Teacher Attrition and Motivation in Ethiopia: Prevalence, Associated Factors and Influences

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Abstract

This study examines the intricate interplay between teacher attrition and motivation, emphasizing their significant implications for educational systems, student achievement, and community wellbeing. Attrition among skilled educators driven by personal factors, institutional challenges, and interrelated variables disrupts learning environments and erodes school culture. Employing a triangulated research design, the study integrates quantitative and qualitative methods, including desk reviews, teacher surveys, focus group discussions, and administrative data analysis, to capture both statistical trends and lived experiences. Findings suggest that schools fostering supportive, secure, and well-compensated workplaces are more successful in attracting and retaining high-performing teachers. Professional development, well-being initiatives, and fair evaluation systems further enhance retention. However, economic pressures, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, with Ethiopia as a focal case, exacerbate attrition, as stagnant salaries fail to keep pace with inflation. Addressing this issue requires systemic reform and improved economic conditions. Given the diverse political, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts across regions, further localized research is essential to develop effective, sustainable solutions.

Keywords: Teacher Attrition, Teacher Motivation, Teacher Retention, Teacher Turnover

Introduction

The provision of high-quality education through the employment of a well-qualified teaching workforce and the establishment of effective school leadership remained an education policy priority for Ethiopia (Ministry of Education [MoE], 1994 & 2023). However, the education system faces mounting challenges, particularly in teacher motivation and retention, which directly impact the quality of education and student achievements. As noted by Gemeda and Tynjälä (2015a), the two greatest challenges facing the education system are the deteriorating quality of education and the decline in students' learning outcomes. Motivation—the central focus of this study, refers to the intrinsic values and personal convictions that drive individuals to pursue and remain in the teaching profession. Ethiopian teachers face numerous demotivating factors, including poor working conditions, low salaries amid high inflation, limited career

growth, lack of resources, and unsafe environments. These challenges have contributed to a growing concern over teacher attrition.

Teacher attrition, defined as leaving the profession entirely, is often conflated with teacher migration, which involves transitioning between schools. This conceptual distinction remains difficult to delineate due to the absence of systematic exit interviews and longitudinal tracking mechanisms. As Gundlach (2025) emphasises, further investigation into the differences between teacher attrition and teacher migration is necessary in order to inform policy and practice. Teacher attrition refers to teachers leaving the profession entirely, while teacher migration refers to teachers transitioning between schools.

In Ethiopia, data collection challenges have led to ambiguity in understanding teacher mobility. According to the Education Statistics 2023/24, the reasons for attrition in public schools are largely categorized under "Other," with "Change/Left teaching profession" accounting for 5.2% and "Retirement" following. Regional disparities are evident, with attrition rates ranging from 0.0% in Addis Ababa to 9.0% in Gambella.

Globally, teacher attrition rates vary significantly. According to UNESCO (2017), during the mid-to-late 2010s, primary school teacher attrition in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) was 4.8%, while attrition at the lower secondary level reached 7.3%. Some countries, such as Benin and Sierra Leone, have reported rates exceeding 20%. Scholars have identified a motivation crisis among teachers in SSA, which threatens efforts to improve education quality (Pitsoe, 2007; Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Harding & Mansaray, 2005).

In contrast, high-income countries tend to experience higher attrition rates due to broader employment opportunities. For example, Europe's average teacher attrition rate is 7.1%, with England and Scandinavia reaching 10.2% (Bennell, 2023, p. 2). As can be seen from the data presented by Bennell (2023) on annual attrition rates among primary school teachers in SSA in the mid-to-late 2010s, the attrition rate of public-school teachers in Ethiopia is about 2%, which is relatively low. In countries like Ethiopia, this relatively low rate may be viewed in the context of limited alternative career options and high teacher unemployment among job seekers (Bennell, 2023).

This study provides deeper insights into the causes and trends of teacher attrition in private schools, with their higher attrition rates. It explores the socioeconomic, cultural, and political factors influencing teacher motivation, reviews relevant theoretical frameworks, and analyzes how school allocation and economic conditions affect staffing stability. Furthermore, it offers data-driven recommendations for educational institutions and policymakers to reduce attrition rates, enhance teacher motivation through professional development and workplace incentives, and address systemic challenges to improve teacher retention.

Rationale

The continual loss of qualified and experienced teachers disrupts the learning process, undermines educational quality, and fosters instability within schools. Such turnover weakens staff morale and erodes the broader school culture. In contrast, retaining teachers strengthens relationships with students, parents, and stakeholders, building trust and mutual support. A stable and supportive environment also enables teachers to grow professionally, gain valuable experience, and enhance their instructional effectiveness, ultimately advancing the education system.

Teacher attrition further strains school resources. Administrators are compelled to divert significant time and funding toward recruitment, hiring, and training, often at the expense of other critical priorities. This cycle imposes a heavy financial burden, whereas reducing attrition would ease costs and allow schools to redirect funds toward pressing educational needs. Addressing the root causes of attrition, therefore, requires targeted interventions, including reducing excessive workloads, strengthening institutional support, and expanding opportunities for professional development.

In Ethiopia, these challenges are intensified by severe economic pressures faced by civil servants. According to the World Food Programme (June 2022), conflict and drought have driven inflation to unprecedented levels, with the Food Price Index rising by 43% compared to the previous year. Similarly, Trading Economics (2024) reported that Ethiopia's inflation rate reached 17.5% in September 2024, with food prices increasing even more sharply. These conditions place immense financial strain on teachers, whose stagnant salaries fail to keep pace with the rising cost of living.

As a result, many teachers struggle to meet basic needs. Despite minor salary adjustments, no substantial measures have been taken, leading to widespread dissatisfaction that erodes morale and diminishes passion for teaching. Economic hardship and systemic inefficiencies have forced teachers to attend school only when scheduled for classes, while many seek secondary employment to survive. This dual burden limits their ability to prepare lessons, pursue further study, and maintain physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Creativity is stifled, motivation remains low, and many teachers are present in classrooms only physically, while mentally and professionally disengaged. This reality is reflected in declining national school leaving examination results.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to explore the complex realities confronting teachers, their financial struggles, their capacity to sustain motivation under adverse conditions, and their commitment to professional responsibilities. By examining these lived experiences,

the research seeks to identify practical solutions to improve teacher well-being and strengthen the broader educational system.

Research Question

This study attempts to answer the following research questions

- What are the key factors influencing teacher attrition, and how does teacher motivation mediate the relationship between these factors and teacher retention in Ethiopia?
- Which intrinsic factors (e.g., personal values, job satisfaction, no reward or recognition, absence of professional development training, etc.) and extrinsic factors (e.g., working conditions, administrative support, low monthly salary, and institutional environment, etc.) most strongly influence teachers' decisions to leave or stay in the profession?
- What are the differences, if any, in reasons for attrition and motivation among teachers in private schools in Ethiopia?
- What effective motivational approaches or methods are being practiced in private schools in Ethiopia, and their effectiveness?
- If there are any strategies and motivational interventions in Private schools (e.g., professional development, recognition programs, etc.), to what extent have they ever influenced teacher retention and overall school performance?

Literature Review

Conducting an extensive literature search is crucial for analysing current statistical trends related to attrition and motivation across various contexts. This entails reviewing pertinent academic research to grasp the wider educational implications of these phenomena, as well as sourcing the latest available reports on the subject. To facilitate a thorough investigation, the literature review was systematically organized by themes, enabling a deeper conceptual understanding to support the study. Accordingly, the review was structured under the following subheadings: Teacher Attrition, Attrition in Sub-Saharan Africa, Teacher Motivation, and Theories of Motivation.

Teacher Attrition

Teachers play a pivotal role in the education sector, as they are at the frontline of curriculum implementation and are directly accountable for student growth and development. Consequently, teacher attrition has become a growing concern in educational research, prompting scholars to investigate its underlying causes and contributing factors. Nguyen et al. (2019) provide a comprehensive overview of this trend, noting that research on attrition has expanded substantially over the past thirteen years. They propose a refined conceptual framework that organizes determinants into three broad categories: personal, school, and external correlates, offering a more nuanced lens through which to examine retention and attrition.

Studies highlight the serious implications of teacher attrition. Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2013) demonstrate that high levels of attrition are negatively associated with student achievement, even among students whose teachers remain. Beyond academic outcomes, attrition also imposes substantial financial costs on schools, underscoring the urgency of addressing this issue. Within the school context, Nguyen et al. (2019) emphasize that teacher satisfaction is a critical factor influencing decisions to stay or leave. They further note that middle school teachers are more likely to exit than elementary teachers, and that organizational features such as disciplinary climate, administrative support, and professional development strongly shape retention. Access to adequate teaching materials also reduces attrition, whereas other school body characteristics appear to exert only a minor influence. "The role of evaluation and accountability has been debated, with some scholars expressing concern that such measures may drive teachers away" (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2012). However, more recent evidence suggests otherwise.

Springer et al. (2019) found that teachers subject to evaluation, even for accountability purposes, were less likely to leave than those who were not. Similarly, Boyd et al. (2008) and Feng (2010) argue that evaluations can empower teachers by providing feedback on strengths and areas for growth, thereby reducing attrition. These findings suggest that evaluation and accountability, when implemented constructively, may improve workforce quality by retaining effective teachers and encouraging weaker ones to exit.

Globally, determinants of attrition extend beyond school-level factors. Nguyen et al. (2019) identify teacher characteristics (e.g., gender, age, and family status), qualifications, organizational features, resources, and student body composition as key influences. Yet findings remain mixed. For instance, Borman and Dowling (2008) found little evidence that socioeconomic composition strongly affects attrition, while Engel, Jacob, and Curran (2014) observed that teachers' preferences vary systematically according to student demographics. Such contradictions show the complexity of attrition research and the need to consider interactions among multiple variables.

Cross-national comparisons further illustrate this complexity. In OECD countries, attrition rates range from 2% to 14% annually, with Korea reporting the lowest and the United States the highest (UNESCO, 2020). Rates also fluctuate over time within individual countries. Importantly, even in the absence of voluntary resignation, education systems typically experience a baseline attrition rate of 3–4% annually due to retirement, illness, or death. In Ethiopia, recent statistics from the Ministry of Education (2024) indicate a 2% attrition rate in public schools, which is considered acceptable. However, this figure masks deeper challenges: poorly performing teachers often remain in the system, as qualifications alone determine entry

and retention. This underscores the need for policies that address not only attrition rates but also teacher competence and effectiveness.

Teacher Attrition in Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) refers to the regions of the African continent lying south of the Sahara, comprising between 46 and 48 countries depending on the organization defining the region (UN, WHO, World Bank). Like many parts of the world, SSA faces significant challenges with teacher attrition, which is often context-dependent. The main causes identified include HIV/AIDS, low salaries, poor management, and weak teacher motivation (Xaba, 2001; Bennell, 2005; World Bank, 2007; Mulkeen, 2010; Mutune & Orodho, 2014). Teaching is frequently perceived as a last-choice profession or a stepping stone to more attractive careers (World Bank, 2007, as cited in Giertz, 2016).

Teacher attrition rates in SSA vary widely, with estimates ranging from 5% to 30% depending on the country. Attrition imposes substantial costs on educational institutions through increased recruitment and hiring needs, while also undermining student performance and school effectiveness. As Ortega-Dela Cruz (2016) notes, strategic responses must focus on improving school-level conditions that support effective teaching, since strong teaching environments foster better learning outcomes.

Low salaries remain the most significant factor driving attrition in SSA. Salaries are a double-edged instrument: adequate pay can attract and retain teachers, while inadequate pay leads to demotivation and declining education quality. Even minor salary adjustments can have major fiscal consequences for governments, given the large proportion of education budgets devoted to teacher wages (World Bank, 2007). Furthermore, corruption has been identified as a major obstacle to economic and social development, including within the education sector (World Bank, 2002, 2007).

Bennell and Akyeampong (2007) emphasize that low pay and poor working conditions are the primary causes of attrition and shortages. While merit pay has been linked to reduced attrition, evidence remains inconclusive regarding which program characteristics are most effective. Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019) caution that much of the research relies on associational evidence, leaving uncertainty about whether observed effects are unbiased or influenced by unobserved school-level factors. Similarly, evidence on whether merit pay attracts more effective teachers or not teacher evaluation reduces attrition, remains limited.

Mulkeen (2010) argues that policies addressing attrition must improve working conditions, ensure reliable payment, and strengthen management. Guskey (2000) adds that reforms assuming uniform national education systems often fail, as teaching is shaped by diverse contextual factors. UNESCO (2015a) highlights the chronic nature of teacher shortages in SSA,

projecting that countries such as Tanzania, Sudan, and Gambia will not close the gap until after 2030. Collaboration between program developers and teachers is therefore essential to balance and improve teaching and learning processes. Research in Ethiopia reinforces this point: schools offering safe, supportive environments and adequate compensation are better able to attract and retain motivated teachers (Gemeda & Tynjälä, 2015b).

Overall, teacher attrition in SSA is complex and multifaceted, shaped by economic, social, and institutional factors. Research remains inconclusive, requiring careful approaches that integrate first-hand evidence from teachers and stakeholders. Recent studies have expanded the determinants of attrition beyond traditional factors, identifying teacher evaluation, merit pay, federal policies, principal effectiveness, race/gender matching, school reform, and research practice partnerships as emerging influences (Nguyen et al., 2019). This underscores the contextual nature of attrition, which is profoundly shaped by geography, social environment, and national development.

Teacher Motivation

Teacher motivation refers to the intrinsic values that drive individuals to choose and sustain teaching, as well as the effort they invest, which is shaped by contextual factors (Han, 2016). Teacher motivation is crucial for effective performance, and addressing declining motivation is essential for sustaining high-quality teaching and enhancing student learning outcomes (TTF, 2016; World Bank, 2018)

Globally, governments have recognized the importance of teacher motivation in addressing attrition. For example, teacher shortages have been reported in countries such as the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Norway, where teaching is often perceived as a less attractive career option (Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007; Weiss, 1999). In response, the U.S. Department of Education announced more than $368 million in new grant opportunities through the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program and the Teacher and School Leader (TSL) incentive program. These initiatives prioritize educator diversity, career advancement, and leadership opportunities tied to increased compensation (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Beyond government efforts, numerous NGOs, philanthropic foundations, and community organizations also provide small education grants to support teachers and schools. Directories such as *GrantWatch* list hundreds of active education-related funding opportunities from non-profit and private sources (GrantWatch, n.d.), while *FundsforNGOs* highlights international and U.S.-based grants aimed at school improvement and teacher development (Funds for NGOs, n.d.). These proactive measures reflect the urgency of addressing teacher attrition and motivation.

Research interest in teacher motivation has grown significantly in the past decade, with scholars identifying causes of shortages such as early attrition, an ageing teaching force, limited career opportunities, low job security, and declining prestige (OECD, 2005; Richardson & Watt, 2005, 2006; Sinclair, 2008; Sinclair et al., 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2007; Watt et al., 2012). Motivation is closely linked to student outcomes, educational reform, teaching practice, and teachers' psychological well-being. Administrators, therefore, need to consider how to attract and retain teachers by ensuring supportive environments and fair compensation.

To address motivation, policy recommendations are emphasizing strong administrative support, collaborative school cultures, and meaningful professional development. Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, and Darling-Hammond (2016) caution, however, that more rigorous evaluations of such initiatives are needed. Similarly, Beng Huat See et al. (2020) argue that mentoring and teacher development programs often lack robust evidence of effectiveness, underscoring the need for causal research. Mulkeen (2010, as cited in Beng Huat See et al., 2020) adds that teachers are motivated by student achievement but demotivated by conditions that limit their ability to meet objectives.

Despite clear evidence that attrition negatively affects educational outcomes, limited research has examined how motivation can mitigate these effects, particularly within the Ethiopian context. Schools that provide safe, supportive environments and adequate compensation are better able to attract and retain motivated teachers. Ultimately, effective leadership is essential to ensure equitable access to quality education, especially in underserved communities where shortages are most acute.

Theories of Motivation

Educational institutions have frequently applied Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory to enhance teacher motivation and retention. To strengthen intrinsic motivation, schools implement structured career development programs such as workshops, mentorship initiatives, and leadership training. At the same time, hygiene factors are addressed through smaller class sizes, improved teaching resources, and supportive administrative policies, which help mitigate dissatisfaction. Institutions also introduce teacher awards, performance-based bonuses, and public recognition programs to reinforce motivation. In addition, granting educators greater autonomy in curriculum design and classroom management fosters a sense of ownership and engagement.

> *In the Sub-Saharan African (SSA) context, multiple factors influencing teacher motivation warrant further exploration. These include strengthening teacher-parent relationships, ensuring sustained distribution of resources (e.g., materials and water), providing adequate and regular in-service training, and enabling a more transparent and accountable education system. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory*

(intrinsic motivators and extrinsic hygiene factors) and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs have been used as frameworks to analyse these issues in developing countries. Findings suggest that satisfying teachers' needs leads to higher motivation, improved performance, better student achievement, and overall quality education (Frehiwot, 2021, p. 35).

In Ethiopia, however, only a few of these theories have been implemented within the school system. While numerous professional development programs have been introduced in public schools, many were framed as motivational initiatives designed primarily to provide per diem compensation rather than to enhance teachers' skills. As a result, financial incentives often shifted participants' focus on monetary benefits rather than the actual learning experience. Regarding hygiene factors, private school teachers tend to benefit more than their public-school counterparts. Flexible schedules, smaller class sizes, and improved teaching resources are more prevalent in private schools. In contrast, public schools are heavily influenced by political directives, and well-structured administrative policies play little role in reducing dissatisfaction. Transparent communication, fair workload distribution, and responsive leadership are rarely practiced, making it difficult to foster a stable and motivating work environment. Conversely, private schools that actively address compensation, job security, and professional growth through thoughtful administrative support are better able to mitigate frustration and enhance teacher retention and engagement.

Although several studies have examined structural and policy-related aspects of teacher attrition in Ethiopia, significant gaps remain in understanding the lived experiences of teachers, particularly regarding economic hardship, motivational decline, and professional disengagement. Much of the existing research focuses on quantitative attrition rates without capturing the qualitative dimensions of teacher well-being and commitment. Addressing this gap requires in-depth exploration of how socioeconomic pressures and institutional conditions shape teachers' daily realities and long-term career decisions.

In summary, while some components of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (See Table 1 on next page) have been applied in Ethiopia, the depth and capacity to fully translate each factor into actionable strategies have proven unrealistic. This highlights the need for more context-sensitive approaches to teacher motivation that integrate both structural reforms and the lived experiences of educators.

Maslow Comes to Life for Educators and Students further to what has been stated above, which explores how "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (See Figure 1 on next page) can be applied in classrooms to support both teachers and students" Maslow, A. H. (1943).

Table 1: Summary of Key Concepts of Herzberg's Two Factors That Affect Teachers'
Motivation

No	MOTIVATING FACTORS (Intrinsic)	DEMOTIVATING FACTORS (Extrinsic Hygiene Factors)
1	School improvements	Workload (Working conditions)
2	Meaningful PDT	Low Monthly Salary
3	Supportive Teacher Evaluation	Recognition (reward vs. performance)
4	Recognition from colleagues or mgmt.	Teacher Accountability
5	Advancement	Lack of Career Development
6	Responsibility	Institutional Environment
7	Work itself	Teacher's Voice
8	Minimum threshold/ Reward	Materials and Facilities

Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The idea is that when basic needs (like food, safety, and emotional well-being) are met, students are more engaged and ready to learn. Educators can also create brain-friendly environments by addressing these needs through strategies like mindfulness, positive affirmations, and supportive classroom structures. Likewise, a teacher or student can reach his or her full potential to be mentally critical and be able to influence his or her environment,

provided there is a fulfilled aesthetic needs and a coercive environment to trigger personal desire to learn and understand more are in place. Otherwise, expecting an influence on existing teaching and learning condition to attain an improved school environment and the quality of education would be poor. This is the point where a paradox has emerged between those advocating for salary increases (Teachers) and the government's expectations for quality education. Due to the inherent nature of the issue, finding common ground and reaching an amicable resolution appears impossible, as the demands seem fundamentally irreconcilable.

In summary, the reviewed literature spans 15 years, with publications dating from 2007 to 2022. Recently, the case of attrition and motivation has become a more of a challenge for most SSA, including Ethiopia. The readings on attrition and motivation research made so far are quite complex and have made it impossible to deduce one size fits for all conclusive endorsement. The problem varies between countries, regions, political systems, and the type of school administration in this case (private, public, religious, international schools, etc.). Moreover, human beings are egoistic by nature and have multiple needs and unlimited demands that vary throughout changing times, so be true with teachers. Hence, considerate understanding of attrition and motivation issues vary along with contexts of the external environment, and too difficult to speculate the consequences of any action taken to resolve both. Hence, research done so far on attrition and motivation reflects an intrinsic value than extrinsic hygiene factors, as shown above, which would have more significance.

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques to investigate teacher attrition in private schools, with particular attention to the factors driving teacher attrition and the resulting instability in the education system. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the issue by integrating statistical data with contextual insights.

Study Participants and Sampling

The study was conducted in three private schools in Addis Ababa, each with over ten years of continuous operation, ensuring stable records and reliable insights into teacher attrition and motivation. Teachers from Grades 1–12 were included to capture variations across grade levels. Selection criteria emphasized institutional longevity, multi-campus operations, and established private sector practices, while teacher participation required full-time engagement in teaching responsibilities.

Data were collected from administrative records, structured surveys, and focus group discussions, with attrition rates calculated annually. Ethical safeguards were rigorously applied, including informed consent, confidentiality, and measures to minimize bias. Although five

additional schools were initially approached, only institutions granting consent were included; in this case, 2 consented, which makes the studied schools 3 in total, thereby ensuring that the findings reflect mature private school practices and remain ethically aligned with research protocols.

A total of 45 teachers from 3 schools were selected using simple random sampling. Participants' names were written on slips of paper, shuffled, and drawn to guarantee unbiased selection.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire consisting of self-developed 4 multiple-choice and 3 open-ended questions:

- Basic Information plus 4 key multiple-choice questions to capture quantifiable data that contains fulfilment, motivation factors, and attrition & retention.
- 3 open-ended questions to explore personal experiences and perspectives.
- 3 Focal group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, each comprising 4–5 participants.

Where participants were asked guiding questions such as the reasons for teacher attrition, influencing factors, and potential strategies to mitigate it. Participants' opinions and concerns were recorded in handwritten notes, which were later transcribed into digital format. The discussions were conducted in the native Amharic language, allowing participants to express themselves more freely. These FGDs provided rich qualitative insights into the emotional, professional, and institutional dimensions of teacher attrition and motivation.

Purpose and Analysis

This methodological framework enables:

- Methodical assessment of teacher attrition patterns.
- Evaluation of motivational factors affecting retention.
- Interpretation of qualitative narratives from focus group discussions to enrich the quantitative findings.

Together, these methods offer a robust foundation for understanding the dynamics of teacher attrition and its implications for private school systems.

Data Analysis

The data collected through questionnaires and focus group discussions were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of teacher attrition and motivation in private schools.

Quantitative Analysis

Responses from the 4 key multiple-choice questions with multiple answers were coded and entered a spreadsheet for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, mainly frequencies and

percentages, were used to identify patterns in Rates of teacher attrition, Common motivational factors, Perceptions of job and Institutional support mechanisms. This analysis helped quantify the prevalence of key issues and provided measurable insights into the factors influencing teacher retention and turnover.

Qualitative Analysis

The 3 open-ended questions and transcripts from the three focus group discussions (each with 4–5 participants) were analysed using thematic analysis. This involved:

Transcribing the responses verbatim, coding recurring ideas and expressions and Grouping codes into broader themes such as motivation factors, demotivating factors, reasons for leaving and staying in the teaching profession explored. These themes were then interpreted to uncover deeper meanings and contextual factors that may not be evident in the quantitative data.

To enhance the validity of the findings, triangulation was employed by comparing insights from both data sources. This cross verification allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how personal experiences align with broader trends in teacher attrition and motivation.

Ethical considerations

Most research process in social science, mainly education, presents unique ethical challenges due to the involvement of human participants who have the fear of accountability, risk of losing confidential information, or the sensitive nature of educational data, which, if not carefully handled, sometimes violates the rights of the research participants.

- "This study implemented strict protocols to protect personal and organizational data, including anonymization of participant information, restricted access to sensitive records, and compliance with institutional privacy guidelines. Ethical considerations were addressed comprehensively, balancing the interests of teachers, department heads, supervisors, HR managers, and school directors. As Bruton et al. (2024) note, ensuring responsible and ethical conduct is paramount to maintaining research integrity and safeguarding participant well-being. These measures ensured that privacy and ethical standards were upheld throughout the research process."
- The consent form ensures that names are left out of the document, and participation is purely voluntary.
- The research document does not include the name of any school or individual, as this was anticipated and mutually agreed upon by the participants.

Result and Discussion

Teacher Survey Result

This study examines the underlying causes of teacher attrition in private schools and emphasizes the pivotal role of motivation in sustaining retention. Drawing on survey responses from 45 teachers, it provides a comprehensive perspective on the complex interplay between motivating and demotivating factors that shape teachers' decisions to remain in or leave the profession.

The findings highlight a clear tension between **intrinsic motivators**, such as passion for teaching, positive relationships, and opportunities for professional growth, and **extrinsic pressures**, including salary dissatisfaction, heavy workloads, and limited career progression. Although teaching continues to attract individuals due to its accessible entry requirements, inadequate compensation and restricted advancement prospects reinforce its perception as a temporary or stopgap career rather than a sustainable long-term profession.

Detailed results across all key categories are presented in the following tables.

a) Motivational Factors

Table 2: What motivates teachers in their current teaching job?

	Motivational Factors	School 1	School 2	School 3	Total
a)	Passion for teaching	7	4	10	21 (28.00)
b)	Supportive work environment	6	4	4	14 (18.67)
c)	Salary & benefits	8	1	1	10 (13.33)
d)	Opportunities for professional growth	5	3	5	13 (17.33)
e)	Positive relationships with students & parents	6	3	5	14 (18.67)
f)	Other (please specify) (Admin Effort)	2	1	0	3 (4)
	Total=	34 (45.33)	16 (21.33)	25 (33.33)	75 (100)

NB: Numbers in parentheses are percentages (%).

Analysis of motivational factors across the three schools reveals that passion for teaching (28%) is the most significant driver, followed closely by supportive work environments (18.67%) and positive relationships with students and parents (18.67%). Opportunities for professional growth (17.33%) and Salary and benefits (13.33%) were comparatively weaker motivators.

Notably, School 3 demonstrated a strong reliance on intrinsic motivation (i.e., passion for teaching), while School 1 highlighted financial incentives as a key factor. These findings suggest that teacher motivation is sustained more by intrinsic and relational factors than by extrinsic rewards, aligning with literature on professional identity and school climate.

b) Demotivating factors

Analysis of demotivating factors (Table 3) reveals that salary dissatisfaction (31%) and high workload and stress (28.17%) are the most significant challenges across the three schools. Limited career progression (18.31%) and student behaviour challenges (16.90%) also contribute to teacher demotivation, though to a lesser extent. School-level differences highlight that salary dissatisfaction is most acute in School 1, career progression concerns dominate in School 2, and workload stress is particularly high in School 3.

Table 3: What demotivates teachers in their current teaching job?

	Factors	School 1	School 2	School 3	Total
a)	Workload & stress	9	2	9	20 (28.17)
b)	Limited career progression	5	6	2	13 (18.31)
c)	Salary dissatisfaction	12	3	7	22 (31)
d)	of administrative support	2	1	1	4 (5.63)
e)	Student behaviour challenges	6	4	2	12 (16.90)
	Total	**34 (47.89)**	**16 (22.54)**	**21 (29.60)**	**71 (100)**

NB: Numbers in parentheses are percentages (%).

Overall, the findings highlight the need for systemic interventions in compensation and workload management, complemented by targeted strategies for career development and classroom management. Such measures are essential to reducing teacher demotivation and enhancing retention.

c) Attrition

Table 4: Primary reason for leaving the teaching position

	Factors	School 1	School 2	School 3	Total
a)	Better salary elsewhere	9	4	6	19 (36.54)
b)	Burnout & stress	3	1	3	7 (13.46)
c)	Lack of career advancement opportunities	4	1	2	7 (13,46)
d)	Poor work-life balance	7	3	2	12 (23.08)
e)	School leadership issues	5	0	2	7 (13.46)
f)	Other (please specify)	1	0	0	00
	Total	**28 (53.85)**	**9 (17.31)**	**15 (28.85)**	**52 (100)**

NB: Numbers in parentheses are percentages (%).

Analysis of primary reasons for leaving teaching positions indicates that better salary opportunities elsewhere (36.54%) and poor work-life balance (23.08%) are the most significant drivers of attrition. Burnout and stress, lack of career advancement opportunities, and school

leadership issues (13.46% each) also contribute, though to a lesser extent. School-level differences reveal that financial incentives and work-life balance are particularly pressing in School 1, while salary remains the dominant factor across all schools.

These findings underscore the need for systemic reforms in compensation and workload management, complemented by targeted strategies for career development and leadership improvement to enhance teacher retention. Without such interventions, teaching positions risk being perceived as transitional rather than long-term careers, leading to instability in the profession. This has profound implications for the quality of education and the holistic development of learners, who may otherwise face inadequate learning experiences and long-term gaps in essential skills and knowledge required for success in contemporary society.

d) *Primary Reason to encourage teachers stay in teaching job*

Table 5: What would encourage teachers to stay in teaching role?

	Factors	School 1	School 2	School 3	Total
a)	Salary increase	16	4	8	28 (33.73)
b)	More professional development opportunities	6	4	10	20 (24.1)
c)	Stronger administrative support	4	1	8	13 (15.66)
d)	Improved work-life balance	8	3	5	16 (19.28)
e)	Better classroom resources	3	1	2	6 (7.23)
f)	Other (please specify)	0	Passion	0	00
	Total	**37 (44.58)**	**13 (15.66)**	**33 (39.76)**	**83 (100)**

NB: Numbers in parentheses are percentages (%).

The data reveal that salary increase is the most influential factor in encouraging teachers to remain in their roles, with a total score of 33.73% across the three schools. School 1 reported the highest emphasis on salary, while Schools 2 and 3 also highlighted it as a significant motivator.

Professional development opportunities ranked second (24.1%), with School 3 placing the strongest emphasis on the same factor, suggesting that opportunities for skill enhancement and career growth are particularly valued in this context.

Work–life balance was equally important (19.28%), and administrative support comes next (15.66%). School 3 reported the highest need for stronger administrative support, while School 1 emphasized improved work–life balance. These findings highlight the importance of institutional structures and workload management in sustaining teacher motivation. Classroom resources were less frequently cited, though Schools 1 and 3 acknowledged their relevance. School 2 uniquely identified the "human element" and "passion" as additional motivators,

underscoring the role of intrinsic factors in teacher retention. These findings suggest that effective retention policies must integrate competitive compensation with career development, workload management, and supportive leadership."

The survey of 45 teachers provides a comprehensive view of the complex interplay between motivational and de-motivating factors shaping teacher retention. Across schools, passion for teaching remains a strong intrinsic motivator, yet this commitment is undermined by persistent challenges such as salary dissatisfaction, workload stress, and limited career progression. The data reveal that while teachers value supportive environments, professional development, and positive relationships with students, these factors alone are insufficient to counterbalance the pressures of inadequate compensation and demanding responsibilities.

Attrition is most strongly driven by the search for better salaries elsewhere and concerns over work–life balance, while retention is most effectively encouraged through salary increases, professional development opportunities, and stronger administrative support. These findings underscore the need for a balanced approach that integrates both extrinsic incentives and intrinsic motivators to sustain teacher engagement.

For Ethiopia, the implications are clear: without systemic reforms in compensation, workload management, and career advancement pathways, teaching risks being perceived as a transitional occupation rather than a long-term profession. This perception threatens the stability of the education system and the quality of learning outcomes for students.

Conversely, by addressing these challenges through targeted policy interventions, the private school system can foster a more resilient, motivated, and committed teaching workforce, one capable of delivering high-quality education and equipping future generations with the skills and knowledge required to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

e) Open-ended questions provided to teachers to give their views
Following the 'tick box' questions, teachers were asked to respond to an open-ended section consisting of three guiding questions designed to elicit their views. These questions were intended to allow teachers to contribute additional reflections freely, and the excerpts below capture the perspectives they shared.

i) What are the most rewarding reasons about teaching in a private school?
Teachers expressed confidence that their compensation was comparatively better than that of their public-school counterparts. In addition, the institution offered opportunities for supplementary income through overtime and special assignments designed to motivate staff. Educators emphasized that the school environment cultivated strong work ethics, effective time

management, and systematic task execution aligned with the academic calendar, factors that significantly contributed to their professional growth.

Beyond financial considerations, teachers valued the collaborative culture, intellectual freedom, and constructive feedback that fostered teamwork, brainstorming, and self-development. This atmosphere provided space for passionate educators with creative potential to thrive. The learning environment was described as highly supportive of quality education, strengthened by smaller class sizes, closer academic supervision, and robust administrative support. A teacher with 5 years' experience said:

> *Induction that involved training in smart board technology not only prepared me for teaching but also enabled full eye contact and stronger classroom control, an advantage unattainable with a traditional blackboard and chalk.*

A strong sense of community and mentorship further promoted professionalism, motivation, and genuine enthusiasm for teaching. Educators appreciated the opportunity to work with eager learners, celebrate student achievements, and access richer teaching resources within a positive social setting. The presence of experienced and qualified faculty was regarded as a critical factor in enhancing student satisfaction and academic outcomes, creating a cycle of growth and fulfilment for both teachers and learners.

ii) One thing teachers would change about their work environment if given the opportunity

Effective teacher deployment requires assigning qualified individuals to subjects that align with their expertise, while fostering shared responsibility and balanced accountability. Schools highlighted the need for adequate classroom resources and moral support to encourage innovation and the adoption of advanced teaching methods. Despite these efforts, challenges remain.

Addressing such concerns calls for a structured system that ensures fair remuneration and promotes job satisfaction. Participants emphasized that management should create supportive working environments where career advancement is facilitated, living standards are improved, and teachers are motivated to teach with commitment.

Findings also reveal limited engagement with research evidence on educational policy and practice, alongside insufficient understanding of institutional frameworks. Strengthening these areas would enhance teaching and learning outcomes while contributing to a more informed, empowered, and professionally fulfilled teaching workforce added with a strong commitment to responsibility.

iii) Further comments by the teachers

Assign the right teacher for the right subject and enhance shared responsibility along with balanced individual accountability. A teacher conveyed his deep sense of sorrow, remarking:

> *I should not have become a teacher; I would have preferred to be self-employed, a*
> *master of my own time, free to live and enjoy life, rather than being bound to work*
> *for a small salary that does nothing to change one's life.*

The above testimony underscores how individuals who enter the profession without a genuine calling or passion often remain in teaching merely to secure a daily livelihood, a situation that ultimately undermines the quality of the learning environment.

In summary, teachers value private schools for their financial advantages, supportive environments, and professional growth opportunities. However, they seek improvements in fair compensation systems, career pathways, classroom resources, and evidence-based policy engagement. Overall, their reflections highlight the importance of aligning teacher expertise with subject assignments, fostering collaboration, and balancing accountability to sustain motivation and professional fulfilment. As detailed in the discussion of results from the closed-ended items above; the teachers would still wish to leave if obtained better opportunities.

f) *Focus Group Discussion*

Focus group discussions conducted in three private schools in Addis Ababa identified teacher attrition as a persistent challenge, with rates ranging from 8% in School 3 to 12% in School 2 and reaching 31% in School 1. To mitigate attrition, school management implemented stringent recruitment procedures, typically involving curriculum vitae screening, subject-specific interviews, written assessments, and practical teaching demonstrations. Successful candidates then underwent induction programs designed to familiarize them with institutional systems and ease their transition into teaching assignments. Despite these measures, newly recruited teachers, particularly those from rural backgrounds, frequently encountered difficulties in subject mastery, pedagogical practice, and adjustment to urban school contexts, which shortened their tenure. Participants unanimously concluded that there is a broader national challenge in teacher preparation.

One HR manager explained that recruitment practices are aligned with predictable cycles of attrition. As noted,

> *It has become customary each July to advertise vacancies for teachers across all*
> *subjects, in anticipation of filling gaps created by those who leave without prior*
> *notice.*

All three schools reported similar difficulties in securing qualified candidates, especially in English, mathematics, science, and, more recently, vocational subjects. Teachers were regularly evaluated through monthly performance checklists linked to financial incentives or certificates of recognition. However, attrition persisted, compounded by the absence of exit interviews, reluctance among teachers to disclose reasons for departure, and limited documentation of staff

movement. The discussions highlighted salary disparities and the pursuit of better financial opportunities as the primary drivers of attrition. Institutions that linked evaluation outcomes to awards, salary increments, and opportunities for leadership progression demonstrated stronger retention. Beyond financial incentives, schools that promoted collegial relationships, provided subsidized meals, offered welfare services such as counseling and partial medical reimbursement, and acknowledged personal milestones were viewed as enhancing teacher commitment. Short-term interventions such as merit pay, bonuses, and supplementary income were noted to reduce attrition temporarily, whereas supportive work environments, transparent evaluation systems, and recognition of teacher competence were regarded as more sustainable retention strategies. Nevertheless, participants in the focus group discussions acknowledged that performance evaluation for competence remains a complex mechanism: while stringent accountability measures often provoked resistance among less competent staff, particularly in contexts of teacher shortages, effective teachers perceived evaluations as empowering, fostering professional growth, constructive dialogue, and enhanced morale.

Likewise, persistent challenges like frequent shifts of education bureau policy, lack of reliable attrition data, and competition from international schools offering higher salaries continue to undermine retention efforts. In response, one school introduced motivational strategies such as traditional savings schemes (Equib), interest-free credit, higher learning scholarships, and MSc summer courses. Collaborative practices, including supervision, lesson studies, and multidisciplinary discussions, were reported to enhance teaching quality, while social and wellness programs such as travel, sports, weekly meetings, and counselling promoted staff engagement and well-being, discouraging teachers from seeking employment elsewhere.

The FGD affirmed that workload management was structured around a standard teaching load of 20–24 periods per week, and reduced contact hours for non-academic subjects such as sport classes and vocational subjects. Teachers with lighter loads were encouraged to take supplementary employment, including weekend classes, while those in high-demand subjects assumed additional responsibilities with financial compensation. This approach was designed to incentivize staff and reduce the likelihood of teachers seeking employment elsewhere.

This measure has been asserted by a school management advisor and recruitment officer who explained that:

> *Recruiting new teachers has become a heavy burden, consuming resources and diverting staff from development and systemic improvement, a challenge that has increasingly become routine in school management.*

Looking forward, school leadership consistently prepares strategic initiatives for the subsequent academic year. Such as establishing a CV bank that mitigates last-minute departures. Several planned measures are taken, including mandatory pedagogical training, performance-based

salary increments, strengthened work-life balance policies, and proactive interventions to reduce attrition.

Conclusion and implications

This study demonstrates that teacher attrition and motivation in private schools is primarily driven by salary disparities and workload pressures, while retention is strengthened by supportive environments, transparent evaluation systems, and recognition of teacher competence. Understanding these underlying factors behind teacher attrition and motivation requires a deliberate, well-structured approach grounded in the perspectives of teachers and other central figures within the school community. Attrition is not merely a staffing challenge; it imposes financial and moral strain on institutions through continuous recruitment and hiring, while also undermining student performance and overall school quality. Effective solutions must therefore be school-centred, focusing on the conditions that foster high-quality teaching, since strong teaching environments inevitably create better learning outcomes.

Globally, teacher attrition and motivation have become pressing issues, often driven by rising costs of living and stagnant salaries that fail to adjust for inflation. This erodes financial stability and diminishes the attractiveness of teaching as a long-term profession, leading many to view it as a temporary occupation. In Ethiopia, as in other Sub-Saharan African contexts, the lack of systematic tracking of attrition further hampers efforts to understand and address the problem. It is therefore crucial that the school admin evaluates these concerns and implements sustainable measures to enhance retention, maintain motivation, and ensure job satisfaction.

Given the challenges of an underperforming education system and increasing economic pressures, several reforms are essential to strengthen teacher motivation and retention with observable implications on educational leadership, policy, and institutional landscape:

Implications on educational leadership: The leadership is urged to implement a coordinated, but diverse strategy to reinforce teacher motivation and retention. First and foremost, flexibility and opportunities for income diversification should be allowed, provided they do not compromise established quality standards or weaken accountability and monitoring mechanisms. In addition, recruitment efforts must prioritize candidates with genuine passion and commitment to teaching, while pedagogical training should be reinforced with practical skill-building to ease teachers' workload through task delegation and enhance student engagement.

One key point that has received little, if any, attention is the provision of guidance and counselling services, which are essential to support teachers during financial and personal difficulties. In addition, building partnerships with NGOs, philanthropists, and donor programs can broaden the resources available to sustain incentives and motivation. Strengthening ties with

community-led initiatives to recognize and reward teacher performance is also encouraged, while proactive school administration should prioritize enhancing teacher satisfaction, given its strong influence on retention.

Policy implications: Addressing the challenges of teacher attrition and motivation requires coordinated action by both schools and policymakers. Regular salary adjustments to offset inflation are essential for reducing dissatisfaction, fostering motivation, and ensuring long-term commitment. Equally important is the implementation of workload management and work–life balance policies to mitigate stress and burnout, while clear career development pathways at the school level can foster professional growth. Strengthened administrative support and leadership practices remain critical for building trust and sustaining motivation among staff.

Implications on institutional practices: At the institutional level, several practices have been introduced to support teacher performance and retention, yet they require further strengthening. Monthly performance evaluations, often linked to financial incentives or certificates of recognition, have been designed to foster accountability. However, attrition remains a persistent challenge, compounded by the absence of systematic exit interviews and limited documentation of the reasons for teacher departure.

Motivational strategies encompass a range of financial and educational supports, including Equib (which provides members with access to lump sums of money through pooled contributions) schemes, interest-free credit, scholarships, summer courses, and MSc sponsorships, alongside collaborative professional practices such as supervision, lesson studies, multidisciplinary discussions, and curriculum evaluation. Social and wellness

programs, including travel opportunities, sports activities, weekly meetings, and counselling services, also contribute to teacher motivation.

In terms of workload management, a standard teaching load of 18–20 periods per week is applied, with reductions for non-academic subjects. Teachers with lighter loads are encouraged to pursue supplementary employment, while those in high-demand subjects may assume additional responsibilities with financial compensation, thereby incentivizing staff and reducing reliance on external recruitment. To consolidate these efforts, leadership should prioritize mandatory pedagogical training, performance-based salary increments, stronger work–life balance policies, and proactive measures to mitigate attrition and foster collaboration among staff.

Finally, these implications highlight the need for a holistic approach that combines systemic reforms, supportive policies, and strengthened institutional practices. By aligning financial incentives with professional development, fostering supportive environments, and addressing

workload challenges, schools can build a motivated and resilient teaching workforce capable of driving sustainable educational success.

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