroom environment. It was hard to find meaning in the new work. Uhm... I wasn't sure if this was the right fit for me."* The deep emotional attachment they had to their teaching roles made the transition even more challenging, as many struggled to find the same sense of fulfillment and purpose in their new careers.

This emotional struggle is supported by Maxwell et al. (2022), who found that career transitions from teaching to other sectors often carry a significant emotional toll, particularly when individuals feel they are leaving behind a core part of their personal identity. Their research suggests that the attachment to teaching is so strong that many educators experience a profound sense of loss and uncertainty when their new roles fail to provide comparable emotional rewards. Similarly, Park et al. (2024) noted that transitioning professionals often experience identity loss, leading to reduced job satisfaction and a longer adjustment period. The participants' experiences affirm these findings, emphasizing that the emotional impact of career transition extends beyond professional challenges to deeply affect personal identity, well-being, and long-term adjustment.

Challenge 9. Navigating Job Expectations and Lack of Clear Guidance. Many participants found that once they left the education sector, the expectations in their new roles were often unclear, and the structured guidance they had relied on in the classroom was noticeably

absent. Sarah, who transitioned from teaching secondary social studies to becoming a Senior Customer Service Associate, admitted that the lack of clarity added to her stress: *"Wala jud klaro nga expectations. I felt like I was constantly trying to catch up. Ahm, no one really sat down with me to explain what was expected. I had to figure things out on my own."* (There were no clear expectations. I felt like I was constantly trying to catch up. No one really explained what was expected. I had to figure things out by myself.)

The absence of clear orientation or structured mentorship programs made it difficult for many participants to adjust and gain confidence in their new roles. Unlike in education—where expectations, routines, and support systems are clearly defined—many corporate or industry roles lacked such structure, leaving transitioning professionals feeling adrift. These findings are consistent with Matthews et al. (2024), who emphasized that a lack of structured guidance during career transitions often leads to heightened stress, confusion, and diminished job satisfaction. Without clear expectations or adequate onboarding, individuals frequently feel lost and uncertain in their new professional environments. Similarly, Hu et al. (2024) concluded that effective mentoring and orientation programs play a critical role in easing career transitions, providing necessary clarity, building confidence, and supporting long-term adjustment. The experiences shared by the participants strongly affirm the existing literature that identifies lack of guidance as a critical barrier in career transitions from education to industry.

Challenge 10. Cultural and Social Adjustment. The social aspect of transitioning to a new career posed significant challenges, as the dynamics in corporate or industry settings were vastly different from the close-knit, supportive community often found in schools. Maria, who moved from teaching chemistry to becoming a Senior Chemist Specialist, reflected on the sense of isolation she experienced: *"In teaching, you're always surrounded by people. In this new job, I felt isolated. Ah, it's a very different environment."* She found it difficult to build

relationships and feel part of a cohesive team within the more individualistic and task-focused corporate environment.

The more formal and hierarchical communication styles of corporate workplaces contrasted sharply with the collaborative and relational interactions they had grown accustomed to in educational settings. These experiences highlight the broader challenge many former teachers face when adjusting to new social and cultural norms outside the education sector. Li and Lee (2025) observed that teachers transitioning to non-educational roles often experience social isolation due to the lack of camaraderie and informal communication that characterize schools. Their study found that this sense of alienation is particularly acute for individuals who previously thrived in the community-oriented atmosphere of teaching. Similarly, Ling et al. (2021) identified that limited social integration opportunities in new work environments can contribute to feelings of disconnection and hinder long-term workplace adjustment. The participants' experiences strongly affirm the existing literature that highlights cultural and social adjustment as a significant and often overlooked barrier to successful career transitions for educators.

Theme 3. Challenges After Transition

The transition to a new career outside of teaching did not mark the end of challenges for many participants. Instead, it introduced a new set of obstacles that tested their resilience, adaptability, and capacity to find fulfillment in unfamiliar professional landscapes. Beyond the initial adjustment, many faced ongoing difficulties—navigating new job expectations, managing the emotional weight of leaving behind a deeply rooted teaching identity, and coping with the demands and pressures of their new roles. These challenges underscored that while the decision to leave the classroom was significant, the journey toward reinvention and satisfaction in a new career was just beginning.

Challenge 11. Adapting to New Job Expectations and Responsibilities. One of the most immediate

challenges participants faced after transitioning from teaching was understanding and adapting to new job expectations, which often differed significantly from the structured and predictable environment of education. Ethan, who became a Senior Buyer after 16 years of teaching physical education, reflected on how unprepared he felt in his new role: *"Sige lang, I had to figure things out on my own. There was no proper training program, and that made it stressful. Oh, I felt like I was always behind, trying to catch up."* (It's fine, I had to figure things out on my own. There was no proper training program, and that made it stressful. I felt like I was always behind, trying to catch up.) The absence of structured training or clear onboarding processes created a strong sense of insecurity and made it difficult for him to build confidence in his new professional environment. These struggles align with the findings of Matthews et al. (2024), who emphasized that the absence of structured guidance and training during career transitions significantly increases stress levels and undermines individuals' confidence in their new roles. Likewise, Hu et al. (2024) found that unclear expectations in post-transition positions often leave professionals feeling insecure and uncertain about their value and contributions to their new organizations. The experiences of the participants strongly affirm existing literature that identifies unclear job expectations and lack of role clarity as major obstacles in adjusting to new professional environments following a career transition.

Challenge 12. Struggling with Professional Identity and Emotional Adjustment. Another persistent challenge following the transition was the emotional toll of losing a teaching identity. Many participants had spent years cultivating their professional identity as educators, and the shift to a completely different field left them grappling with a deep sense of loss and uncertainty about who they were in their new roles. Anna, who moved from teaching biology to working as a staff nurse, described the lingering emotional burden: *"I missed the students. I missed teaching. It was hard to leave that behind. Even now, I sometimes think about it. Oh, it was difficult to*

adjust emotionally." For her, the difficulty lay not only in leaving but also in reconciling her long-standing identity with her new professional context. The struggle to let go of a familiar professional identity while constructing a new one was a recurring theme. Many participants found it difficult to experience the same sense of purpose and fulfillment in their new roles, underscoring how strongly their self-concept had been tied to their identity as teachers.

These experiences closely mirror the findings of Toubassi et al. (2023), who identified that the loss of a deeply ingrained professional identity, particularly after long-term careers like teaching, can lead to emptiness, disorientation, and emotional detachment. Similarly, Park et al. (2024) found that former educators often endure prolonged emotional adjustment periods as they reconstruct their sense of self and seek new sources of professional meaning. In this study, participants' narratives expand upon existing literature by illustrating not only the profound emotional disruption that follows professional identity loss, but also the prolonged internal conflict involved in redefining one's purpose beyond teaching.

Challenge 13. Cultural Differences and Social Adaptation. Adjusting to new workplace cultures presented another significant challenge for many former teachers. After years in the collaborative and close-knit environment of schools, participants found themselves navigating unfamiliar social dynamics and workplace norms in their new professions. Maria, who transitioned from being a secondary chemistry teacher to a Senior Chemist Specialist, reflected on the stark contrast: *"In teaching, you're always surrounded by people. In this new job, I felt isolated. Ah, it's a very different environment, and I missed the closeness I had with my colleagues before."*

The transition to a more formal and less emotionally supportive corporate environment created barriers to building meaningful connections, leaving many participants feeling disconnected and out of place. These findings align with the observations of Li and Lee (2024),

who reported that professionals transitioning from education to other sectors often experience social isolation, especially when moving from highly relational work cultures to more hierarchical and task-oriented settings. Similarly, Yen and Pan (2008) emphasized that adapting to new communication and cultural norms in corporate environments can significantly delay social integration for individuals accustomed to informal, interpersonal teaching contexts. The participants' experiences complement prior research, offering concrete evidence of how profound cultural and social shifts contribute to ongoing feelings of disconnection during career transitions.

Challenge 14. Dealing with Job Stress and Uncertainty. Once in their new roles, many participants faced persistent stress and uncertainty, often intensified by their unfamiliarity with new responsibilities. John, who transitioned from being an elementary agriculture teacher to a crop supervisor, spoke candidly about his experience: *"Ah, I wasn't sure if I was doing things right. I had to learn on the job, and it was stressful. I had to adjust, and there was always that doubt in my mind - whether I was making the right choices."* The fear of making mistakes and the pressure of navigating uncharted professional territory emerged as common concerns among participants following their career transitions. Kim and Lee (2020) and Villarama et al. (2025b) discuss how job uncertainty frequently generates significant stress, particularly when individuals enter new fields with limited training or guidance. The fear of failure and unfamiliar expectations often produce emotional strain that hinders both confidence and professional growth. Similarly, Martini (2024) found that ambiguity surrounding new roles contributes to prolonged stress as individuals struggle to interpret evolving responsibilities without clear instructions or mentorship. Furthermore, career transitions inherently involve an element of personal risk, as individuals leave familiar roles to pursue opportunities that may offer greater fulfillment but also carry greater uncertainty. The findings of this study offer further support to existing literature by

illustrating how job ambiguity and uncertainty during career transitions create ongoing emotional tension, reinforcing the complex psychological challenges educators face when shifting into unfamiliar work environments.

DISCUSSION

Implications for Teacher Education and Professional Preparation. The results of this study show that teachers who moved to non-educational industries faced many challenges at different stages of their transition. These include financial problems, emotional struggles, skill gaps, cultural adjustment, and ongoing stress. While teacher training helps teachers build strong classroom and communication skills, it does not always prepare them for other career options outside education. Teacher education programs can improve by including training on project management, digital skills, leadership, and career adaptability. Preparing teachers for possible career changes may help them handle transitions better if needed. The emotional struggles with identity loss also suggest that teacher training should help future teachers build a stronger sense of identity that includes both teaching and skills that apply to other fields. This may help reduce emotional difficulties if they need to shift careers.

Policy Implications for Educational Institutions and DepEd. The findings suggest that teachers do not leave the profession because they no longer want to teach but because of problems in the system that affect their well-being and career growth. The Department of Education (DepEd) can make several improvements to help teachers stay. First, provide more opportunities for promotion, including leadership roles that do not require leaving the classroom. Second, review teacher salaries and provide better financial incentives. Third, reduce the number of administrative tasks so teachers can focus more on teaching. Fourth, give teachers access to counseling, mentoring, and mental health support to help them deal with emotional stress. These changes may help address the reasons why teachers leave and support their long-term well-being.

Theoretical Integration and Directions for Future Research. The emotional struggles and identity issues found in this study can be explained by using Schlossberg's Transition Theory. This theory shows how people manage big life changes, depending on how they see the situation, the support they have, and how much control they feel. The teachers in this study often felt unsure about themselves and lacked support when moving into new careers. Professional Identity Theory also helps explain and illustrate why teachers found it hard to let go of their teaching identity and create a new one.

This study suggests several areas for future research. Future studies can follow teachers over time to see how satisfied they are with their new careers. Studies comparing teachers who stay in education with those who leave can help identify what helps teachers stay. Research can also look at how mentoring and support programs can make career transitions easier. Finally, studies can evaluate how DepEd's policies affect teacher attrition. Future research can help improve programs and policies that support teachers, both in education and beyond.

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