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## **Teacher Attrition in Bhutan: Are Personal or Professional Factors more Influential?**

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## ABSTRACT

*This study explores the rising teacher attrition rate in Bhutanese schools, examining the personal and professional factors influencing teachers' decisions to leave the profession. The Push-Pull-Mooring (PPM) Theory serves as the theoretical framework, explaining teacher attrition through push factors that drive teachers away from their current roles, the pull factors attract them toward new professions, and the mooring factors either facilitate or hinder resignation decisions. A qualitative secondary data analysis was conducted, using existing teacher resignation information from various online platforms. Findings indicate that professional factors such as excessive workload, limited career progression, weak leadership, and policy constraints are more influential than the personal factors such as low salaries, lack of financial incentives, and parental disengagement, intensifying teachers' job dissatisfaction.*

**Keywords:** Personal factors, push-pull-mooring theory, professional factors, secondary qualitative research, teacher attrition in Bhutan

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## INTRODUCTION

**T**eacher attrition is a growing challenge in Bhutan, posing significant implications for the country's education system and its vision of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Teacher attrition referred to the premature or voluntary resignation of teachers from the profession (Macdonald, 1999). According to

Sharma (2024), the attrition rate in Bhutan in the year 2024 was 6.9%, which is twice the value as compared to the previous year (3.8%). In terms of numbers, 545 teachers left the profession in the year 2024 (Ministry of Education and Skills Development, 2024). As presented in Table 1, the overall rate of teacher resignations has exhibited an upward trajectory, notwithstanding a brief decline observed in 2020. As Dorji (2024) notes, teacher attrition in Bhutan continues to escalate, despite the teaching profession being among the highest remunerated occupations in the country.

**Table 1**

*Number of Public-School Teachers Leaving the Education System.*

Year	Total teachers	Total resignations	Voluntary resignations
2026	8,297	290	200
2017	8,644	345	260
2018	8,824	355	263
2019	8,518	480	277
2020	9,388	163	112
2021	9,185	353	224
2022	9,860	478	307
2023	9,593	371	284

*Note.* The table presents the total number of teachers, total resignations, and voluntary resignations recorded between 2016 and 2023 (Dorji, 2024).

Significantly, the concerning factor is the increasing number of voluntary resignations of teachers, despite the government endorsing a 35% to 55% salary increase and a 5% to 15% teaching allowance on the basic pay to motivate teachers (Katel, 2023; Ministry of Finance, 2019). Moreover, in 2023, in accordance with the national pay raise in Bhutan, teachers benefited from an increase in teaching allowance (Pelden & Dorji, 2023). As a result, the financial incentive has provided temporary relief but may have failed to ensure long-term teacher retention (Rigdel et al., 2025).

### **Statement of the Problem**

A study on teacher attrition in Bhutan is particularly important in the context of STEM education, as the country’s ongoing reforms to promote science and technology depend heavily on retaining qualified and motivated teachers. The shortage of trained STEM educators has created a widening skills gap, threatening the effectiveness of Bhutan’s education modernization goals (Dorji, 2024). Therefore, understanding the factors contributing to teacher attrition is critical for

strengthening Bhutan's STEM education system and achieving long-term educational and economic development.

Hence, teacher attrition continues to pose a significant challenge to the education system, despite various interventions aimed at improving teacher retention. Prior research has identified a range of contributing factors, including gender, qualifications, job satisfaction, inadequate infrastructure, excessive workload, limited professional development opportunities, insufficient compensation, challenging working conditions, and ineffective school leadership (Choden, 2019; Dorji, 2020; Dorji et al., 2019; Rinzin, 2022; Wangchuk & Dorji, 2020). In response, the government has implemented financial incentives, such as salary increases and enhanced teaching allowances, to address the issue. However, the persistence of high resignation rates suggests that these measures alone are insufficient. This indicates that teacher attrition is a complex, multifaceted problem that warrants deeper investigation to uncover the underlying causes and to inform more effective retention strategies.

To address this complexity, the present study employs the Push-Pull-Mooring (PPM) theory as a conceptual framework to examine the factors influencing teachers' decisions to leave the profession. By categorizing personal and professional influences within the push, pull, and mooring dimensions, the study aims to systematically analyze the interplay of these factors. This theoretical lens supports the interpretation of findings and guides the discussion in relation to the study's aims and objectives. Ultimately, the research seeks to generate data-driven insights that can inform policy development, including incentives, training programs, curriculum reforms, and balanced workload distribution, with particular attention to supporting all teachers, including those in STEM education.

## **Aim**

This study aims to examine whether personal or professional factors have a greater influence on teacher decisions and rate of attrition in Bhutanese schools.

**Research Objective 1:** To identify and categorize the personal and professional factors that contribute to teacher attrition.

**Research Objective 2:** To examine and compare the influence of personal and professional factors on teachers' final decision to leave the teaching profession.

**RQ1:** What are the key personal and professional factors influencing teachers' decisions to resign?

**RQ2:** Which type of factor, personal or professional, has a greater influence on teachers' final decision to leave the profession?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher attrition has become a global issue as it adversely impacts other educators, students, and educational institutions. A high attrition rate increases the workload and stress levels of remaining teachers, which raises the risk of burnout and job dissatisfaction (Allotta, 2023; Li et al., 2022). According to Amitai and Van Houtte (2022), frequent teacher departures disrupt the continuity of student learning, which consequently affects their academic progress and achievement (Calvert, 2022). Additionally, countries experiencing high teacher attrition must allocate substantial financial resources to recruit and train new educators, funds that could otherwise be invested in improving educational infrastructure (Koerber et al., 2023).

This literature review analyses peer-reviewed journals published between 2022 and 2025 to explore the key factors contributing to teacher attrition in Bhutan. It specifically focuses on how personal factors, including individual, interpersonal, and community influences, as well as professional factors at the organizational and industrial levels, impact teachers' decisions to resign from the profession.

### **Personal Factors: Individual, Interpersonal, and Community**

#### *Individual Factors*

Teacher attrition is significantly shaped by individual-level factors, especially in remote and underserved regions such as rural Bhutan. Early-career teachers are particularly vulnerable, with many considering teaching as a temporary role rather than a long-term vocation. This outlook is intensified by difficult living conditions, professional isolation, and motivational decline, all of which contribute to high turnover rates among novice educators (Dlamini et al., 2023; Rigdel et al., 2025). A critical factor underlying these trends is the persistent gap between teacher training and the realities of classroom practice. Inadequate preparation leaves many teachers stressed, with diminished self-efficacy, making the profession unsustainable (Childs et al., 2025). Similar patterns emerge internationally; for example, in Rwanda, limited access to professional development exacerbates burnout and disengagement (Zeitlin, 2021).

Motivational dynamics also play a significant role. While many teachers begin their careers driven by strong intrinsic motivation and idealistic goals, these aspirations are often eroded by structural challenges such as low compensation, limited career advancement, and demanding work conditions. This phenomenon, referred to as “motivation erosion,” is particularly acute in remote schools lacking adequate institutional support (Dlamini et al., 2023). Comparable findings in Ghana further affirm how dissatisfaction with working conditions and compensation leads to attrition, even among initially passionate educators (Nleguribi Dimbu, 2022).

### *Interpersonal Factors*

Interpersonal relationships with family, colleagues, and students play a crucial role in shaping teacher retention across different contexts (Steiner et al., 2022). In Bhutan, teachers often face significant familial responsibilities, such as caring for extended relatives, which frequently clash with professional duties and contribute to stress and eventual resignation (Rigdel et al., 2025). Similar challenges are observed in India, where cultural expectations place strong emphasis on family obligations (Pushpalatha & Keshamma, 2024), and in Kenya, where economic pressures require teachers to support large families, further increasing their burden (Njuguna et al., 2022). In contrast, countries like the United States and Finland have institutional support systems, such as parental leave and childcare services, that help educators manage family responsibilities and remain in the profession (Salonen & Koivisto, 2024).

Collegial relationships also influence teachers' experiences and decisions to stay in the field. In Bhutan, supportive peer interactions help foster a sense of community and reduce feelings of isolation (Rigdel et al., 2025; Zangmo, 2023). However, in environments where cooperation is lacking, teachers often feel undervalued and disconnected (Chang, 2023). In India, competitive work cultures undermine collaboration and weaken professional bonds (Pandey & Sayed, 2024), while in the United States, structured mentorship programs provide guidance and emotional support, particularly for early-career teachers (Badescu, 2024).

Interactions with students present another critical interpersonal dimension. In Bhutan, classroom management and addressing diverse learning needs are ongoing challenges that often lead to teacher burnout (Karma, 2024). Similar issues are found in Kenya and India, where overcrowded classrooms and limited resources place additional strain on teachers (Cheruiyot, 2024; Pandey & Sayed, 2024). In contrast, teachers in the United States benefit from professional development programs focused on classroom management (Badescu, 2024), and Finland's education system prioritizes student well-being and personalized learning, both of which help reduce teacher stress and support positive teacher-student relationships (Nordmyr et al., 2024).

### *Community Factors*

The community plays an essential role in supporting teacher retention. Teachers who work in environments where they receive consistent positive feedback and public recognition from the community often demonstrate higher resilience and greater job satisfaction. Research by Ledger et al. (2024) and Qingchen and Zhang (2024) show that when communities actively participate in school activities, provide resources, and acknowledge teachers' contributions, they help create a supportive atmosphere that enhances professional fulfillment.

On the other hand, a lack of community involvement can have harmful effects. As for Qingchen and Zhang (2024), teachers who are excluded from community

and school-related activities frequently experience elevated stress and feelings of devaluation. This sense of isolation can lead to long-term professional disengagement, diminishing their motivation and sense of belonging (Han, 2022). While financial incentives can temporarily boost morale, they are not sufficient in the absence of strong community support. Furthermore, Bisht et al. (2025) argue that community recognition and involvement are more influential in sustaining teacher motivation over time.

## **Professional Factors: Organizational and Industrial**

### *Organizational Factors*

Organizational factors, including teachers' relationships with school administration and the quality of their working conditions, play a crucial role in influencing teacher retention (Zavelevsky & Lishchinsky, 2020). One key aspect within the organizational environment is the nature of leadership exercised by school administrators. Research shows that the quality of leadership directly affects teachers' professional commitment. For instance, Lochmiller et al. (2024) found that when teachers perceive their administrators as supportive and responsive, they are more likely to remain in the profession. Leadership that emphasizes emotional intelligence and psychological well-being, particularly through transformational approaches, has been shown to positively impact organizational commitment (Li et al., 2024). Similarly, Gorham and Fufaa (2024) highlight that psychosocial support from leadership serves as a powerful motivator, contributing to a more stable and engaged teaching workforce.

Beyond leadership, the broader working conditions within schools significantly influence teacher attrition. As García et al. (2022) argue, a supportive work environment characterized by strong teacher voice, minimal school-level problems, and elevated teacher morale contributes substantially to teacher retention. In contrast, heavy workloads, lack of recognition, and the resulting toll on physical and mental health are among the leading causes of teacher burnout and exit from the profession (Chen et al., 2022; Heffernan et al., 2022). Furthermore, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching resources, and excessive administrative burdens are also major contributors to teacher dissatisfaction (Darron et al., 2023; Koerber et al., 2023).

Empirical evidence from Bhutan further supports the impact of working conditions on teacher attrition. Studies by Dorji et al. (2023), Gyeltshen (2024), and Tshering and Phuntsho (2022) consistently identify unfavorable working environments as major contributors to teacher dissatisfaction and departure. However, research also indicates that certain organizational practices can mitigate these challenges. According to Veliz and Mainsbridge (2024), the importance of professional learning communities, mentorship programs, teacher autonomy, and

strong collegial relationships in enhancing teacher well-being and professional satisfaction.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of teacher preparation and induction programs plays a crucial role in attrition rates. Research indicates that new teachers without adequate training and mentorship are more likely to leave within their first few years (Koerber et al., 2023). Without structured induction programs and ongoing support, early career educators struggle to adapt, contributing to long-term workforce instability (Cells et al., 2023).

### *Industrial Factors*

Industrial factors, comprising policy interventions and standards, play a role in shaping teacher retention. The high-stakes teacher accountability policies have been directly linked to teacher burnout and increased turnover (Aulia & Haerani, 2022). Systems that emphasize punitive measures rather than constructive feedback and growth-oriented assessments create additional pressure, particularly in under-resourced schools (Darron et al., 2023). In Bhutan, one such performance and assessment of teacher professionalism is the Bhutan Professional Standards for Teachers (BPST), which outlines the set standards one must comply to in the teaching industry in Bhutan. The Bhutan Professional Standards for Teachers (BPST) represents a significant policy initiative aimed at enhancing teacher quality and professionalizing the teaching workforce in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Studies indicate that the BPST has been met with a generally positive reception among educators. For instance, Wangda (2023) revealed that many educators perceive the standards as instrumental in clarifying professional expectations and enhancing teaching competencies, which in turn positively influences student academic outcome. The alignment of BPST with Bhutanese cultural values and its emphasis on continuous professional growth further contribute to its acceptance among teachers (Ministry of Education, 2020). Despite these positive perceptions, the implementation of BPST has also introduced challenges that may impact teacher retention. Notably, the increased administrative responsibilities associated with compliance to the standards have been linked to heightened stress levels among teachers (Dorji, 2024).

The other performance assessment mechanism is the Individual Work Plan (IWP) founded in 2017 with amendments suggested to it in 2024 (Tshering, 2024). In Bhutan, the Individual Work Plan (IWP) has been identified as a contributing factor to teacher attrition. Teachers perceive it as an additional administrative burden, requiring extensive documentation and potentially creating unnecessary stress (Dorji et al., 2025). However, concerns have been raised by some educators regarding the fairness of the evaluation process. Teachers who demonstrate impressive performance in practice but fall short in documentation often receive lower scores and may be placed in the “Need Improvement” category. According

to a report by the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (2023), this has led to frustration among educators, with some arguing that the current system may unintentionally lower morale and cause tension within school communities.

This literature review points to a significant research gap in understanding teacher attrition in Bhutan. A significant gap in the existing literature is the lack of understanding regarding whether personal or professional factors play a more decisive role in teachers' ultimate decision to resign from the profession. While prior studies have explored personal factors and organisational determinants, limited research has assessed which of these factors are more influential on teacher's attrition.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework used to discuss the findings of this study is the Push, Pull, and Mooring (PPM) Theory. The PPM theory was originally developed to explain human migration patterns (Clark et al., 1996). But in recent years, this theory has been increasingly used in the field of educational research (Heffernan et al., 2022; Lisana, 2023; Zhu et al., 2023). Within this theoretical framework, the push factors drive teachers away from their current roles, the pull factors attract them toward new professions, and the mooring factors either facilitate or hinder resignation decisions (Heffernan et al., 2022). As highlighted by Fu (2011), teacher departure represents a switching behavior that aligns with the PPM theoretical perspective and serves as an effective framework for understanding teacher attrition.

The PPM framework's flexibility was suitable for this study, as it does not impose rigid metrics for push, pull, or mooring factors, unlike other theoretical models that focus solely on behavioral aspects of teacher attrition (Heffernan et al., 2022). The PPM framework allows researchers to identify unique factors relevant to specific research objectives. It enables a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics involved in teacher attrition, making it an appropriate theoretical foundation for investigating why teachers choose to exit the profession prematurely. The study specifically focused on the push factors, which comprise the factors influencing teachers to leave the profession.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

#### *Philosophical Assumptions*

The study is grounded in interpretivist epistemology, which views knowledge as subjective and socially constructed. It uses qualitative methods to explore human experiences. Ontologically, it follows constructivism, asserting that reality

is shaped by social and cultural contexts, leading to multiple interpretations of truth (Ignacio & Paras, 2024). Axiologically, the study acknowledges the researchers' values, emphasizing diversity, inclusivity, and equity to guide ethical and meaningful research outcomes (Gupta et al., 2023).

## **Research Method**

The interpretivist philosophical positioning of the study made a qualitative research framework preferable and applicable (Creswell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2016). A qualitative framework was preferred over a quantitative or mixed-methods framework because the study focused on understanding the underlying reasons behind teacher attrition, which required an in-depth exploration of experiences, perceptions, and systemic factors. Since the study relied on secondary data, a secondary qualitative research methodology using online data was adopted (Cheong et al., 2023).

### *Secondary Qualitative Research Methodology*

A secondary qualitative research methodology research approach offers flexibility and relaxed criteria for data eligibility, making it particularly suitable for studies where primary data collection is constrained, as was in this study (Cheong et al., 2023). As Cheong et al. (2023) argue, secondary qualitative data, especially when sourced from publicly available online interviews, can be a powerful alternative when direct first-hand interviews are not feasible. In the present study, the absence of primary data necessitated reliance on secondary sources, which provided rich and relevant insights aligned with the research questions.

Although secondary qualitative research methodology provides an ethically sound means of examining pre-existing data within this study, it is accompanied by notable methodological constraints that warrant critical consideration. One major concern is the quality and relevance of the data, as it was originally collected for purposes other than the current research focus. This can lead to gaps in alignment between the data and the research objectives (Walker, 2021). Additionally, contextual understanding may be limited, as researchers lack direct engagement with participants and may miss nuanced meanings embedded in the original setting (Bishop et al., 2005). Furthermore, missing or incomplete information can hinder comprehensive analysis, especially when access to full datasets is restricted or when key variables are absent (Mora, 2022).

Despite these limitations, secondary qualitative research remains the most suitable methodology for this study. It allows for the exploration of teacher attrition using rich, pre-existing datasets that reflect real-world experiences and institutional contexts. When interpreted through a robust theoretical framework such as the Push-Pull-Mooring (PPM) theory, secondary data can yield valuable

insights into the personal and professional factors influencing teachers' decisions to leave the profession. This approach supports the study's aim to inform policy and practice without the resource constraints of primary data collection.

## **Research Methods**

Data was collected using the purposive sampling technique, which is a non-probability method in which data are deliberately chosen because they can provide rich and meaningful insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). In this study, comments were collected that met specific inclusion criteria, such as discussions on teacher attrition in Bhutan. This approach is common in qualitative and social media research, where the goal is depth of understanding rather than statistical generalization (Kozinets, 2020; Bengtsson, 2014).

Therefore, within the context of this research, secondary data were originally gathered by others for different purposes and were reused in a new context (Cheong et al., 2023). It was done by collecting online from publicly accessible platforms, including Facebook posts by *Kuensel* newspaper, articles from *Bhutan Today*, *The Bhutanese Newspaper*, *Business Bhutan*, and *Kuensel Online*, as well as content from TikTok, YouTube, and the Bhutan Broadcasting Service. Participants were selected randomly from the list of individuals who commented on these online posts. While some participants identified themselves using pseudonyms, others remained anonymous. Due to the nature of the data, it was not possible to determine participants' real names or demographic details. This anonymity, while limiting in terms of demographic analysis, ethically supported the study in the absence of formal ethical clearance, as no identifiable personal information was collected.

## **Data Analysis**

Data was analysed using secondary sources, employing thematic analysis within a qualitative research framework and guided by a secondary qualitative research methodology. This study utilized secondary data collected from 25 participants across various online platforms. The data comprised user-generated content and interactions that provided rich insights into the participants' perspectives and experiences. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), is a flexible and rigorous method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data and Table 2 exemplifies the process undertaken in this study. The analysis followed a structured process of familiarization, coding, theme development, and refinement, ensuring a comprehensive and credible interpretation of the data (Lochmiller, 2021).

## Ethical Considerations

The study relied on secondary data rather than primary data; the requirement of ethical approval application is exempted in such research environments (Cheong et al., 2023). To ensure academic integrity and prevent misrepresentation, all original data sources were appropriately acknowledged, and the authenticity of the analysis was maintained throughout the study. The potential influence of the researchers’ personal biases and preconceptions on the interpretation of themes was acknowledged and critically considered throughout the analytical process (Baldwin et al., 2022).

## RESULTS

A thematic analysis of qualitative data revealed several recurring themes contributing to teacher attrition in Bhutan. Table 2 illustrates a representative sample of the thematic analysis process undertaken in this study to reveal the themes.

**Table 2**  
*Thematic Data Analysis Sample*

Participant Name	Posted Content	Platform	Codes	Categories	Themes
Nado Shak	“One may leave for good reasons and better opportunities.”	Face-book	Better opportunities	Motivation	Lack of career progress and motivation
Tee Wang	“The two prominent reasons would be workload and working environment.”	Face-book	Workload and working environment	Work conditions	Work overload and substandard working conditions
Nyendo	“The concern lies in the quality, content delivery, and	Kuensel (News Paper)	Quality, content delivery and experience	Impact on education	Teacher Attrition Undermines Educational Quality and

	experience that we are losing.”				Student Achievement
Mr Subash	“Give comfortable salaries so teacher can survive. Less salary, more work”	Kuensel (Facebook)	Less salary more work	Salary	Low Compensation
Mr Subash	“Give comfortable salaries so teachers can survive. Less salary, more work.”	Kuensel (Facebook)	Less salary more work	Work conditions	Work overload and substandard working conditions
Loknath Sharma	“Too much workload besides teaching in school.”	Kuensel (Facebook)	Too much workload	Workload	Work overload and substandard working conditions
Shen Wow	“I am an art teacher. I taught history, STEM, and senior science for three years. It was mental and dealing with behaviour on top of that.”	TikTok	mental exhaustion and dealing with student behaviour	Work Stress and student behaviour	Teacher Stress and student misconduct
Megee2	“Why is no one talking about the executives and management	TikTok	executives and management of school	Work environment	Negative workplace culture

	of schools? The toxic culture.”		and toxic culture		
Megee2	“Why is no one talking about the executives and management of schools? The toxic culture”	TikTok	executiv es and manage ment of school and toxic culture	Managem ent	Poor Leadership
Unhingedba ndit	“This is because teachers don’t have support, lack of leadership, system pleases the parents and students can’t be disciplined due to bureaucracy.”	TikTok	bureaucr acy	Administr ation	Poor Leadership

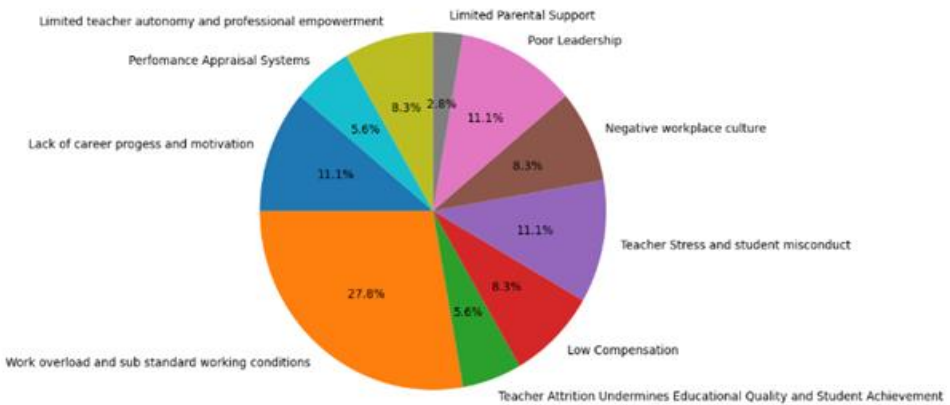
*Note.* Contents derived from the findings of this study.

As per the findings of this research, teachers in Bhutan have expressed significant dissatisfaction with their profession, citing a range of professional and personal challenges. On the professional front, recurring issues such as ineffective leadership, a negative workplace culture, student misconduct, unrealistic performance evaluation standards, and limited parental engagement have contributed to a deteriorating professional environment. Personally, educators report low compensation, excessive workloads in unsatisfactory conditions, diminished motivation, limited opportunities for career advancement, restricted professional autonomy, and elevated levels of stress, all of which reflect a profound lack of personal fulfillment and well-being within the teaching profession.

## DISCUSSION

The themes derived from the analysis highlight systemic challenges and contextual influences within the education sector, illustrating the multifaceted nature of teacher retention, as depicted in Figure 1. A visual representation is provided in figure 1 that highlights the distribution of responses, thereby offering insight into which themes were more prominent and how they align with the research questions. Thus, drawing on these themes and integrating the push and pull theoretical framework, the research questions were subsequently revisited and critically examined.

**Figure 1**  
*Key Factors Contributing to Teacher Attrition*



*Note.* The percentages were calculated by determining the frequency of each theme relative to the total number of data points collected.

### **RQ1. What are the key personal and professional factors influencing teachers' decisions to resign?**

At the personal level, insufficient and low compensation emerged as a significant theme in the findings, contributing to teacher attrition, with 8.3% of respondents citing low salaries as a reason for leaving the profession. Participant Mr Subash's insightful remark, "Give comfortable salaries so teachers can survive. Less salary, more work" captures the financial strain educators face, where stagnant wages fail to keep pace with rising workloads, leading to burnout and career exits. This is aligned with findings by Aulia and Haerani (2022), who

noted that low salaries contribute significantly to teacher turnover, especially when teachers feel their pay does not reflect the effort they put into their work.

In addition, the theme identified as 'workload and substandard working conditions' accounted for 27.8% of the total responses from the twenty-five participants in this study, indicating that excessive workload under inadequate conditions contributed significantly to feelings of demotivation. Participant Khagendra stated *“I feel that workload is another main reason for teachers leaving the system. When workload is more, but IWP ratings are low, appreciation is denied and promotion is delayed, who would like to continue the work?”* This comment by participant Khagendra reflects a clear reason why teachers are leaving the profession in Bhutan. Another participant, Robertafong holds the view: *“It's not just the low pay, but low funding for schools overall. There needs to be educational assistants, security, nurses, librarians, counselors, custodians, kitchen staff, technology support... the list is overwhelming. Everytime support staff is cut, teachers are picking up the slack”* It is evident from Robertafong's statement that beyond low salaries, chronic underfunding of schools in Bhutan has led to cuts in essential support staff, forcing teachers to take on additional non-teaching responsibilities. This added burden exacerbates workload stress and contributes to teacher dissatisfaction and attrition.

Even though the theme “work overload and substandard working conditions” stems from professional factors its impact on teachers in the form of stress is a personal one. Teachers described excessive workloads, compounded by inadequate infrastructure, and limited resources, contributing to stress and burnout. This view echoed research by Amitai and Van Houtte (2022), who argued that the lack of financial rewards for extra work compounds teachers' frustration and prompts them to seek other opportunities.

Besides inadequate compensation, limited career progression and thus resulting in demotivation, contributed 11.1% towards the findings in this study as indicated in the theme named “lack of career progress and motivation”. Participants reported limited opportunities for professional advancement, which led to decreased motivation and long-term dissatisfaction with the teaching profession. Participant Ugyen Dorji commented, *“The lack of growth and professional advancement leads to demotivation eventually prompting teachers to seek opportunities elsewhere”*. Ugyen Dorji's statement reflects how the absence of clear career pathways leads to demotivation, prompting teachers to seek alternative employment where their skills and efforts may be better recognized and rewarded. Another anonymous participant noted, *“I feel there are limited opportunities for growth and advancement in teaching career”*. This remark suggests that his long-term prospects are constrained, which undermines retention and morale. Moreover, studies by Zhang and Zhang (2023) and Patil (2023) validated these sentiments, highlighting that the perceived stagnation in career progression leads to job dissatisfaction and resignation from the profession.

In addition, the theme named “limited teacher autonomy and professional empowerment” amounted to 8.3 % of the total responses noted by participants. Participant Psalm stated “*Let teachers teach. Stop the micromanaging, admins, district official visits, and observations*”. Psalm’s comment reflects growing frustration among teachers over excessive micromanagement and lack of professional autonomy. The absence of autonomy in instructional decision-making and restricted opportunities for professional agency was identified as key deterrents to sustained engagement in the profession.

In the context of teacher attrition, the PPM Theory provides a robust framework for understanding the underlying motivations driving career shifts. Push factors, such as inadequate compensation, limited career progression, lack of motivation, excessive workload and stress, and a perceived deprivation of adequate rewards and empowerment, serve as significant deterrents within the current professional environment. These negative conditions erode job satisfaction and contribute to a sense of professional stagnation, compelling educators to consider alternative career paths.

In contrast, pull factors such as opportunities for better remuneration, professional growth, and improved work-life balance in other professions act as attractive incentives drawing teachers away from the education sector. Meanwhile, mooring factors, including personal values, social ties, and psychological readiness for change, influence the decision-making process by facilitating the transition.

Furthermore, 2.8 % of the participant responses determined that insufficient parental engagement in children’s education contributed to increasing number of teachers leaving the profession in Bhutan. Parental involvement in their children’s education appears to be on decline despite being associated with positive outcomes for students (Gurung et al., 2020). Many teachers experience burnout due to the overwhelming responsibility of ensuring student success without adequate support from parents. Participant Kezang Tshering Yoezer highlighted that “*The attrition rate is high because teachers experience burnout due to lack of parental support in their children’s learning.*” This suggested that when parents fail to reinforce learning at home, teachers must compensate by providing additional academic and emotional support, leading to stress and exhaustion.

In relation to the issue of non-parental engagement, the PPM Theory offers valuable insight into the contributing factors. Push factors, particularly the lack of parental engagement, exacerbate teacher burnout by placing the full burden of student success on teachers without sufficient external support. This imbalance not only intensifies stress but also fosters a sense of isolation and professional dissatisfaction. Such conditions align with Fu’s (2011) assertion that teacher attrition is a form of switching behaviour, driven by discontent with prevailing circumstances. Thus, inadequate parental community support can act as a catalyst for educators seeking more supportive and sustainable career alternatives.

On the professional front, 27.8% of the findings revealed that teacher attrition in Bhutan is significantly driven by work overload in substandard conditions. As previously noted, this issue impacts teachers on a personal level, yet its roots lie in broader organizational shortcomings, thus highlighting its dual effect on both individual well-being and professional stability. Many teachers report being overburdened with responsibilities that extend beyond classroom teaching, including large class sizes, teaching multiple subjects outside their specialization, and extensive administrative duties. Participant Shen Wow shared, *“I am an art teacher, yet I had to teach history, STEM, and senior science for three years. It was mentally exhausting and dealing with student behaviour on top of that made it worse.”* This highlights the unrealistic expectations placed on teachers, leading to exhaustion and stress (Amitai & Van Houtte, 2022; Cheku & Wangdi, 2021; Chen et al., 2023).

Additionally, 5.6% of teachers identified bureaucratic pressures, specifically the Bhutan Professional Standards for Teachers (BPST) and the Individual Work Plan (IWP), as significant stressors. These concerns fall under the broader theme of performance appraisal systems derived from findings of this study. Participant Khagendra noted that *“When workload is more, but IWP ratings are low, appreciation is denied and promotion is delayed, who would like to continue the work?”* Hence, it can be concurred that lack of recognition in an organisation demoralizes educators (Aulia & Haerani, 2023).

Furthermore, poor leadership in organisations as reported in 11.1% of participant responses in theme labelled “poor leadership” as is also a reason for teachers leaving the profession. Ineffective school leadership, marked by a lack of vision, inadequate support, and poor communication, emerged as a factor undermining teacher morale and contributing to attrition. Participant Krishna Kumar Sanyasi emphasized this concern, stating, *“High turnover rate among teachers is driven by combination of inadequate support from the administration and burden of meeting unrealistic expectations.”* Teachers who receive limited administrative support are more than twice as likely to leave their schools or exit the profession altogether (Lochmiller et al., 2024). Despite its significant impact, school leadership often remains unexamined, and so does the negative workplace culture in Bhutan’s educational sector.

A toxic work environment, characterized by limited collegial support and professional isolation, was frequently cited by 8.3% of the participants as a demoralizing factor. Many of the factors discussed earlier, though experienced personally, are rooted in broader organizational dynamics. As one respondent questioned, *“Why is no one talking about the executives and management of schools? The toxic culture?”* Additionally, excessive workloads, unfair administrative decisions, and ineffective leadership styles contribute to teacher dissatisfaction and increased turnover (Wangchuk & Dorji, 2020).

At the professional level, the PPM Theory provides a critical lens through which to examine the systemic challenges contributing to teacher attrition. Push factors such as unequal workload distribution, bureaucratic inefficiencies, weak leadership, and toxic work environments have rendered teaching an increasingly unsustainable profession in Bhutan. Teachers, for instance, have reported burnout stemming from unrealistic expectations, including multi-subject teaching, administrative overload, and rigid compliance with policies such as the Bhutan Professional Standards for Teachers (BPST) and the Individual Work Plan (IWP). These structural constraints, compounded by a lack of recognition and insufficient administrative support, have significantly diminished job satisfaction and prompted many to leave the profession (Lhendrup & Dema, 2021).

Within the PPM Theory framework, mooring factors, such as school leadership, workplace culture, and institutional support, can either anchor teachers in their roles or facilitate their departure. However, findings suggest that in Bhutan, these mooring factors have largely intensified dissatisfaction rather than mitigated it. In the absence of effective interventions to improve financial incentives, equitable workload distribution, and administrative leadership, push factors continue to outweigh any stabilizing mooring influences. Thus, imbalance has contributed to persistently high attrition rates, and its impact on education quality and student achievement was also noted by 5.6% of the total responses in this study.

## **RQ2. Which type of factor, personal or professional, has a greater influence on teachers' final decision to leave the profession?**

Personal and professional factors both play a role in influencing teachers' decisions to leave the profession in Bhutan. However, professional factors tend to have a stronger and more direct impact, often triggering personal consequences that collectively lead to resignation. These two categories are not always easily separated, as professional challenges frequently result in personal strain, making the decision to exit the profession a complex and intertwined process.

One of the most significant professional factors identified in this research and amounting to 27.8% of the total participant responses is work overload in substandard conditions. Although this originates from the professional domain, it has deep personal repercussions, such as burnout, stress, and demotivation. This example illustrates how professional pressures can manifest as personal struggles, reinforcing the idea that professional factors often drive personal dissatisfaction. Other major professional contributors include poor leadership (11.1% of the participant responses) and student misconduct (11.1% of the participant responses), which create a negative and unsupportive work environment. Additionally, low compensation and a toxic workplace culture further diminish teachers' morale and commitment to the profession.

On the other hand, personal factors such as lack of career progress, reduced motivation, limited autonomy, and insufficient professional empowerment also influence teacher attrition. These factors reflect individual aspirations and personal growth needs. However, their impact is often less pronounced compared to professional factors. In many cases, personal dissatisfaction stems from professional shortcomings, such as rigid institutional structures or ineffective leadership, suggesting that personal factors are frequently secondary effects of professional challenges.

Therefore, while both personal and professional factors contribute to teacher attrition, professional factors are more prevalent and influential. They not only directly affect teachers' working conditions but also indirectly shape their personal experiences, making them the primary drivers behind the decision to leave the profession.

In answering the main aim of this study, it was found that while both personal and professional factors influence teacher attrition in Bhutanese schools, professional factors have a greater impact. Challenges such as work overload, poor leadership, student misconduct, low compensation, and negative workplace culture directly affect teachers' professional lives and indirectly lead to personal consequences like burnout and stress. Although personal factors such as lack of career progress, motivation, autonomy, and empowerment contribute to attrition, they are often secondary effects of professional issues. Therefore, professional factors are more prevalent and influential in shaping teachers' final decisions to leave the profession.

## CONCLUSION

All in all, this study explored whether personal or professional factors more strongly influence teacher attrition in Bhutanese schools. Using a qualitative framework and thematic analysis of social media data, the research was guided by two questions: identifying key personal and professional factors, and determining which type has a greater impact on teachers' decisions to resign. The Push-Pull-Mooring (PPM) Theory provided a lens for interpreting findings.

Results revealed that while both personal factors (e.g., low wages, limited career growth, stress, lack of empowerment) and professional factors (e.g., excessive workload, weak leadership, toxic environments) contribute to teacher dissatisfaction, professional factors exert a stronger influence on attritional decisions. This study reinforces the relevance of the PPM Theory in understanding teacher attrition within Bhutan's socioeconomic context, highlighting the interconnected nature of personal and professional pressures rather than isolated causes.

## IMPLICATIONS

### Future Research

There is a need for longitudinal studies tracking teacher career trajectories to understand how attrition decisions evolve and what interventions might help retain educators. Further research should also examine the impact of non-academic responsibilities on teacher burnout.

### Policy Implications

Findings offer actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders, including the need for structured professional development, performance-based incentives, streamlined administrative processes, enhanced parental engagement, and stronger accountability for school leadership. This study adds valuable qualitative depth to existing quantitative research on teacher attrition in Bhutan.

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