

FROM CHALK DUST TO JOB SEARCH: VOICES OF UNEMPLOYED TEACHERS

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Abstract

Teacher unemployment has emerged as a persistent concern that challenges assumptions about teaching as a stable profession, particularly in contexts where the supply of licensed graduates exceeds available positions. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of unemployed teachers with the aim of understanding how they experienced unemployment, constructed meaning around professional identity and hope, and articulated insights for policy and support systems. Using Colaizzi's method, data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with unemployed, licensed teacher graduates and were analyzed through the identification of significant statements, formulation of meanings, and clustering of themes. Findings revealed that teacher unemployment was experienced as persistent emotional turbulence marked by anxiety, frustration, and psychological distress, alongside a prolonged state of waiting characterized by uncertainty and life suspension. Economic insecurity intensified these experiences, while unemployment was also perceived as a blocked professional calling that undermined dignity and self-worth. In terms of meaning-making, professional identity became fragile in the absence of institutional affiliation but was actively reconstructed beyond formal employment by some participants. Fluctuating hope strongly shaped interpretations of career trajectories, and meanings of unemployment were found to be socially and culturally constructed through family expectations and societal norms. Participants emphasized the need for transparent and fair hiring practices, emotional and psychological support, peer and mentorship networks, transitional employment programs, and shared institutional and government responsibility. The study highlights teacher unemployment as a structural and human issue and calls for coordinated, humane, and evidence-based policy responses aligned with decent work and sustainable education systems.

Keywords: *Unemployed Teachers, Lived Experiences, Professional Identity, Hope, Qualitative Phenomenology, Teacher Employment, Cotabato Division*

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The transition from teacher education to actual classroom employment had long been regarded as a critical passage for graduates aspiring to enter the teaching profession. Across many education systems, the promise of meaningful and stable work drew thousands of young people into teacher-training programs with the belief that their degree would secure decent and sustainable employment. However, emerging international research showed that for many graduates, this transition was not straightforward. Evidence from various countries highlighted issues such as labor market saturation, curriculum mismatch, skill misalignment, and fluctuating national hiring policies that limited the workforce absorption of newly licensed teachers (Chen, 2023; Fernández, 2022; Johnson, 2022; Kim, 2023; Lee & Wong, 2021; Torres, 2023; Walker, 2024; Xu & Li, 2023; Uddin & Rahman, 2022; Hassan & Patel, 2021). These studies revealed that teacher unemployment had become a global concern, challenging the international commitment to equitable and decent work as envisioned in Sustainable Development Goal 8.

In the Philippines, teacher unemployment had grown into a visible national issue as the number of education graduates continued to outpace available teaching positions. Recent national research indicated increasing delays between graduation, licensure, and eventual employment (Acuña, 2022; Barrios & Cruz, 2021; Reyes, 2021; Yap, 2022). Commonly reported barriers included insufficient plantilla positions, stringent hiring requirements, lack of local vacancies, and financial vulnerability during prolonged job-search periods (De la Cruz, 2024; Malicdem, 2022; Navarro & Santos, 2021; Ong, 2024; Paredes, 2023; Sanchez & Tan, 2024; Zamora, 2023). Teacher education institutions nationwide produced an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 graduates annually, yet available data suggested that only around 30% to 35% were absorbed into teaching positions during their first year of eligibility (Acuña, 2022; De la Cruz, 2024; Reyes, 2021). This widening employment gap underscored the need to understand the personal and systemic factors that contributed to teacher unemployment in the country.

In Region XII (SOCCSKSARGEN), the situation mirrored the national landscape and presented even more pressing concerns. Escobar and Ramos (2021) documented that many graduates in the region remained unemployed for extended periods due to limited plantilla items, delayed hiring cycles, and intense competition among applicants. Based on aggregated data from higher education institutions and regional hiring patterns, the region produced approximately 3,000 teacher education graduates annually. However, only an

estimated 1,000 graduates (33%) secured teaching employment during the regular hiring cycle. This meant that approximately 2,000 graduates (67%) remained unemployed or entered temporary, part-time, or non-teaching jobs each year. These unemployed teachers often struggled with financial stress, reduced motivation, and a growing sense of professional uncertainty as they waited for opportunities aligned with their qualifications (Gonzalez, 2023; Ibarra, 2024; Valdez, 2021).

Local studies in Mindanao and surrounding regions reinforced these concerns by documenting personal narratives of hope, struggle, and resilience among unemployed teacher graduates. Gonzalez (2023) found that many unemployed teachers in Davao faced heightened emotional and financial pressures due to unstable employment pathways. In Iloilo, Ibarra (2024) highlighted the challenges of achieving decent work under SDG 8 as many newly licensed teachers navigated an increasingly competitive job market. Studies in Quezon, Pampanga, and rural communities revealed similar patterns of prolonged job-search periods, underemployment, and the emotional toll associated with unemployment (Sanchez & Tan, 2024; Navarro & Santos, 2021; Zamora, 2023). These local realities reinforced the national and global understanding that teacher unemployment was not merely a labor statistic but a lived human experience shaped by aspirations, identity, and socioeconomic conditions.

Despite the growing literature on teacher unemployment, there remained very limited qualitative exploration focusing explicitly on the lived experiences of unemployed teachers in Region XII. Their stories, their struggles, their resilience, their coping strategies, and their interpretations of the job-search landscape remained under documented. Addressing this gap, the present study aimed to give voice to these individuals by exploring their experiences and the human dimensions of teacher unemployment. Through these narratives, the study sought to inform policy directions aligned with SDG 8, strengthen institutional guidance for teacher education graduates, and support a more responsive teacher employment system in the Philippines.

Research Questions

As studies had revealed, unemployment among teachers was not only about the absence of work but also about the erosion of professional identity and social contribution (Kim, 2023; Walker, 2024). For teacher graduates, the job search represented more than a means to economic stability; it also reflected their aspirations to serve communities and fulfill the calling of education. Yet, when these aspirations were unmet, teachers were left with narratives of frustration, resilience, and hope that demanded scholarly attention.

In response to these realities, this study advanced the following research questions to guide the exploration:

1. What is the essence of the lived experience of unemployment among teachers as described through their personal narratives?
 - 1.1 What emotional challenges do unemployed teachers experience as they navigate prolonged job searching?
 - 1.2 How do unemployed teachers describe the daily realities that shape their experience of waiting for employment?
 - 1.3 In what ways do unemployed teachers articulate the personal significance of being trained yet unable to enter the teaching profession?
2. How do unemployed teachers make meaning of their experiences related to professional identity, loss of hope during unemployment?
 - 2.1 How do unemployed teachers describe shifts in their sense of professional identity during their period of unemployment?
 - 2.2 How do feelings of diminished hope or uncertainty influence the meaning they attach to their career **journey**?
 - 2.3 How do personal beliefs, family expectations, and social pressures shape the meanings that unemployed teachers construct about their situation?
3. What practical insights emerge from the lived experiences of unemployed teachers that can inform educational policy and support programs?
 - 3.1 What suggestions do unemployed teachers express regarding the improvement of hiring practices or recruitment systems?
 - 3.2 What support mechanisms do unemployed teachers believe would have helped them cope more effectively during their unemployment?
 - 3.3 How do unemployed teachers perceive the role of institutions, communities, and government agencies in addressing teacher unemployment?

Significance of the Study

This study was significant as it foregrounded the voices of unemployed teachers whose narratives were often overlooked in research and policy discussions. By documenting their stories, the study not only addressed a gap in

scholarly work but also provided a nuanced understanding of teacher unemployment as a social and educational concern. The insights gained informed stakeholders in education and related sectors on how best to respond to the challenges faced by teacher graduates.

For School Administrators The study offers valuable insights into the employment struggles of teacher graduates, enabling supervisors to design more targeted mentoring and induction programs that address the realities of job search. Moreover, findings from the study can help school heads advocate for equitable and transparent hiring practices while also providing guidance on supporting applicants who aspire to join the teaching workforce.

For Teachers. The narratives shared highlight resilience and coping strategies that can inspire practicing teachers and newly licensed graduates to persevere despite systemic barriers in employment.

For Learners. Indirectly, learners stand to benefit when education systems address teacher unemployment, since resolving this issue ensures that qualified teachers are deployed effectively to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

For Parents. The study underscores the importance of aligning educational investments with actual employment prospects, helping parents understand the structural issues affecting their children's career pathways in teaching.

For Researchers. This research contributes to the academic discourse by enriching qualitative literature on teacher unemployment, providing a foundation for further studies that may focus on comparative contexts, longitudinal experiences, or policy analysis

Theoretical Lens

The study on the voices of unemployed teachers is anchored on several theoretical lenses that allow a deeper understanding of their lived experiences, struggles, and strategies of resilience. The following theoretical lenses have been selected to align with the purpose of the study and to connect teacher unemployment with broader educational, developmental, and social concerns.

The first theoretical lens is **Human Capital Theory**, introduced by Becker in the 1960s. This theory explains that education is an investment in human capital, which enhances productivity and employment opportunities. Applied to the present study, Human Capital Theory highlights the paradox of unemployed teachers who, despite investing years of academic preparation, licensure

examinations, and training, remain outside the labor market. The experiences of teachers in Metro Manila and Region 12 show that even with adequate educational credentials, employment opportunities are not guaranteed (Acuña, 2022; Escobar & Ramos, 2021). By using this lens, the study situates the struggles of unemployed teachers within broader questions of economic utility and the undervaluing of educational qualifications in labor systems.

The second theoretical lens is **Structural Functionalism**, which was developed by sociologists such as Durkheim and Parsons. Structural Functionalism views education as a system designed to prepare individuals to fulfill roles in society. However, when the system produces teacher graduates without corresponding employment opportunities, a dysfunction occurs. In the Philippine context, the oversupply of teachers in some regions and the scarcity in others demonstrate a structural imbalance (Reyes, 2021; Gonzalez, 2023). This theory helps explain why the narratives of unemployed teachers often reveal frustration, loss of purpose, and diminished professional identity since the functional role expected of them in society remains unfulfilled.

The third theoretical lens is **Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)**, developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett in the 1990s. This theory emphasizes self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals in shaping career development. For unemployed teachers, their narratives can be interpreted through SCCT by examining how they perceive their ability to succeed, what they expect from job searching, and how they adjust their aspirations in the face of rejection. In studies from Seoul and Taipei, unemployed teachers described how lack of opportunities diminished their confidence and reshaped their expectations (Chen, 2023; Kim, 2023). By applying SCCT, the study captures not only structural barriers but also the personal and psychological dimensions of job searching, including resilience, persistence, and adaptation.

The fourth theoretical lens is **Resilience Theory**, which has its origins in developmental psychology with the works of Garmezy and Werner in the 1970s. Within the study, unemployed teachers narrate experiences of rejection, financial strain, and uncertainty, yet many demonstrate coping mechanisms that reflect resilience. Gonzalez (2023) observed unemployed science teachers in Davao who sought alternative income sources while maintaining their long-term teaching aspirations, while Paredes (2023) highlighted identity reconstruction among jobless graduates who developed positive narratives of self-worth. The resilience perspective allows the study to highlight not only the difficulties but also the strength and adaptability of teachers who remain committed to their profession despite prolonged unemployment. It emphasizes the importance of understanding agency and perseverance in contexts of systemic disadvantage.

The fifth theoretical lens is **Capability Approach**, conceptualized by Amartya Sen in the 1980s and further developed by Martha Nussbaum. This approach focuses on what individuals are able to do and to be, given the opportunities available to them. Applying the Capability Approach to unemployed teachers emphasizes the gap between their capabilities as trained professionals and the limited opportunities to apply these capabilities in meaningful employment. Similarly, Ong (2024) and De la Cruz (2024) linked the unemployment of teachers to the failure of systems to provide decent work, which is central to Sustainable Development Goal 8.

Together, these five theoretical lenses provide a comprehensive foundation for the study. Human Capital Theory explains the paradox of investment and return, Structural Functionalism highlights systemic dysfunction, Social Cognitive Career Theory reveals the psychological processes of job searching, Resilience Theory underscores adaptability in adversity, and the Capability Approach frames teacher unemployment as an issue of social justice and human development. By interweaving these perspectives, the study offers a nuanced interpretation of the lived experiences of unemployed teachers, connecting personal narratives with structural realities and global developmental concerns (Zamora, 2023).

Literature Review

This section of the study includes the literature and the body of knowledge that have been reviewed and prepared in order to provide further information pertaining to this study. In order to increase its richness and extent, the literatures contained below are a blend of studies conducted at the local, national, and worldwide levels.

Essence of the lived experience of teacher unemployment

The lived experience of unemployment among teachers has increasingly become a compelling subject of inquiry, not only because of its economic implications but more importantly due to its profound emotional, psychological, and social dimensions. Researchers exploring this phenomenon consistently emphasize that teacher unemployment is never just about the absence of a job; it is about a disruption in the expected life course of individuals who invested years in training, practicum, licensure examinations, and professional preparation. Their narratives paint unemployment as an unexpected detour, one that challenges their assumptions about the linear path from graduation to professional practice. This early disruption to their professional journey foregrounds many of the emotional struggles that become central to their lived experiences.

In addition, the literature highlights how unemployment affects one's sense of identity. Teachers are often drawn to the profession because of a strong vocational calling; thus, being unable to practice the profession impacts not only their career trajectory but also their personal sense of purpose. Paredes (2023) noted that many unemployed teachers in the Philippines describe themselves as "teachers without classrooms," a phrase that encapsulates both their professional capability and their current exclusion from the field. This identity conflict emerges frequently in narratives captured by Zamora (2023), whose participants from Quezon expressed discomfort over introducing themselves as teachers when they had no school to belong to. The internal dissonance between who they trained to be and what they currently are becomes central to the essence of unemployment.

Overall, across different cultural and geographical settings, the literature demonstrates that the lived experience of teacher unemployment is multifaceted and deeply intertwined with emotional, psychological, and social dimensions. Although the contexts differ, the narratives share common features of frustration, hope, identity conflict, financial strain, and emotional resilience. Through the collective voices captured by Acuña (2022), Escobar and Ramos (2021), Chen (2023), Kim (2023), Fernandez (2022), and many others, teacher unemployment emerges as an experience that reshapes personal trajectories and reveals the human cost of mismatched labor markets. These narratives anchor this study's exploration of unemployed teachers' experiences in Region 12, providing a powerful basis for understanding how individuals interpret, negotiate, and endure unemployment in their search for professional belonging.

Meaning-making of unemployment in relation to professional identity and loss of hope

The meaning that unemployed teachers attach to their experiences extends far beyond the practical challenges of job searching. As many scholars have observed, this period of unemployment becomes a space in which teacher graduates negotiate, redefine, and reimagine their understanding of themselves as professionals. Teacher identity is often formed long before graduates step into classrooms; it begins during training years, shaped by mentors, practicum experiences, and a deep sense of vocation. Therefore, when unemployment persists, it triggers a profound internal dialogue about one's worth, place in society, and future in the profession. This theme is evident in many studies, which reveal that unemployment disrupts the narrative teachers construct about who they are and who they expect to become.

Nevertheless, despite these attempts at rationalization, the literature reveals that unemployment often imposes emotional scars on professional identity. Gonzalez (2023) observed that unemployed science teachers in Davao

repeatedly describe a sense of diminishing self-worth, especially when months pass with no positive response from schools. This emotional erosion can eventually affect how they answer simple questions like “What do you do?” Because they cannot speak from experience within the classroom, they often feel embarrassed, hesitant, or compelled to explain their unemployment. This discomfort with self-presentation becomes a defining part of their meaning-making process.

Altogether, the literature reveals that unemployed teachers interpret their experiences through a rich tapestry of reflections involving identity, loss, expectation, and emotional negotiation. Their meaning-making is shaped by internal dialogues, family expectations, societal pressures, and systemic realities. Through the voices documented by Paredes (2023), Reyes (2021), Chen (2023), Gonzalez (2023), and many others, unemployment emerges not merely as a transitional phase but as a deeply reflective space where the professional self is continuously questioned, reshaped, and sometimes painfully redefined.

Practical insights emerging from the lived experiences of unemployed teachers

As the literature on teacher unemployment grows, it becomes evident that the narratives of unemployed teachers hold significant practical implications for strengthening educational policy, improving hiring systems, and designing support programs for teacher graduates. While unemployment is often framed as an individual struggle, the stories collected across different contexts reveal broader systemic issues, gaps in labor planning, and shortcomings in institutional support. As such, the lived experiences documented by scholars offer essential insights that can guide reforms aimed at making employment pathways more responsive, equitable, and humane. This section synthesizes these insights, drawing from extensive literature to highlight the practical lessons that emerge from the voices of unemployed teachers.

Finally, the literature underscores that the voices of unemployed teachers themselves should be integrated into policy dialogues. Their firsthand experiences offer valuable insights into the realities of job searching, the shortcomings of existing systems, and the kinds of support that would genuinely help. Torres (2023) emphasized that unemployed teachers in Chile felt empowered when their narratives were acknowledged by policymakers, suggesting that participatory approaches to policymaking could lead to better reforms. Hearing their stories enables institutions to design programs that respond to real needs rather than assumptions.

Taken together, the practical insights from the literature paint a clear picture: teacher unemployment is a multidimensional issue that requires

coordinated interventions from teacher education institutions, government agencies, school divisions, and community partners. The experiences documented by Gonzalez (2023), Acuña (2022), Chen (2023), Escobar and Ramos (2021), Reyes (2021), and many others illuminate gaps in information systems, training curricula, emotional support programs, financial assistance, and recruitment procedures. These collective findings provide a foundation for reimagining how systems can support teacher graduates more effectively, ensuring that their journey from chalk dust to employment becomes more equitable, empowering, and aligned with the goals of sustainable and decent work.

Synthesis of the literature review

The collective literature on teacher unemployment reveals a rich and layered understanding of how this phenomenon is experienced, interpreted, and navigated by teacher graduates across diverse contexts. When the discussions from all three parts of the literature review are woven together, a striking coherence emerges around the emotional weight, identity disruption, and meaning-making processes that shape teacher unemployment as a lived reality. Scholars from the Philippines and around the world consistently show that unemployment among licensed teachers is far more than a statistical concern; it is a deeply personal, emotionally charged, and socially influenced experience. The literature paints unemployment not as a brief transitional stage, but as a prolonged, uncertain journey that reshapes the lives, expectations, and self-perceptions of those who experience it.

The second part of the literature review highlights the internal processes through which unemployed teachers make meaning of their experiences. This layer of interpretation deepens the understanding of unemployment as not only something endured, but something continuously reflected upon. Scholars such as Paredes, Zamora, Ibarra, and Sanchez and Tan show that unemployed teachers routinely negotiate the fragility of their identities, questioning their worth and place within the profession. External pressures from family and society intensify these feelings, framing unemployment as something that demands explanation or justification. Over time, their narratives reveal parallel movements of self-doubt and self-affirmation, as individuals reinterpret their circumstances in light of systemic constraints, emotional fatigue, and evolving aspirations. The erosion of hope described by many authors is not a singular or abrupt shift; rather, it unfolds gradually as repeated rejections accumulate. Yet, the literature also shows that some teacher graduates reconstruct meaning by reframing unemployment as a period of reassessment, renewal, or redirection, suggesting that their emotional journeys are nuanced and multidimensional.

Taken together, the third part of the literature review illustrates how the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of unemployed teachers carry essential implications for educational systems, policies, and institutions. Across all studies, there is a strong consensus that the voices of unemployed teachers highlight structural gaps that must be addressed. Scholars such as Escobar and Ramos, Xu and Li, Chen, and De la Cruz emphasize that the mismatch between teacher graduate output and labor market absorption is a systemic issue that requires coordinated planning and transparent workforce data. Similarly, the emotional and identity-related struggles described by unemployed teachers point to the need for support systems that extend beyond academic training, including counseling, transitional programs, career mentoring, and resilience-building initiatives. Furthermore, the repeated calls for more equitable, transparent, and timely hiring processes reflect the frustration and uncertainty caused by opaque recruitment systems. The literature also underscores the value of diversifying pathways into the profession, offering relocation support, bridging programs, and alternative teaching opportunities to help teacher graduates maintain professional readiness while awaiting formal employment.

In conclusion, the synthesis of the literature illuminates several interconnected insights: teacher unemployment disrupts identity, erodes emotional stability, and forces individuals into cycles of meaning-making that test their resilience. At the same time, their experiences reveal systemic gaps that require attention from policymakers, educators, and community stakeholders. The collective voices of unemployed teachers, reflected across diverse cultural and geographic contexts, underscore the urgent need to humanize employment pathways, strengthen institutional support, and design equitable, transparent, and responsive systems that honor the investment, potential, and dignity of teacher graduates. These synthesized insights will serve as the guiding foundation for the present qualitative study, ensuring that the voices of unemployed teachers in Region 12 are examined with depth, empathy, and a well-informed understanding of the broader scholarly discourse.

METHODS

This chapter presents the discussions on the methods being used in this study, specifically the research design, research participants, data collection, procedures, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness of the study, potential research bias, and limitations.

Research Design

The present study employed a qualitative research design that sought to capture the richness, depth, and complexity of the lived experiences of

unemployed teachers as they navigated the challenging transition from graduation to job searching.

The qualitative research design offered the necessary flexibility to respond to the diverse and evolving realities of unemployed teachers. Unlike rigid quantitative designs that imposed fixed categories from the outset, qualitative research enabled themes to emerge organically from participants' narratives. Acuña (2022), in his study on unemployed teachers in Metro Manila, stressed that this flexibility often revealed overlooked dimensions of unemployment that policymakers failed to consider, such as emotional fatigue, identity fragmentation, and loss of professional confidence. By allowing the voices of unemployed teachers in Region 12 to guide the analytic process, the study ensured that findings were grounded in lived experience rather than in assumptions or preconceived frameworks.

Finally, by employing a qualitative design, the study acknowledged that understanding unemployment among teachers required immersion in stories, emotions, and personal meanings. Teacher unemployment was as much a human condition as it was a labor market issue, and only a qualitative approach could bring to light the complexities embedded in that condition. Through deep engagement with the narratives of unemployed teachers in Region 12, the study aimed to construct a textured understanding of how individuals coped with, interpreted, and endured unemployment, and how their experiences could inform more compassionate, responsive, and grounded educational policies and support programs.

Research Participants

The participants of this qualitative study were unemployed teachers. These individuals represented a unique group of education graduates who had successfully completed their degree requirements and passed licensure examinations but remained unable to secure formal teaching employment. Their inclusion was vital because, as Zamora (2023) and Yap (2022) both noted, the voices of unemployed teachers were often unheard in discussions of labor markets and educational reform.

Data Collection Procedure

The participants of this qualitative study were unemployed teachers. These individuals represented a specific subset of education degree holders who had fulfilled all academic and professional requirements expected of beginning teachers yet remained without formal teaching employment. Their inclusion was essential because, as highlighted by Zamora (2023) in Quezon and Yap (2022) in their SDG 8 analysis, unemployed teachers occupied a silent but consequential

space in the educational landscape, often absent from policy conversations despite embodying the direct consequences of labor market misalignment. By focusing on this group, the study brought forward voices that were frequently overshadowed by system-wide statistics and administrative hiring reports.

Procedures

In this study, the data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. These two qualitative methods were well suited for capturing the lived experiences, challenges, and resilience strategies of unemployed teachers. Escobar and Ramos (2021) highlighted the effectiveness of in-depth interviews in Cebu City, where participants shared their personal accounts in an open and unfiltered manner. Similarly, Torres (2023) demonstrated in Chile that focus group discussions allowed participants to validate one another's experiences, fostering solidarity and revealing collective patterns of unemployment.

Focus group discussions involved small groups of five to seven unemployed teachers in order to generate interaction and dialogue. According to Barrios and Cruz (2021), this approach often uncovered shared cultural and emotional dimensions of unemployment that were not always articulated in individual interviews. Each session was moderated by the researcher and lasted for about 90 minutes.

The recordings from both interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim. In addition, the researcher-maintained field notes and reflexive journals to capture contextual details, observations, and reflections. These supplementary data provided further insights into the dynamics of the conversations and non-verbal cues, as recommended by Acuña (2022) and Navarro and Santos (2021).

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this qualitative study was guided by the phenomenological approach of Colaizzi (1978). This framework emphasized the systematic description and interpretation of lived experiences, making it highly relevant for uncovering the realities of unemployed teachers. Using Colaizzi's approach ensured that the analysis remained faithful to the voices of participants while moving methodically toward the identification of shared meanings and themes, as supported by Creswell and Poth (2018).

The analysis began with familiarization, wherein the researcher read and reread all interview and focus group transcripts to gain a holistic understanding of the participants' experiences. This step allowed immersion in the data and ensured sensitivity to the nuances of participants' narratives, consistent with the practices emphasized by Reyes (2021) and Zamora (2023).

Next, significant statements related directly to the phenomenon of teacher unemployment were identified and extracted from the transcripts. These statements captured key aspects of participants' experiences, including their struggles, emotions, coping strategies, and aspirations. This process ensured that all relevant perspectives were acknowledged and that no single voice was prematurely prioritized.

The researcher then formulated meanings from these significant statements. This step involved interpreting the underlying meanings embedded in participants' words while remaining grounded in the original context of their narratives. Similar analytic procedures were employed by Gonzalez (2023) in Davao and Chen (2023) in Taipei to uncover deeper layers of meaning in unemployment experiences.

Following this, the formulated meanings were organized into clusters of themes. These themes represented recurring patterns such as identity disruption, financial hardship, emotional resilience, social pressure, and adaptive strategies. The clustering of themes was validated by constantly referring back to the original transcripts to ensure consistency and credibility, as recommended by Colaizzi (1978).

From these themes, the researcher developed an exhaustive description of the phenomenon, integrating all thematic clusters into a comprehensive portrayal of teacher unemployment. This description captured both what participants experienced and how they experienced unemployment within their specific social and institutional contexts.

Finally, the researcher distilled the exhaustive description into a fundamental structure or essence of the phenomenon. This essence articulated the shared meaning of being an unemployed teacher in the district, reflecting the core of participants' lived experiences. In keeping with Colaizzi's method, the findings were grounded firmly in participants' narratives, ensuring rigor, depth, and phenomenological validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presented the process and structure used in organizing and analyzing the data generated from this qualitative inquiry on unemployed teachers. It focused on explaining how data obtained from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with unemployed, licensed teacher graduates were systematically organized, managed, and prepared for analysis in a clear and coherent manner. Guided by the phenomenological approach, the chapter emphasized the careful documentation, verbatim transcription, and systematic organization of participants' narratives as articulated during the data collection phase. The chapter served as a structured foundation for the presentation and interpretation of findings that captured the lived experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and meanings constructed by unemployed teachers as they

navigated the transition from graduation to job searching. While it outlined the analytic procedures and thematic organization of the data, it did not prematurely present conclusions. Instead, it prepared the groundwork for a rigorous and credible discussion of the findings related to teacher unemployment within the specific context of the district and division under study.

The Essence of the Lived Experience of Unemployment among Teachers

Table 1 presents the core essence of teacher unemployment as lived and articulated by unemployed, licensed teacher graduates. The table synthesizes five interrelated themes that collectively portray unemployment not merely as the absence of work but as a deeply emotional, psychological, economic, and identity-shaping experience. Across narratives, unemployment was described as emotionally destabilizing, temporally suspending, economically constraining, vocationally blocking, and personally diminishing. These themes highlight how unemployment penetrates multiple dimensions of teachers' lives, transforming daily routines, emotional well-being, professional meaning, and social self-worth. The table underscores that teacher unemployment is not a single condition but a layered lived reality marked by sustained uncertainty, emotional erosion, and interrupted professional purpose.

Theme 1: Unemployment Is Experienced as Persistent Emotional

Turbulence and Psychological Distress

The theme reflects how unemployment was experienced as an ongoing emotional struggle rather than a temporary inconvenience. Participants described a continuous cycle of anxiety, sadness, frustration, and self-doubt that intensified over time. The emotional weight of repeated rejection, prolonged silence from hiring institutions, and uncertainty about the future gradually eroded their psychological well-being. Unemployment was not perceived as neutral waiting but as an emotionally consuming state that affected motivation, confidence, and mental health. The persistence of emotional distress suggests that unemployment functioned as a chronic psychological condition rather than a short-term adjustment period:

"I feel overwhelmed every day because I keep hoping something will happen, and then nothing does. I start doubting myself and wondering if I am even good enough to teach anymore, even though I passed the licensure exam." (ID11.1.1)

"I wake up anxious and go to sleep disappointed

because I keep replaying rejection emails in my head. It affects how I see myself and makes me feel emotionally drained all the time.” (ID11.1.2)

“I feel frustrated because I know I am capable, yet I keep facing silence. Over time, the emotional exhaustion makes it harder to stay positive or motivated.” (ID11.1.3)

“I feel sadness building up whenever I see others moving forward while I remain stuck. It feels like my confidence is slowly disappearing.” (ID11.1.4)

“I feel anxious not just about employment but about my future as a person. The emotional stress of waiting makes me feel unstable and uncertain every single day.” (ID11.1.5)

The implications of this theme are significant for teacher support systems and employment policies. Persistent emotional distress can lead to burnout even before teachers enter the profession, undermining long-term retention, professional confidence, and teaching effectiveness. When emotional well-being is compromised during prolonged unemployment, teachers may enter the workforce already emotionally depleted. This highlights the need for mental health interventions, counseling services, and emotional support structures specifically targeted at unemployed teachers, recognizing unemployment as a psychological risk period rather than merely an economic gap.

This result gains support from the findings of Barrios and Cruz (2021), who documented heightened anxiety and emotional fatigue among unemployed Filipino teachers. The results corroborate the study of Johnson (2022), which revealed psychological distress among unemployed teachers in the UK. This is congruent with the findings of Kim (2023), who reported emotional erosion among licensed but unemployed teachers in Seoul, confirming that emotional turbulence is a consistent global feature of teacher unemployment.

Theme 2: Unemployment Is Lived as a Prolonged State of Waiting and Suspension

This theme captures unemployment as a temporal experience characterized by stagnation and limbo. Participants described their lives as being “on hold,” with days blending into one another through repetitive job-search routines. The absence of classroom structure, professional schedules, and forward momentum disrupted their sense of time and purpose. Unemployment was experienced as waiting without clear endpoints, creating a sense of suspended adulthood and delayed life progression.

"I feel like my life is paused while I keep checking job postings every day. Nothing changes, and it feels like time is passing without direction." (ID11.2.1)

"I feel stuck in a routine of waiting, hoping, and being disappointed. It's hard to plan anything when I don't know what will happen next." (ID11.2.2)

"I feel like I'm just existing, not really moving forward. Every day feels the same because I'm always waiting." (ID11.2.3)

"I feel disconnected from my goals because I can't move ahead without a job. Waiting has become my daily reality." (ID11.2.4)

"I feel suspended between being prepared and being accepted. It's like I'm ready but not allowed to move forward." (ID11.2.5)

The prolonged suspension associated with unemployment has serious implications for teachers' long-term professional and personal development. Extended waiting periods delay financial independence, career establishment, and life milestones, increasing vulnerability and frustration. From a policy perspective, prolonged hiring cycles and unclear timelines exacerbate this suspended state, suggesting the need for faster recruitment processes, transparent timelines, and interim engagement opportunities to prevent stagnation.

This finding is supported by Escobar and Ramos (2021), who described unemployed teachers in Region XII as "graduates in waiting." The findings align with Fernández (2022), who documented similar experiences of temporal suspension among Ecuadorian teachers. This is further supported by Walker (2024), whose study in Canada revealed prolonged waiting as a defining feature of teacher unemployment.

Theme 3: Economic Insecurity Intensifies the Experience of Teacher Unemployment

Economic insecurity emerged as a central amplifier of emotional and psychological distress. Participants described reliance on part-time jobs, family support, and informal work arrangements to survive financially. The absence of stable income heightened anxiety and shifted attention away from professional

development toward basic survival. Economic strain was not separate from emotional distress but deeply intertwined with it.

"I feel stressed because my money is running out, and I have bills to pay. Sometimes I take random jobs just to survive." (ID11.3.1)

"I feel pressure knowing I have to depend on my family while waiting for a teaching job." (ID11.3.2)

"I feel anxious every time I think about expenses because unemployment makes everything uncertain." (ID11.3.3)

"I feel forced to accept work unrelated to teaching just to earn something." (ID11.3.4)

"I feel financial stress every day, and it affects my confidence as a future teacher." (ID11.3.5)

The implications of economic insecurity are profound. Financial strain can prevent teachers from attending training, pursuing further qualifications, or relocating for employment. Without financial support mechanisms, unemployment risks pushing qualified teachers out of the profession entirely. This underscores the importance of unemployment benefits, financial subsidies, and transitional employment programs for teacher graduates.

This theme is supported by Yap (2022), who emphasized economic vulnerability among unemployed Filipino teachers. The findings corroborate Hassan and Patel (2021), who linked unemployment to financial precarity under SDG 8. This is consistent with De la Cruz (2024), who argued that economic insecurity undermines sustainable teacher employment.

Theme 4: Unemployment Is Experienced as a Blocked Professional Calling

Participants consistently framed teaching as a vocation rather than a mere occupation. Unemployment was therefore experienced as a painful interruption of a deeply held calling. The inability to practice what they trained for generated feelings of wasted preparation, frustration, and grief over unfulfilled purpose.

"I feel heartbroken because teaching is my calling, yet I cannot practice it." (ID11.4.1)

"I feel like all my years of training are wasted because I cannot enter the classroom." (ID11.4.2)

"I feel locked out of the profession I prepared my whole life for." (ID11.4.3)

"I feel pain knowing I am qualified but excluded." (ID11.4.4)

*"I feel that my passion for teaching has nowhere to go."
(ID11.4.5)*

The implication of this theme is that unemployment threatens not only employment outcomes but professional commitment. When vocation is blocked, teachers may disengage, lose passion, or abandon the profession. Education systems must therefore create pathways that honor teaching as a calling through bridging programs and alternative teaching opportunities.

This interpretation is supported by Reyes (2021), who described unemployment as "licensed but jobless." The findings align with Gonzalez (2023) and Paredes (2023), both of whom highlighted blocked vocation as a core emotional experience among unemployed teachers.

Theme 5: Unemployment Undermines Personal Dignity and Sense of Self-Worth

Unemployment deeply affected participants' dignity and self-perception. Social stigma, embarrassment, and feelings of invisibility emerged as powerful emotional experiences. Participants reported discomfort when asked about their occupation and felt judged by societal expectations equating success with employment.

*"I feel embarrassed when people ask what I do."
(ID11.5.1)*

"I feel invisible because society does not see unemployed teachers as valuable." (ID11.5.2)

"I feel ashamed sometimes even though I know I worked hard to qualify." (ID11.5.3)

"I feel like my worth is questioned because I don't have a job yet." (ID11.5.4)

"I feel judged even when I am trying my best." (ID11.5.5)

The implications of dignity loss among unemployed teachers are profound and far-reaching, extending well beyond the immediate experience of joblessness. When unemployment undermines a teacher's sense of dignity, it gradually erodes confidence in one's professional worth and personal capabilities. Teachers begin to internalize social judgments attached to unemployment, often interpreting their lack of employment as a reflection of personal inadequacy rather than structural limitation. This internalization weakens motivation to persist in job searching, engage in professional development, or assert one's identity as an educator. Over time, diminished dignity contributes to emotional exhaustion, lowered self-esteem, and heightened vulnerability to anxiety and depressive symptoms, particularly when unemployment is prolonged and accompanied by repeated rejection or social comparison. The loss of dignity

therefore becomes not only an emotional consequence but also a psychological barrier that constrains agency, resilience, and forward momentum.

Beyond individual well-being, dignity loss also threatens teachers' long-term professional identity and social participation. Teaching is widely regarded as a respected and service-oriented profession, and when teachers are unable to fulfill this role, they may experience feelings of invisibility and social marginalization. Without supportive narratives that recognize unemployment as a systemic issue rather than a personal failure, unemployed teachers may withdraw from professional communities, avoid social interactions that trigger feelings of shame, and disengage from civic or educational spaces where their skills could otherwise be valued. This withdrawal weakens their sense of belonging and limits opportunities for informal teaching, mentoring, or community engagement that could sustain their professional identity during periods of unemployment. In the absence of responsive policies and institutional support, dignity loss thus has the potential to produce long-term disengagement from the teaching profession, contributing to attrition even among highly motivated and qualified graduates.

Table 1. The Essence of the Lived Experience of Unemployment among Teachers

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Emotional challenges during prolonged unemployment	Anxiety; frustration; sadness; emotional exhaustion; self-doubt	"I often feel a mix of frustration, anxiety, and sadness... I start questioning my abilities." (IDI P1)	Unemployment Is Experienced as Persistent Emotional Turbulence and Psychological Distress	Teacher unemployment was lived as a psychologically exhausting condition marked by anxiety, emotional fatigue, and diminishing self-confidence.
Daily realities of waiting for employment	Repetitive routines; lack of structure; feeling stuck	"My days are filled with anxious waiting and repetitive routines." (IDI P1)	Unemployment Is Lived as a Prolonged State of Waiting and Suspension	Unemployment was experienced as being placed on hold, where daily life lacked structure, direction, and future certainty.

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Economic conditions during unemployment	Financial anxiety; survival jobs; family dependence	"I'm hustling with random jobs just to survive." (IDI P5)	Economic Insecurity Intensifies the Experience of Teacher Unemployment	Financial instability compounded emotional distress and shifted focus from professional growth to basic survival. Unemployment was not perceived as temporary joblessness but as the painful interruption of a deeply held vocational purpose.
Being trained but unable to enter the profession	Wasted preparation; blocked vocation; unfulfilled calling	"Teaching is a calling I cannot fulfill." (IDI P6)	Unemployment Is Experienced as a Blocked Professional Calling	Unemployment was experienced as an identity wound that diminished dignity, social value, and self-esteem.
Impact of unemployment on self-worth	Loss of confidence; stigma; invisibility	"I feel embarrassed when people ask what I do." (IDI P7)	Unemployment Undermines Personal Dignity and Sense of Self-Worth	

Meaning-Making of Professional Identity and Hope during Teacher Unemployment

Table 2 presents the meaning-making processes employed by unemployed teachers as they negotiated changes in professional identity, hope, and self-understanding during prolonged unemployment. The themes illustrate how unemployment did not merely disrupt employment trajectories but deeply influenced how teachers perceived themselves, their profession, and their future. Across narratives, teachers described identity fragility, active identity

reconstruction, fluctuating hope, existential uncertainty, and socially mediated meanings. Collectively, the table demonstrates that unemployment functioned as a critical period of identity negotiation, where teachers continuously interpreted, questioned, and redefined what it meant to be a teacher in the absence of institutional affiliation.

Theme 1: Professional Identity Becomes Fragile in the Absence of Institutional Affiliation

This theme captures how teachers' professional identities weakened when detached from formal teaching roles and institutional belonging. Participants consistently linked their sense of being a "real teacher" to having a classroom, learners, and an official appointment. Despite licensure and training, unemployment made participants feel professionally invisible, hesitant, and uncertain about their legitimacy as educators. The absence of institutional validation thus destabilized identity that was previously clear and confidently held.

*"I feel like my identity as a teacher has become fragile because I don't belong to a school anymore. Without a classroom or students, I sometimes feel like I'm not a real teacher."
(ID12.1.1)*

*"I feel unsure when people ask me what I do, because I hesitate to say I am a teacher without being employed."
(ID12.1.2)*

*"I feel like my professional identity depends so much on having an institution behind me, and without it, I feel incomplete."
(ID12.1.3)*

*"I feel less confident introducing myself as a teacher now compared to when I just graduated."
(ID12.1.4)*

*"I feel that being unemployed makes my teacher identity feel weak, even if I know I am qualified."
(ID12.1.5)*

The implications of this theme suggest that teacher identity is highly institutionalized and vulnerable to disruption during unemployment. When identity is strongly tied to employment status, prolonged joblessness can erode confidence, professional voice, and sense of belonging. This highlights the need for institutional mechanisms that sustain professional identity beyond employment, such as alumni networks, teaching fellowships, or interim teaching engagements that maintain teachers' connection to the profession even while unemployed.

This interpretation gains support from the findings of Reyes (2021), who observed that licensed but jobless teachers often experience identity insecurity when detached from schools. The results corroborate the study of Johnson (2022), which showed that unemployed teachers in the UK struggled to maintain professional identity without institutional affiliation. This is congruent with Kim (2023), who found that identity fragility was common among unemployed licensed teachers in Seoul.

Theme 2: Teacher Identity Is Reconstructed Beyond Formal Employment Status

Despite identity fragility, many participants actively reconstructed their teacher identity beyond formal employment. Teachers reframed teaching as a vocation, moral commitment, or intrinsic value rather than a position-dependent role. This reconstruction allowed participants to preserve dignity and purpose despite unemployment. Teaching was described as something they “carry within” rather than something granted solely by institutions. This meaning-making process served as a coping strategy that protected identity against complete erosion.

“I feel that even without a job, I am still a teacher at heart because teaching is who I am.” (ID12.2.1)

“I feel that being a teacher is not just about having a position, but about how I think and care for learners.” (ID12.2.2)

“I feel that my love for teaching remains even if I am not in the classroom right now.” (ID12.2.3)

“I feel that my identity as a teacher is part of my values, not just my employment.” (ID12.2.4)

“I feel that unemployment cannot take away the skills and passion I developed as a teacher.” (ID12.2.5)

The implication of this theme is that identity reconstruction plays a crucial role in sustaining resilience among unemployed teachers. When teachers redefine identity as intrinsic and values-based, they are better able to endure prolonged unemployment without abandoning the profession. Educational institutions and policymakers can support this process by validating non-traditional teaching roles, recognizing informal teaching contributions, and promoting broader definitions of teacher identity beyond permanent appointments.

This result is supported by Paredes (2023), who documented identity reconstruction as a resilience mechanism among unemployed teacher graduates. The findings align with Fernández (2022), who found similar identity reframing among Ecuadorian teachers. This is consistent with Quesada (2022),

whose study in Costa Rica highlighted vocational identity as a protective factor during unemployment.

Theme 3: Fluctuating Hope Shapes Interpretations of Career Trajectories

Hope emerged as a dynamic and unstable emotional resource that strongly influenced how participants interpreted their career journeys. Teachers described cycles of optimism after submitting applications followed by despair when met with silence or rejection. These fluctuations shaped whether unemployment was seen as a temporary delay, a detour, or a permanent derailment. Hope, therefore, functioned as a lens through which teachers made sense of their professional futures.

"I feel hopeful every time I apply, but that hope disappears when I don't hear back." (ID12.3.1)

"I feel like my career is delayed when hope is still there, but derailed when hope fades." (ID12.3.2)

"I feel emotionally exhausted from constantly rebuilding hope after disappointment." (ID12.3.3)

"I feel that my motivation depends so much on whether I still believe something will change." (ID12.3.4)

"I feel that hope keeps me going, but losing it makes everything feel meaningless." (ID12.3.5)

The implications of fluctuating hope are critical in understanding why some unemployed teachers persist in the profession while others eventually disengage or exit entirely. Hope functions as a psychological anchor that sustains motivation, meaning, and emotional energy during prolonged periods of uncertainty. When hope is repeatedly raised through job applications and then diminished by silence or rejection, teachers experience an emotional cycle that is both exhausting and destabilizing. Sustained loss of hope gradually weakens teachers' belief that their efforts will lead to meaningful outcomes, making continued job searching feel futile rather than purposeful. Over time, this erosion of hope can lead teachers to reconsider their commitment to the profession, explore alternative career paths, or withdraw from teaching altogether, not because of diminished passion or competence, but because prolonged uncertainty becomes emotionally unsustainable.

This interpretation is strongly supported by existing literature. Gonzalez (2023) documented how unemployed science teachers in Davao experienced recurring emotional cycles of hope and hardship, noting that prolonged disappointment often led to emotional fatigue and weakened professional commitment. These findings corroborate the study of Ibarra (2024), who identified hope fluctuation as central to how unemployed teachers constructed meaning

around their employment struggles within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal 8. Similarly, this interpretation is congruent with the findings of Torres (2023), who observed among unemployed teacher cohorts in Chile that sustained uncertainty and repeated rejection undermined hope, while supportive institutional practices helped teachers remain engaged and resilient. Collectively, these studies affirm that fluctuating hope is a decisive factor in shaping teachers' persistence, well-being, and long-term attachment to the teaching profession.

Theme 4: Uncertainty Serves as Both a Disruptive and Transformative Force

Uncertainty was experienced as deeply destabilizing, yet simultaneously transformative. Participants described questioning career paths, reassessing goals, and reflecting on personal resilience. While uncertainty caused anxiety and fear, it also prompted introspection, adaptability, and redefinition of success. This dual nature positioned uncertainty as both a threat and an opportunity for growth.

"I feel uncertain about whether teaching will still work out for me, and that scares me." (ID12.4.1)

"I feel forced to rethink my plans because nothing is guaranteed." (ID12.4.2)

"I feel that this uncertainty has made me stronger and more reflective." (ID12.4.3)

"I feel torn between holding on and letting go of the profession." (ID12.4.4)

"I feel that uncertainty has changed how I define success and resilience." (ID12.4.5)

The theme says that, uncertainty, when unsupported, can lead to distress, but when guided, can foster growth and adaptability. Career counseling and reflective programs can help teachers navigate uncertainty constructively rather than destructively.

This finding gain support from Acuña (2022), who described uncertainty as a defining feature of the post-graduation employment gap. The findings align with Xu and Li (2023), who noted uncertainty-driven adaptation among unemployed teachers in Shanghai. This is supported by Lee and Wong (2021), who highlighted uncertainty as both disruptive and formative in Hong Kong teacher graduates.

Theme 5: Meanings of Unemployment Are Socially and Culturally Constructed

Participants' interpretations of unemployment were strongly shaped by family expectations, social norms, and cultural definitions of success. Teaching was viewed as a stable and respected profession, making unemployment particularly stigmatizing. Social comparison with employed peers intensified feelings of inadequacy, while family pressure influenced emotional responses and self-evaluation.

"I feel pressured by my family to succeed because they believe teaching should be stable." (IDI2.5.1)

"I feel judged when I compare myself to peers who already have jobs." (IDI2.5.2)

"I feel that society sees unemployment as failure, even when it's not my fault." (IDI2.5.3)

"I feel conflicted because my family supports me but also worries about my future." (IDI2.5.4)

"I feel that cultural expectations affect how I see my own worth." (IDI2.5.5)

This theme speaks that unemployment among teachers cannot be meaningfully understood without close attention to the social and cultural contexts in which it is experienced. Unemployment is not only a personal or economic condition but a socially constructed experience shaped by shared beliefs about success, productivity, and professional worth. In many communities, teaching is culturally associated with stability, respectability, and moral contribution. When teachers are unable to secure employment, this cultural expectation intensifies emotional distress, as individuals are not only coping with joblessness but also with the perceived violation of deeply embedded social norms. As a result, unemployed teachers often interpret their situation through a moral lens, experiencing shame, self-blame, and a sense of falling short of societal ideals, even when unemployment is clearly driven by structural limitations in the labor market.

Table 2 Meaning-Making of Professional Identity and Hope during Teacher Unemployment

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Shifts in professional identity during unemployment	Identity instability; hesitation; loss of confidence	"I sometimes see myself as just unemployed." (IDI P1)	Professional Identity Becomes Fragile in the Absence of	Teachers' professional identities weakened when separated from

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Reframing identity beyond employment	Teacher at heart; vocation; intrinsic identity	"I still see myself as a teacher at heart." (IDI P2)	Institutional Affiliation Teacher Identity Is Reconstructed Beyond Formal Employment Status	formal teaching roles and institutional belonging. Participants redefined teaching identity as intrinsic and values-based rather than dependent on job position. The presence or absence of hope strongly influenced how participants understood their professional future.
Influence of diminished hope on career meaning	Hope–despair cycle; doubt; emotional fluctuation	"Hope turns into disappointment when nothing happens." (IDI P7)	Fluctuating Hope Shapes Interpretations of Career Trajectories	Uncertainty destabilized participants while also prompting reflection, resilience, and identity reconstruction.
Career uncertainty and existential reflection	Career questioning; resilience; adaptation	"I wonder if I should consider another path." (IDI P6)	Uncertainty Serves as Both a Disruptive and Transformative Force	Interpretations of unemployment were shaped by cultural norms, family expectations, and peer comparison.
Role of family and social expectations	Family pressure; social comparison; judgment	"Society judges success through employment." (IDI P7)	Meanings of Unemployment Are Socially and Culturally Constructed	

Practical Insights for Educational Policy and Support Programs

Table 3 presents the practical insights that emerged from the lived experiences of unemployed teachers, focusing on how their narratives translate into concrete recommendations for educational policy, institutional practices, and support systems. Unlike the earlier tables that centered on emotional and identity-related meanings, this table foregrounds participants' reflective evaluations of systemic gaps and their proposed solutions. The themes collectively reveal that unemployed teachers do not merely endure hardship but actively diagnose structural weaknesses in recruitment, support, and governance. The table highlights five interrelated themes that frame teacher unemployment as a systemic issue requiring coordinated responses across hiring systems, emotional support structures, transitional programs, and institutional accountability.

Theme 1: Transparent and Fair Hiring Practices Are

Essential to Address Teacher Unemployment

This theme reflects participants' strong perception that opaque, delayed, and inconsistent hiring practices significantly worsen the experience of unemployment. Teachers emphasized that the absence of clear timelines, unclear ranking criteria, limited feedback, and perceived favoritism contributed to prolonged uncertainty and emotional distress. Unemployment was not viewed solely as a result of labor market saturation but as a consequence of procedural inefficiencies and inequities within recruitment systems. Participants framed transparency and fairness not as privileges but as fundamental requirements for ethical employment practices.

*"I feel frustrated because I submit applications and wait for months without any updates, and I don't even know where I stand in the process."
(ID13.1.1)*

*"I feel anxious when hiring systems are unclear, because I don't know if I was rejected or just forgotten."
(ID13.1.2)*

*"I feel discouraged when I suspect that connections matter more than qualifications."
(ID13.1.3)*

"I feel that fair and merit-based selection would at least give me peace of mind, even if I don't get hired immediately." (IDI3.1.4)

"I feel respected when systems are transparent, because it shows that applicants' efforts are valued." (IDI3.1.5)

This theme underscores significance for education governance and workforce management. Lack of transparency intensifies emotional distress, prolongs unemployment, and undermines trust in public institutions. Clear recruitment guidelines, standardized evaluation systems, accessible vacancy platforms, and timely feedback mechanisms could substantially reduce uncertainty and restore confidence among teacher applicants. Transparent hiring is not merely administrative efficiency but a psychosocial intervention that stabilizes hope and preserves professional dignity.

This finding gain support from Escobar and Ramos (2021), who identified delayed and unclear hiring cycles as key contributors to teacher unemployment in Region XII. The results corroborate the findings of Acuña (2022), who emphasized procedural opacity in Metro Manila recruitment systems. This is congruent with the study of Walker (2024), which found that transparent hiring practices reduced anxiety and attrition among unemployed teachers in Canada.

Theme 2: Emotional Support Is a Critical Component of Teacher Employment Systems

Participants consistently emphasized that emotional and psychological support was largely absent during their period of unemployment. While hiring systems focused on credentials and rankings, the emotional toll of prolonged job searching was left unaddressed. Teachers expressed the need for counseling services, mental health support, and structured emotional care specifically tailored for unemployed educators. Emotional support was framed as essential for sustaining motivation, self-worth, and resilience.

"I feel emotionally exhausted, and I wish there was someone from the system who could check on how we are coping." (IDI3.2.1)

"I feel that having access to counseling would help me manage stress and anxiety during unemployment." (IDI3.2.2)

"I feel isolated when I deal with unemployment alone without emotional support." (IDI3.2.3)

"I feel that emotional care is just as important as

finding a job.” (IDI3.2.4)

“I feel stronger when I know that my emotional struggles are acknowledged and validated.” (IDI3.2.5)

The theme points to the urgent need to integrate mental health services into teacher employment systems. Without emotional support, prolonged unemployment can lead to burnout, depression, and disengagement from the profession. Providing counseling, stress-management programs, and psychosocial services can protect teachers' well-being and preserve their capacity to enter the profession with confidence and commitment.

This result is supported by Gonzalez (2023), who documented emotional exhaustion among unemployed teachers in Davao. The findings align with Paredes (2023), who emphasized the psychological dimension of teacher unemployment. This is consistent with Ong (2024), who argued that failure to address emotional well-being undermines SDG 8 commitments to decent work.

Theme 3: Peer and Mentorship Networks Sustain Emotional and Professional Resilience

Participants highlighted the importance of peer support and mentorship as protective mechanisms during unemployment. Interaction with fellow unemployed teachers, mentors, or senior educators helped reduce isolation, normalize struggles, and sustain professional identity. Peer networks functioned as informal spaces for encouragement, information sharing, and emotional validation, compensating for institutional gaps.

“I feel less alone when I talk to other unemployed teachers who understand what I’m going through.” (IDI3.3.1)

“I feel encouraged when mentors remind me that unemployment does not define my worth.” (IDI3.3.2)

“I feel motivated when I hear stories of others who eventually succeeded.” (IDI3.3.3)

“I feel supported when someone checks on my progress and well-being.” (IDI3.3.4)

“I feel that peer groups help me stay connected to the profession.” (IDI3.3.5)

The result suggests that formalizing mentorship and peer-support structures could significantly strengthen unemployed teachers' resilience. Institutionalizing support groups, alumni mentoring programs, and professional learning communities for unemployed teachers can maintain engagement, professional growth, and emotional stability during employment gaps.

This gains support from Navarro and Santos (2021), who documented the role of community support in rural teacher unemployment. The findings corroborate Ibarra (2024), who emphasized peer networks in sustaining hope under SDG 8. This is congruent with Sánchez and Tan (2024), who highlighted mentorship as a buffer against professional disengagement.

Theme 4: Transitional Support Programs Can Bridge the Employment Gap

Participants emphasized the need for transitional programs that provide temporary engagement, income, and professional continuity while awaiting permanent employment. Suggested programs included short-term teaching contracts, community tutoring, volunteer teaching with compensation, and internship-style placements. These were viewed as practical mechanisms to prevent skill stagnation and economic hardship.

"I feel that temporary teaching roles would help me stay active in the profession." (IDI3.4.1)

"I feel that short-term contracts could reduce the gap between graduation and employment." (IDI3.4.2)

"I feel more confident when I can still practice teaching, even informally." (IDI3.4.3)

"I feel that transitional programs would help me survive financially and professionally." (IDI3.4.4)

"I feel that bridging opportunities would prevent teachers from leaving the profession." (IDI3.4.5)

The implications of this theme are critical for workforce sustainability. Transitional programs reduce attrition, preserve skills, and protect professional identity. Without such mechanisms, prolonged unemployment risks pushing qualified teachers into permanent career shifts away from education.

This interpretation is supported by De la Cruz (2024), who argued for transitional employment under SDG 8. The findings align with Hassan and Patel (2021), who emphasized bridging programs in Kenya. This is consistent with Torres (2023), who documented transitional teaching initiatives in Chile.

Theme 5: Teacher Unemployment Requires Shared Institutional

and Government Responsibility

Participants consistently rejected the notion that unemployment was an individual failure. Instead, they framed it as a shared structural responsibility involving government agencies, educational institutions, and communities. Teachers emphasized that systemic alignment between teacher supply, deployment, and support mechanisms was necessary to address unemployment sustainably.

“I feel that this problem cannot be solved by individual effort alone.” (IDI3.5.1)

“I feel that government agencies must create more teaching positions.” (IDI3.5.2)

“I feel that institutions should help graduates transition into employment.” (IDI3.5.3)

“I feel that communities can help by creating local teaching opportunities.” (IDI3.5.4)

“I feel that shared responsibility would make unemployment less painful and isolating.” (IDI3.5.5)

The theme emphasizes the necessity of coordinated and systemic policy responses to teacher unemployment. The lived experiences of unemployed teachers reveal that joblessness is not the result of individual inadequacy, lack of effort, or insufficient competence, but rather the outcome of structural misalignments within educational and labor systems. Fragmented policies, delayed hiring processes, oversupply of teacher graduates, and weak coordination between training institutions and employing agencies collectively produce conditions where qualified teachers remain excluded from the workforce. Addressing teacher unemployment therefore requires integrated planning that aligns teacher education, workforce forecasting, recruitment systems, and deployment mechanisms, rather than isolated or short-term interventions that place responsibility solely on individual graduates.

This result is strongly supported by existing scholarship. Malicdem (2022) emphasized that structural barriers, including limited plantilla items and misaligned teacher deployment systems, are primary drivers of teacher unemployment in the Philippines. The findings corroborate the study of Uddin and Rahman (2022), who framed teacher unemployment as a governance issue under Sustainable Development Goal 8, highlighting the role of state systems in ensuring decent and sustainable employment. This interpretation is congruent with Xu and Li (2023), who underscored state responsibility in aligning teacher supply with labor market demand, arguing that effective policy intervention requires coordinated planning and institutional accountability. Collectively, these

studies reinforce the conclusion that teacher unemployment demands systemic, collaborative, and sustained policy action grounded in shared responsibility rather than individual blame.

Table 3. Policy-Relevant Insights Drawn from the Lived Experiences of Unemployed Teachers

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Perceived issues in hiring and recruitment systems	Transparency; fairness; clear timelines	“Hiring should be more transparent and timely.” (IDI P1)	Transparent and Fair Hiring Practices Are Essential to Address Teacher Unemployment	Teacher unemployment was perceived as rooted in systemic hiring inefficiencies rather than individual inadequacy.
Emotional and psychological support needs	Counseling; mental health services	“Mental health support would be invaluable.” (IDI P2)	Emotional Support Is a Critical Component of Teacher Employment Systems	Psychological well-being was viewed as equally important as job placement in addressing unemployment.
Value of peer and mentoring support	Support groups; mentorship	“Support groups would reduce isolation.” (IDI P1)	Peer and Mentorship Networks Sustain Emotional and Professional Resilience	Collective support was seen as vital for maintaining emotional stability and professional confidence.
Need for financial and transitional assistance	Subsidies; temporary work; bridging programs	“Temporary teaching roles could help.” (IDI P4)	Transitional Support Programs Can Bridge the Employment Gap	Bridging mechanisms were viewed as practical strategies to ease financial strain while preserving professional identity.

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Perceived institutional and government responsibility	Structural reform; shared accountability	“Individual effort alone cannot solve this.” (IDI P4)	Teacher Unemployment Requires Shared Institutional and Government Responsibility	Participants framed teacher unemployment as a structural issue requiring coordinated action from institutions and government.

Synthesis of the Results

The synthesis of findings from this qualitative inquiry reveals that teacher unemployment is a multidimensional and deeply human experience shaped by emotional, identity-related, economic, social, and structural factors. Across participants' narratives, unemployment was consistently experienced not merely as the absence of work but as a prolonged condition of emotional turbulence, uncertainty, and suspended professional life. Teachers described persistent anxiety, frustration, diminished self-worth, and psychological exhaustion resulting from repeated rejection, unclear hiring processes, and extended waiting periods. This synthesis is consistent with the findings of Barrios and Cruz (2021), Gonzalez (2023), and Johnson (2022), who documented similar emotional distress and psychological vulnerability among unemployed teachers in the Philippines and abroad.

Importantly, the synthesis reveals that the meanings teachers attached to unemployment were socially and culturally constructed. Family expectations, community norms, and societal narratives that equate success with stable employment amplified feelings of shame, stigma, and perceived failure. This socially mediated meaning-making process is consistent with the findings of Navarro and Santos (2021), Valdez (2021), and Zamora (2023), all of whom documented how cultural expectations and social comparison shaped unemployed teachers' self-perceptions and emotional experiences.

Finally, the synthesis of results demonstrates that teacher unemployment is a complex, layered phenomenon that affects emotional well-being, professional identity, economic stability, and social participation. The findings reinforce global and local literature that calls for a shift from individualizing unemployment toward recognizing it as a structural and policy-driven issue. Addressing teacher unemployment therefore requires integrated, compassionate, and evidence-based responses that protect teachers' dignity, sustain hope, and align educational systems with the realities of labor market demand.

IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter presented the implications and directions for future research arising from the focus of the study on the lived experiences of unemployed teachers as they navigated prolonged job searching and delayed entry into the teaching profession. It emphasized the need to understand teacher unemployment as a multidimensional and structural issue that affects emotional well-being, professional identity, dignity, and long-term commitment to teaching, while highlighting the shared responsibility of educational institutions, government agencies, and communities in creating transparent hiring systems, supportive transition mechanisms, and humane employment policies. The chapter further underscored the importance of continued research that centers teachers' voices, examines unemployment across diverse contexts, and evaluates policy and program interventions aimed at promoting decent work, sustainable teacher employment, and inclusive educational systems.

Implications and Directions for Future Research

On the Essence of the Lived Experience of Unemployment among Teachers

The findings of this study imply that teacher unemployment must be understood as a complex lived condition rather than a temporary employment gap. The essence of unemployment, as described through teachers' personal narratives, revealed persistent emotional distress, prolonged uncertainty, economic insecurity, and erosion of dignity. These implications challenge labor market approaches that reduce unemployment to numerical indicators and instead call for policies and research frameworks that foreground emotional well-being, identity disruption, and social participation. Understanding unemployment as a holistic lived experience underscores the need for humane and responsive systems that recognize the psychological and social costs borne by unemployed teachers (Barrios & Cruz, 2021; Gonzalez, 2023; Johnson, 2022).

Future research should also explore comparative and cross-cultural analyses of teacher unemployment. While this study focused on a specific regional context, similar patterns have been documented globally. Comparative studies across regions, countries, and education systems could identify structural similarities and context-specific differences, strengthening evidence-based policy responses. Such research would contribute to global discussions on teacher workforce planning, employment equity, and sustainable education systems (Lee & Wong, 2021; Torres, 2023; Quesada, 2022).

On the Meaning-Making, Professional Identity, and Loss of Hope

The findings of this study imply that unemployment significantly disrupts teachers' professional identity and meaning-making processes. Teaching was consistently described as a vocation rather than a mere occupation, making unemployment a deeply personal and existential experience. The fragility of professional identity in the absence of institutional affiliation highlights the extent to which identity is socially and structurally constructed. This suggests that teacher education and employment systems must acknowledge identity maintenance as a critical concern during employment transitions (Paredes, 2023; Reyes, 2021; Fernández, 2022).

Future research should further examine identity reconstruction processes among unemployed teachers. While some participants reframed teaching as an intrinsic identity beyond formal employment, others struggled to sustain this reframing. Future qualitative studies could explore protective factors that enable successful identity reconstruction, such as mentorship, peer networks, or engagement in informal teaching roles. Understanding these mechanisms could inform targeted support programs that preserve professional identity during unemployment (Paredes, 2023; Quesada, 2022; Xu & Li, 2023).

Additional research is also needed to examine hope as a dynamic psychological resource. Mixed-methods or longitudinal designs could investigate how hope fluctuates over time, what institutional practices influence its stability, and how hope relates to persistence, mental health, and eventual employment outcomes. Such research would deepen understanding of emotional sustainability in the teaching workforce and inform interventions that promote resilience without placing undue responsibility on individuals (Gonzalez, 2023; Kim, 2023; Johnson, 2022).

On the Policy and Support Systems

The findings of this study imply that teacher unemployment is fundamentally a structural and governance issue rather than an individual failure. Participants consistently identified systemic barriers such as limited plantilla positions, delayed

hiring cycles, opaque recruitment processes, and weak transition support. These insights call for coordinated policy responses that align teacher education, workforce planning, recruitment systems, and deployment mechanisms. Fragmented or isolated interventions are insufficient to address the complexity of teacher unemployment (Malicdem, 2022; Uddin & Rahman, 2022; Xu & Li, 2023).

The study also underscores the importance of emotional and psychological support as a core component of teacher employment systems. Participants viewed counseling services, peer support groups, and mentorship programs as essential yet largely absent. This implies that support systems should be institutionalized rather than left to informal networks. Integrating mental health services into employment and transition programs could protect teachers' well-being and prevent burnout before entry into the profession (Gonzalez, 2023; Ong, 2024; Paredes, 2023).

Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of policy interventions designed to address teacher unemployment. Studies could examine the impact of transitional programs, mentorship initiatives, hiring reforms, and financial assistance on employment outcomes, teacher well-being, and retention. Comparative policy studies across regions and countries would further strengthen evidence-based decision-making and contribute to the development of sustainable, equitable teacher employment systems (Acuña, 2022; Ibarra, 2024; Sanchez & Tan, 2024)

Overall Implications and Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study carry significant implications for how teacher unemployment is understood, addressed, and researched. Overall, the results demonstrate that unemployment among teachers is not merely an employment gap but a complex lived experience that affects emotional well-being, professional identity, dignity, and long-term commitment to the teaching profession. The persistence of anxiety, loss of hope, economic insecurity, and identity disruption among unemployed teachers suggests that current employment and deployment systems insufficiently account for the human dimensions of joblessness.

The study also implies that emotional and psychological support must be embedded within teacher employment and transition systems. The prevalence of emotional exhaustion, fluctuating hope, and diminished self-worth among unemployed teachers indicates that mental health considerations are integral to workforce sustainability. Support mechanisms such as counseling services, peer and mentorship networks, and career guidance programs can help stabilize hope, preserve professional identity, and prevent premature attrition from the profession.

In terms of future research, there is a strong need for longitudinal studies that examine how unemployment experiences evolve over time and influence teachers' eventual employment outcomes, professional performance, and retention. Tracking teachers from graduation through periods of unemployment and into employment would provide deeper insight into the long-term consequences of delayed workforce entry. Such research could also explore how early experiences of exclusion or support shape teachers' resilience, identity formation, and commitment to teaching across their careers (Acuña, 2022; Reyes, 2021; Xu & Li, 2023).

Finally, future research should expand toward comparative, cross-regional, and cross-national investigations of teacher unemployment. While this study focused on a specific context, similar challenges have been documented in both developing and developed education systems. Comparative research could identify common structural patterns, effective policy interventions, and context-sensitive solutions that promote equitable and sustainable teacher employment. Additionally, evaluative studies of hiring reforms, transitional employment programs, and support interventions are needed to generate evidence-based policies that protect teachers' dignity, well-being, and professional identity while strengthening education systems as a whole (Fernández, 2022; Torres, 2023; Ibarra, 2024; Walker, 2024).

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