



“I’m curious – What influenced your decision not to pursue teaching after graduation?”

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ABSTRACT

The growing number of education graduates who choose not to pursue teaching after graduation raises critical questions about the effectiveness and alignment of teacher preparation programs. While teacher education is often designed with the expectation that graduates will enter the teaching profession, various personal, social, and structural factors may influence alternative career choices. Literatures are focused on on the teacher retention and attrition among in-service teachers and less in the graduate prior to entering teaching career path. This qualitative case study explored the post-graduation career decisions of teacher education graduates who opted to choose different career path. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with six participants and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that many graduates entered teacher education unintentionally or due to limited access to preferred courses. Although some developed motivation during teaching practice, others were discouraged by the perceived demands, low salary, and limited flexibility of the teaching profession. Graduates also cited personal uncertainty, social influence, and the appeal of financially rewarding or flexible careers in other sectors. Despite this, many acknowledged the transferability of teaching competencies and expressed openness to return to the profession under better conditions. The study highlights the importance of strengthening early orientation, career guidance, and professional identity development within teacher education programs. It also underscores the need for policy reforms that address compensation, workload, and employment pathways to make teaching a more attractive and sustainable career option.

RESUMO

O número crescente de graduados em cursos de educação que optam por não seguir a docência após a graduação levanta questões críticas sobre a efetividade e o alinhamento dos programas de formação de professores. Embora a formação docente seja frequentemente concebida com a expectativa de que seus egressos ingressem na profissão, diversos fatores pessoais, sociais e estruturais podem influenciar escolhas profissionais alternativas. A literatura está majoritariamente centrada na retenção e evasão de professores em serviço e dedica pouca atenção aos graduados antes de ingressarem na carreira docente. Este estudo de caso qualitativo explorou as decisões de carreira pós-graduação de licenciados que optaram por seguir caminhos profissionais distintos. Os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevistas em profundidade com seis participantes e analisados por meio de análise temática. Os resultados revelaram que muitos ingressaram na formação docente de forma não intencional ou devido ao acesso limitado a cursos de sua preferência. Embora alguns tenham desenvolvido motivação durante a prática de ensino, outros se sentiram desencorajados pelas exigências percebidas, baixos salários e limitada flexibilidade da profissão. Os participantes também citaram incertezas pessoais, influências sociais e o atrativo de carreiras mais bem remuneradas ou mais flexíveis em outros setores. Apesar disso, muitos reconheceram a transferibilidade das competências docentes e expressaram abertura para retornar à profissão em condições mais favoráveis. O estudo destaca a importância de fortalecer a orientação inicial, o aconselhamento profissional e o desenvolvimento da identidade docente nos programas de formação. Também reforça a necessidade de reformas políticas que abordem a remuneração, a carga de trabalho e os caminhos de ingresso profissional, a fim de tornar a docência uma opção de carreira mais atrativa e sustentável.

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Introduction

The transition from graduation to professional practice is a critical juncture for education degree holders. Conventionally, teacher education programs have traditionally been structured under the assumption that their graduates will enter and remain within the teaching profession (Bardelli et al., 2022; Livers & Lin, 2018). Yet, an emerging trend shows that a substantial number of education graduates are opting not to enter the teaching workforce (Kraft & Lyon, 2024; Rizqi et al., 2024; Suryani & George, 2021). The increasing number of education graduates opting not to enter the teaching profession highlights the need to understand the diverse factors influencing their career decisions. Gaining insights into these dynamics is crucial for educational institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders committed to strengthening teacher preparation programs and ensuring a more sustainable and responsive education workforce.

The teaching profession faces significant challenges that have impacted its attractiveness to new entrants (Botha et al., 2023; Gorard et al., 2022; Verma et al., 2023; Worth & Van den Brande, 2020). There are reports on increasing concerns regarding teacher shortages (Craig et al., 2023; Seeliger & Håkansson Lindqvist, 2023; Mitchell et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2024), diminishing professional prestige (Akiba et al., 2023; Huang et al., 2022; Litvinaitė, 2022; Rizvi, 2023), and unsustainable workload demands (Bernstein & Batchelor, 2022; Briede & Drelinga, 2023; Heffernan et al., 2022; Pan et al., 2023).

Although global initiatives continue to emphasize the critical role of teachers in achieving educational equity and quality (Handriadi et al., 2024; Olsen, 2021; Siregar & Jarudin, 2024), systemic issues such as insufficient compensation (Guthery & Bailes, 2023; Zhou & Ma, 2022), limited professional advancement opportunities (Abu-Tineh et al., 2023; Eghosa-Aimufua et al., 2022; Gorard et al., 2022; Noel, 2021), and deteriorating working conditions (Carter Andrews et al., 2021; Korica, 2022; Ortan et al., 2021; Saks, 2022) have driven teachers to explore alternative career paths.

Within Asia, the pressures influencing graduates' career choices are shaped by rapid economic transformation (Singh et al., 2022; Suhi et al., 2021; Xu & Ma, 2025), sociocultural expectations (Namazova, 2023; Suhi et al., 2021; Suhi et al., 2022), and education sector constraints (Alghizzi, 2022; (Dos Santos, 2021; Islam, 2021; Yu et al., 2022). The diversification of Asian economies has opened a wider range of employment opportunities in fields often perceived as more prestigious and financially lucrative (Al'Abri et al., 2023; Dos Santos, 2022; Mok & Montgomery, 2021).

Simultaneously, teachers in Asian contexts face large class sizes (Erlina et al., 2022; Surianshah, 2022), resource inadequacies (Kapoor et al., 2021; Pradana & Syarifuddin, 2021; Ravet & Mtika, 2021), and heightened public scrutiny (Aslam et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2024; Yue et al., 2023), which, combined with evolving societal values favoring financial success (Lao

et al., 2022; O'Keefe et al., 2021; Syakurah & Rosyila, 2020; Ueno, 2021), may contribute to career attrition even before professional entry.

In the Philippine context, while education remains a prioritized sector in national development agendas (Commission on Higher Education, 2009; Department of Education, 2016; *Department of Science and Technology*, 2022; *National Economic and Development Authority*, 2023), the teaching profession is beset by enduring challenges (Chin et al., 2022; Mananay et al., 2022; Orlanda-Ventayen & Ventayen, 2022; Tarrayo et al., 2022).

Qualified teachers frequently encounter low salary scales (Ahmed, 2025; Casingal & Ancho, 2022; Estillore et al., 2024), precarious employment arrangements (Hungo et al., 2024; Mangaoang, 2021; Simpson & Tajima, 2024), excessive administrative workloads (Algar et al., 2025; Magtalas, 2024; Tarraya, 2023), and limited access to continuous professional development (Bernardo et al., 2020; Gonzaga, 2024; Pasique & Maguate, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed vulnerabilities within the Philippine education system, including gaps in digital infrastructure (Bumagat et al., 2023; Javier, 2022; Villaseñor, 2024), mental health burdens on educators (Cuadra, 202; Mordeno et al., 2023; Pekas et al., 2022), and decreasing level of support systems offered by the institutions (Arnado et al., 2021; Bautista et al., 2021; Estanislao, 2023). These factors have compounded existing deterrents, might prompting many graduates to reconsider teaching as a viable long-term career.

While existing literature extensively explores teacher retention and attrition among in-service educators, there is limited empirical attention given to education graduates who choose not to enter the teaching profession. This study seeks to address that gap by examining the key factors that shape their career decisions. By foregrounding the perspectives of graduates at this pivotal transitional phase, the research offers a nuanced understanding of pre-entry career decision-making and aims to inform ongoing discourse on teacher education.

Methodology

Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine the career decision-making processes of education graduates who chose not to pursue teaching as a profession. A case study approach was appropriate because it enabled an in-depth exploration of a bounded context (Yin, 2017)—in this case, the education graduates of Marikina Polytechnic College (MPC). MPC was intentionally selected as the research site because it is a state higher education institution in the Philippines that offers teacher education programs, yet its graduates have increasingly demonstrated diverse post-graduation career trajectories. This context makes it a representative and relevant setting for understanding why some education graduates opt for non-teaching careers. Rather than beginning with predefined categories, the study adopted an exploratory stance, allowing themes and insights to emerge directly from

participants' narratives. The primary aim was to uncover the key factors influencing graduates' decisions to pursue career paths outside the teaching profession.

Description of Respondent

The participants in this study are education graduates of Marikina Polytechnic College who completed their degree within the last three academic years but chose not to pursue a teaching career. Purposive sampling was employed to intentionally select individuals who can provide rich, relevant insights into the phenomenon under investigation. This sampling strategy aligns with the qualitative case study design, which prioritizes depth and contextual relevance over representativeness (Campbell et al., 2020).

To be eligible, participants must meet the following criteria:

1. Hold a bachelor's degree in education from Marikina Polytechnic College;
2. Graduated within the last three academic years;
3. Have not entered the teaching profession in any formal capacity (e.g., public or private school teaching, tutorial centers);
4. Be willing to participate in an in-depth interview and share their experiences.

An initial estimation of 5 participants will be included, with the final number of six as determined based on data saturation—the point at which no new themes or insights emerge from the interviews (Sebele-Mpofu, 2020). Participants were recruited through combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Prior to participation, all individuals were provided with informed consent forms outlining the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Table 1. Participants of the Study

Participant	Major	Job after graduation
1	Civil Technology	Fast food crew
2	Civil Technology	BPO 1
3	Civil Technology	BPO 2
4	Civil Technology	Events and Rental Services
5	Electrical Technology	Mall Customer Service
6	Automotive Technology	Auto mechanic

Data Collection

Data for this study was gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with education graduates of Marikina Polytechnic College who completed their degree within the last academic year but chose not to enter the teaching profession. These interviews served as the primary method for capturing participants' narratives and uncovering the underlying factors influencing their career decisions (Scanlan, 2020).

The researcher begun by conducting purposive sampling, selecting participants who meet the eligibility criteria. Snowball sampling was also used to identify additional participants

through referrals. Recruitment was carried out via alumni groups, institutional contacts, and social media channels associated with the college. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or virtually through video conferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom, Google Meet), depending on participant preference and accessibility. Each interview lasted last between 45 to 60 minutes and followed a flexible interview guide.

All interviews was audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. Field notes will also be taken to capture contextual cues, non-verbal observations (if applicable), and researcher reflections. Data collection continued until saturation was reached (Daher, 2023).

Some of the interview questions are the following: *"Can you tell me about your journey after finishing your education degree?"*, *"What kind of opportunities did you consider or explore after finishing your degree?"* and *"What was the most difficult part of deciding what to do after college?"*

Ethical Consideration

Before the commencement of data collection, this study underwent review and approval by the Research Ethics Committee of Marikina Polytechnic College. The ethical principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw guided all aspects of the research process. Each participant were provided with an informed consent form outlining the purpose of the study, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as participants. Participation will be entirely voluntary, and individuals may decline or withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms (participants 1 to 6) in all documentation, including transcripts, analysis, and reporting. All digital files—audio recordings, transcripts, and field notes—was stored on a password-protected device accessible only to the researchers. Physical documents were be kept in a locked drawer that is accessible only to the researchers. All data, digital and physical, will be permanently deleted after the publication of this study.

Data Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis adopting Joffe's (2011) framework to examine the interview data. Thematic analysis is a flexible method that allows for identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. It is particularly useful for exploring how participants make sense of their experiences and social contexts, making it appropriate for investigating the career decision-making of education graduates. The researchers also acknowledge their positionality as faculty members of the College, the case study site. Since participants were already alumni, direct power dynamics were minimized.

Result and Discussion

This section presents the emergent themes derived from the narratives of teacher education graduates who opted not to pursue teaching after graduation. Through in-depth

interviews, the study uncovered how personal trajectories, contextual limitations, and post-graduation realities collectively influenced their career decisions.

The discussion is organized into three overarching themes: *Pathways into the Teaching Profession*, which explores how graduates entered the program and developed—or failed to develop—teaching aspirations; *Influencing Factors Behind Non-Pursuit of Teaching*, which examines the economic, social, and psychological factors that led them to explore alternative careers; and *Reflections and Future Directions*, which captures how graduates make sense of their education experience in hindsight, including how teaching competencies remain relevant in other professional contexts. These themes offer a nuanced view of non-pursuit—not as rejection, but as a product of evolving motivations, systemic challenges, and redefined career identities.

Theme 1. Pathways into the Teaching Profession

The participants' entry into the field of teacher education revealed a variety of personal, contextual, and institutional influences that shaped their academic journey long before graduation. While teacher education programs are often designed with the assumption that enrollees are firmly committed to becoming professional educators, the accounts shared in this study challenge that notion. For many, the decision to pursue an education degree was not based on a clear and purposeful career plan, but rather emerged from external pressures, limited options, or a gradual recognition of the profession's value.

Three key subthemes capture these complex and varied pathways: some were enrolled in the program unintentionally or under unclear expectations; others made practical, constrained choices due to financial or contextual limitations; and a few, though initially hesitant, discovered meaningful motivation as they progressed through their academic experience. Each of these narratives provides valuable insight into why some teacher education graduates ultimately decide not to pursue teaching after graduation, despite completing the required coursework and training.

Table 2.
Pathways into the Teaching Profession

Subthemes	Codes	Transcript Excerpts
Unintentional Enrollment	Redirected Entry	"Honestly I didn't choose an education program... they (Admissions Office) applied me in education degree and ignored my email" –P1
	Unaware of Teaching Component	"I didn't know it was actually a teaching course... I expected it to be just about Automotive... it turned out it was more focused on teaching, so I just went ahead with it." –P6
Compromised Choice Due to Limited Access	Financial Constraints	"It's my choice to take education, but what I really want is the one related to science, but I don't have a choice that time" – P2
	Course Availability During Pandemic	"That was a pandemic... I wanted to take engineering... due to pandemic, I have chosen the nearest course" – P3
	Chose What Was Feasible	"I chose it based on the available options because it seemed manageable for me and offered free tuition." – P5
Emerging Motivation Despite Mismatch	Found Meaning Through Practicum	"When I started my practice teaching, I began to like it too." –P6
	Developed Purpose Over Time	"It only proves that the first step is always the hardest... it gets better and better... close to the finish line" –P1

Unintentional Enrollment

This subtheme highlights how some participants entered the teacher education program not out of deliberate intent, but due to administrative redirection or misperceptions about the program's nature. For some, enrollment occurred passively through college procedures, while others assumed the course was more aligned with technical skills than with preparing to become educators. Although these individuals continued their studies with adaptability, the lack of intentionality at the point of entry may have hindered the development of a strong teaching identity. This misalignment between expectations and the program's actual goals likely contributed to a diminished sense of purpose and connection to the profession, which, in turn, influenced their decision not to pursue teaching after graduation.

Compromised Choice Due to Limited Access

Many participants shared that their decision to enroll in teacher education was shaped by urgent life circumstances, such as financial limitations, restricted program availability, and the broader disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. With limited options at hand, they gravitated toward education programs that were tuition-free, easily accessible, or simply manageable given their situation. While these decisions reflect a practical determination to pursue higher education despite adversity, they were often not rooted in a genuine intent to enter the teaching profession. As a result, the connection between their academic path and long-term career goals remained weak, which may have contributed to their decision not to pursue teaching after graduation.

Emerging Motivation despite Mismatch

Several participants entered teacher education with uncertainty or weak initial interest, yet gradually developed a sense of motivation as they progressed through the program—particularly during their practicum experiences. Through classroom engagement and reflection, they began to recognize their capability and the rewarding nature of teaching, which fostered a more positive outlook on the profession. Over time, some developed a clearer sense of purpose and professional growth, even if teaching was not their original aspiration. However, despite this emerging motivation, many still opted for alternative careers where their communication skills, adaptability, and confidence could be more flexibly and lucratively applied.

The findings from this theme suggest several opportunities for enhancing teacher education programs and supporting long-term engagement in the teaching profession. Strengthening communication during admission and providing early orientation initiatives can help align students' expectations with the goals of the program, fostering a more intentional and committed academic journey. Ensuring equitable access to informed career decisions through structured guidance, targeted financial assistance, and clear academic

pathways can empower students—especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds—to make purposeful choices. Additionally, the study highlights the value of practicum experiences in shaping professional identity and motivation. By reinforcing these learning moments with post-graduation support systems, viable employment opportunities, and incentives to enter the profession, institutions and policymakers can create a more encouraging environment for education graduates to build meaningful careers in teaching.

Theme 2. Influencing Factors Behind non-pursuit of Teaching

Participants' reflections revealed that the decision not to pursue teaching after graduation was shaped by a complex interplay of personal, social, and economic factors. While each had successfully completed a teacher education program, their post-graduation choices were influenced not only by their academic experiences, but also by how they envisioned their professional future in light of practical realities and emerging self-awareness.

Several themes emerged in understanding these decisions: financial constraints and the immediate need for stable income made alternative careers more viable; perceptions of the demanding and rigid nature of teaching work discouraged some from committing to the profession; others expressed stronger interest in industry or corporate roles that offered clearer opportunities for growth. Social influences—such as peer encouragement and societal perceptions of teaching—further shaped their career direction, while personal doubts and delayed clarity about their teaching identity left others hesitant to enter the field.

Together, these themes underscore that the path from education degree to teaching career is neither automatic nor assured. Instead, it is shaped by a series of evolving motivations, constraints, and contextual influences that define how graduates choose to engage—or disengage—from the teaching profession.

Table 3.
Influencing Factors Behind non-pursuit of Teaching

Subthemes	Codes	Transcript Excerpts
Economic Constraints and Practicality	Low Salary Expectations	<i>"I believe I wouldn't be able to save money if I pursued teaching in a private school due to the low salary." - P2</i>
	Immediate Financial Needs	<i>"One of the reasons I'm no longer pursuing it is because of money... I already need to earn income to help out." - P5</i>
Perceived Demands of the Teaching Profession	Burdensome of Paperwork	<i>"My main reason is the paperwork that comes with being a teacher... it was the paperwork that discouraged me." - P4</i>
	Lifestyle Incompatibility	<i>"I wanted a job that would allow me to explore and travel to different places... but I know I can't do that if I pursue teaching." - P6</i>
Alternative Career Preferences	Industry-Based Aspirations	<i>"I want to explore myself first... I prefer to further develop my knowledge in automotive by working in the industry." - P6</i>
	Attraction to Corporate Opportunities	<i>"To answer that question—after graduating, my plan is to earn money... and in the BPO industry, it's easier to do that." - P3</i>
Social Influence	Peer and Family Influence	<i>"I earned money and, because of the influence of my friends and family members, I was encouraged—since they told me that it's easier to make money in the BPO industry." - P3</i>

	Social Perceptions on the Teaching Profession	"I also realized that maybe I shouldn't have taken education... because, let's admit it, other professions tend to look down on us." – P5
Personal Uncertainty	Doubts About Teaching Role Fit	"Although I sometimes enjoy teaching, I know deep down that this isn't what I truly want for now." – P1
	Lack of Confidence in Teaching Competence	"I wasn't able to absorb or apply much knowledge during my teaching experience... most of the time, I didn't feel happy or motivated." – P1
	Delayed Career Clarity	"Maybe yes, I've been able to apply it to my current path... but I want to explore myself first." – P6

Economic constraints and Practicality

Many participants were driven to forgo a teaching career not because of a lack of interest, but because of pressing financial realities that demanded immediate income. For some, the prospect of earning a low salary in entry-level teaching positions, particularly in private schools, made the profession financially unsustainable. Others, already contributing to household income or managing personal financial obligations, found the delays and costs associated with entering the teaching workforce—such as licensing requirements and unpaid training—difficult to justify. As a result, they gravitated toward jobs that offered quicker and more competitive compensation, often in corporate or service sectors.

Perceived Demands of the Teaching Profession

Several participants shared that their hesitation to pursue teaching after graduation stemmed from the perceived intensity and rigidity of the profession, particularly the heavy administrative workload and limited lifestyle flexibility. While they appreciated the core aspects of teaching, such as student interaction and lesson delivery, many found the volume of paperwork and after-hours demands to be discouraging and misaligned with their expectations. For others, the structured schedule of teaching conflicted with personal aspirations for mobility, creativity, and autonomy. These perceptions led some to view alternative careers—particularly in industries that offered greater flexibility and less pressure—as more compatible with their long-term goals.

Alternative Career Preferences

Many participants opted for career paths outside teaching not out of disinterest, but due to the pull of professional opportunities that better aligned with their skills, interests, and immediate goals. For them, working in industry was seen as a way to enhance practical expertise and credibility—experiences they viewed as potentially enriching if they ever chose to teach in the future. Others were drawn to the corporate sector, particularly BPO and office-based roles, which offered faster hiring, clearer career progression, and more competitive pay. These choices were often shaped by financial urgency, peer influence, and previous exposure to non-teaching work environments. Rather than a rejection of teaching, their decisions reflected a redirection toward fields where they could apply their education-based competencies in communication, leadership, and adaptability.

Social Influence

Social networks and prevailing societal narratives played a notable role in shaping participants' decisions to forgo a teaching career after graduation. Family and peers, especially those already employed in sectors like BPO or technical industries, often influenced graduates by highlighting the more immediate financial rewards and career advancement available outside education. These lived examples of success in alternative fields made non-teaching paths appear more viable and attractive. In parallel, societal perceptions that portray teaching as a less prestigious or financially stagnant profession further weakened the graduates' motivation to pursue it. For some, this external judgment diminished their sense of pride in being part of the teaching field and contributed to second-guessing their educational choices.

Personal Uncertainty

Unresolved personal uncertainty significantly influenced some graduates' decision to forego teaching after completing their education degree. Despite fulfilling academic requirements, several participants expressed lingering doubts about whether teaching aligned with their personal interests, professional identity, or long-term goals. This lack of clarity was compounded by limited confidence in their teaching competence—especially after experiencing challenges during practicum or the constraints of online learning, which left them feeling underprepared and unmotivated. For others, any clarity or appreciation for teaching came only toward the end of their academic journey, by which time their interests had already shifted to other career options.

Theme 2 offer constructive directions for enhancing teacher workforce retention through responsive and inclusive education policies. Improving the financial attractiveness of the teaching profession—by providing competitive salaries, clear advancement pathways, and efficient onboarding processes—can help address the practical concerns of graduates who may otherwise be drawn to better-paying fields. At the same time, rethinking the structure and demands of teaching roles to reduce administrative burdens and promote work-life balance could make the profession more appealing to a broader range of graduates.

Equipping education programs with flexible career preparation and guidance can support those whose interests evolve beyond traditional classroom roles, affirming the value of teaching competencies across diverse sectors. Enhancing the public narrative around teaching—through both communication strategies and visible professional recognition—can reinforce the status and desirability of the profession. Finally, targeted support in career clarity, early teaching exposure, and confidence-building can ensure that students are better

prepared and more committed to entering the classroom upon graduation, contributing to a stronger and more sustainable teaching workforce.

Theme 3. Reflections and Future Directions

Although the participants in this study chose not to enter the teaching profession immediately after graduation, their reflections revealed that the impact of their teacher education journey extended beyond licensure and classroom practice. For many, the competencies acquired—such as communication, confidence, and leadership—proved to be highly transferable and valuable in non-teaching environments. Others shared that while they pursued alternate careers, they remained open to returning to teaching in the future, depending on improved conditions or personal readiness.

Several participants redefined their career identities by integrating their educational training into new roles, using their background as a foundation for adaptability and personal growth. These reflections offer a nuanced understanding of non-pursuit—not as rejection, but as redirection—demonstrating that the value of teacher education extends into broader professional and personal trajectories.

Table 4.

Reflections and Future Directions

Subthemes	Codes	Transcript Excerpts
Transferability of Teaching Skills	Application of Communication and Confidence	<i>"Yes, in a way—particularly in how I express and present myself, as well as in my confidence, communication skills, and overall capabilities."</i> – P2
	Teaching Training as Corporate Asset	<i>"Ah yes, absolutely. It's the confidence and flexibility—especially since, in the BPO industry, we need to collaborate with people."</i> – P3
Openness to Return to Teaching	Openness to Return to Teaching	<i>"Yes, maybe but in another country like Japan where I can teach without dealing with paper works."</i> – P4
	Teaching as Future Option	<i>"Yes, looking back on my experience during my teaching career... they are always giving me confidence to exert my capacity."</i> – P1
Redefining Career Identity	Teaching Identity Applied in Other Fields	<i>"Maybe yes, I've been able to apply it to my current path—like in how I speak and also in becoming a better person."</i> – P6
	Retrospective Appreciation of the Course	<i>"Yes, it helped because when people look at you, they say, 'That's a teacher... wow, they're confident... wow, they seem competent.'" – P5</i>

Transferability of Teaching Skills

Several graduates who chose not to pursue teaching still recognized the lasting value of their teacher education, particularly in how it strengthened their communication, confidence, and interpersonal abilities. These skills—developed through experiences like microteaching and lesson delivery—proved highly transferable in professional settings such as corporate offices and service industries. Participants noted that their training enabled them to express themselves clearly, collaborate effectively, and manage interpersonal dynamics with

professionalism. Far from being wasted, their education background became an asset in roles that demanded leadership, customer engagement, mentoring, and teamwork. This suggests that while teaching may not have been their final destination, the competencies gained from teacher training prepared them for a broad range of careers.

Openness to Return to Teaching

Although many participants chose not to pursue teaching immediately after graduation, several expressed a potential willingness to return to the profession under more favorable conditions. Their reflections revealed that this decision was not a definitive rejection of teaching, but rather a redirection influenced by current challenges such as administrative burdens, limited flexibility, or financial limitations. Some imagined a future in education within a different context—perhaps abroad—where teaching might offer more autonomy or better compensation. Others found lasting value in their practicum experiences and continued to view teaching as a meaningful option they could revisit when their circumstances aligned more closely with the demands of the profession.

Redefining Career Identity

For several participants, completing a teacher education program shaped not just their academic journey but their broader professional identity, even as they pursued careers outside the formal education sector. The skills and dispositions they developed—such as effective communication, composure, and a strong work ethic—proved adaptable and valuable in diverse settings like the corporate world, service industries, and technical roles. Rather than viewing their teaching degree as irrelevant, many recontextualized it as a foundation for personal growth and workplace competence. Their narratives revealed a sense of pride in how others recognized their confidence and professionalism, attributes often associated with educators. This appreciation, coupled with the purposeful application of teaching competencies in other fields, challenges the traditional view that the success of teacher education is limited to classroom employment.

Theme 3 points to the enduring value and adaptability of teacher education, suggesting that its impact extends well beyond initial career choices. Graduates consistently demonstrated that the skills gained—such as communication, leadership, and organization—are transferable and highly applicable across sectors, reinforcing the broad utility of teaching degrees. Moreover, many expressed a continued openness to return to the profession under better conditions, indicating a strong foundation of commitment that can be reactivated through policy improvements in work environments and incentives. Rather than signaling a departure from education, these outcomes highlight how teacher education fosters adaptable, values-driven professionals who contribute meaningfully to society in various roles—ultimately

strengthening the case for investing in programs that support flexible, lifelong engagement with the teaching profession.

Conclusion

This study explored the complex reasons why some education graduates do not pursue teaching after graduation, revealing that many entered teacher education not by choice but due to institutional redirection, limited course options, or financial necessity. While some participants developed motivation through practicum experiences, others remained unconvinced of their alignment with the teaching profession due to financial pressures, perceived workload demands, lifestyle limitations, and a lack of role fit or confidence. Social influences and public perceptions further shaped their decision-making, yet the skills they gained—such as communication, leadership, and empathy—proved valuable in non-teaching careers. Rather than a rejection of teaching, their choices reflected rational responses to structural, personal, and contextual challenges.

Implications

The findings of this study offer valuable implications for teacher education institutions, policymakers, and education stakeholders who aim to improve graduate retention in the teaching profession. Many participants did not initially intend to enroll in teacher education or later discovered it did not align with their personal or professional goals, suggesting a need for stronger career guidance and early orientation at the institutional level. Teacher education programs must provide structured support that helps students clarify their professional identity and understand the realities of the teaching profession early in their academic journey.

On a policy level, concerns over low salaries, slow hiring, and limited career advancement indicate the importance of improving compensation, streamlining licensure and employment processes, and creating better support systems for beginning teachers. Moreover, since many graduates found the skills they developed to be useful in non-teaching careers, programs should recognize and promote the versatility of teaching competencies, positioning teacher education as a flexible and valuable degree. Encouraging reflective practice and providing authentic field experiences can also help students make more informed and intentional decisions about whether to pursue teaching after graduation. In addition, teacher education programs may explore collaborations with industry partners to provide graduates with diverse practicum opportunities, broaden career pathways, and highlight the transferability of teaching skills across professional contexts. Such partnerships could enhance graduates' confidence in their career choices while also showcasing the wider applicability of teacher education.

Declaration of Generative AI in Scientific Writing

The authors declare that ChatGPT was used to assist with language translation, grammar editing, and formatting. All core ideas, research design, data analysis, and scholarly interpretations were independently developed and critically reviewed by the authors. The content and conclusions remain their sole responsibility.

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