



# Lived experiences of DepEd teacher applicants: A phenomenological study

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## Abstract

The recruitment of public school teachers is a critical process that determines the quality of the teaching workforce while shaping applicants' professional and personal development. Despite its importance, limited studies have explored the lived experiences of teacher applicants throughout the Department of Education (DepEd) hiring process. This study explored the lived experiences of public elementary school teacher applicants during the 2025–2026 DepEd hiring cycle in the Compostela District, Division of Davao de Oro. Specifically, it examined applicants' experiences, the challenges they encountered, the coping mechanisms they employed, and the meanings they derived from the recruitment process. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design involving ten purposively selected teacher applicants with firsthand experience in the DepEd hiring process. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that participants perceived the recruitment process as a transformative journey characterized by perseverance, resilience, and personal growth, which emerged through seven interconnected themes: Full of Joys, Hardships, and Faith; Emotional Rollercoaster Experience; Tough and Rewarding Journey; Struggles that Made Every Exhaustion Worthwhile; Full of Obstacles to Accomplishment; Full of Ups and Downs; and Strengthened Faith and Patience. Although participants encountered financial constraints, extensive documentary requirements, repeated assessments, prolonged waiting periods, and emotional uncertainty, these experiences strengthened their resilience, patience, and commitment to the teaching profession. The study concludes that the DepEd hiring process extends beyond personnel selection by fostering applicants' professional identity and psychological preparedness. The findings highlight the importance of transparent, supportive, and applicant-centered recruitment practices that promote both effective teacher selection and the well-being of aspiring educators.

## Keywords

teacher applicants; lived experiences; transcendental phenomenology; teacher recruitment; resilience; professional identity

## How to Cite

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## Author Contributions

The authors contributed to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, and supervision. The authors approved the final manuscript.

## Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards.

## INTRODUCTION

Teaching is widely recognized as a profession that plays a fundamental role in shaping individuals and society. Before entering the profession, however, aspiring teachers must successfully navigate recruitment processes that assess their academic competence, professional readiness, and personal suitability. As educational systems continue to produce increasing numbers of qualified graduates while permanent teaching positions remain limited, teacher recruitment has become increasingly competitive worldwide. Consequently, applicants often experience emotional, financial, and professional challenges throughout the selection process (Berry et al., 2011; Goldhaber et al., 2022). Beyond its administrative function, teacher recruitment has become an essential mechanism for ensuring teacher quality and long-term educational effectiveness. Effective hiring practices enable schools to identify applicants who possess not only pedagogical competence but also the professional dispositions necessary for successful teaching careers, thereby contributing to workforce stability and improved educational outcomes (Cannata, 2010; Harris et al., 2010; Bruno & Strunk, 2018; Andersson, 2025; Nelson et al., 2025).

Despite the importance of teacher recruitment, the application process is frequently accompanied by challenges that extend beyond meeting qualification requirements. Applicants often encounter extensive documentation, repeated assessments, financial burdens, travel expenses, and prolonged waiting periods before receiving hiring decisions, resulting in uncertainty, stress, and emotional exhaustion (Berry et al., 2011; Papadimitriou & Koutsoklenis, 2023; Rhinesmith et al., 2023). Previous studies have shown that applicants with stronger intrinsic motivation, professional commitment, adaptive coping strategies, and practical competencies are more capable of managing recruitment-related challenges while maintaining perseverance despite repeated setbacks (Alfalih, 2024; Bardach et al., 2022; Çapan, 2024; Cheema et al., 2022). Likewise, stress management, emotional regulation, and resilience have been identified as essential personal resources that enable aspiring teachers to sustain their commitment throughout demanding recruitment processes (Girija & Ramani, 2024; Turner & Garvis, 2023). Furthermore, teacher education institutions and recruitment agencies increasingly employ comprehensive evaluation procedures, including interviews, teaching demonstrations, cognitive assessments, and professional portfolios, to ensure that future educators possess the competencies required for effective classroom practice (Klassen et al., 2020; Haataja et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2023). Reflective learning opportunities and constructive feedback provided during teacher preparation have likewise been shown to strengthen applicants' professional confidence and readiness before entering competitive recruitment systems (Bardach et al., 2021). In addition, teacher education programs play a significant role in developing instructional competence and professional preparedness before graduates transition into the teaching workforce (Dee, 2010).

Within the Philippine context, the Department of Education (DepEd) continues to implement standardized hiring procedures designed to promote transparency, fairness, and merit-based recruitment. Nevertheless, the number of qualified teacher applicants continues to exceed the available permanent teaching positions in many school divisions, resulting in highly competitive recruitment environments. Consequently, many applicants repeatedly participate in hiring cycles while investing substantial time, financial resources, and emotional effort in pursuing public school employment. Public elementary school teacher applicants have been found to experience emotional struggles, uncertainty, and psychological pressure throughout the application process despite maintaining strong aspirations to become public school teachers (Pimienta & Romo, 2024). Similarly, educators frequently rely on adaptive coping strategies to manage occupational stress, highlighting the importance of resilience not only during professional practice but also throughout the recruitment stage (Bacamante & Sabud, 2025). Transparent and merit-based recruitment systems are likewise essential for minimizing perceptions of favoritism and strengthening applicants' trust in hiring decisions, thereby promoting fairness, credibility, and accountability throughout the teacher selection process (Darioly & Riggio, 2014).

Although previous studies have examined teacher recruitment systems, applicant screening, workforce entry, employability, and stress management (Goldhaber et al., 2022; Li & Fan, 2025; Nelson et al., 2025), relatively few have explored how teacher applicants personally experience the recruitment process and the meanings they attach to these experiences. Existing literature primarily emphasizes recruitment policies, hiring practices, and institutional perspectives, with limited attention given to applicants' lived realities of repeated applications, prolonged waiting periods, financial sacrifices, and emotional uncertainty. Addressing this gap, the present study explored the lived experiences of Department of Education teacher applicants in the Compostela District during the 2025–2026 hiring cycle. Specifically, it examined their experiences throughout the recruitment process, the challenges they encountered, the coping mechanisms they employed, and the meanings they derived from these experiences. By documenting the voices of aspiring teachers, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on teacher recruitment and provides evidence that may assist policymakers, school administrators, and teacher education institutions in developing more transparent, supportive, and applicant-centered recruitment practices.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Design**

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Department of Education (DepEd) teacher applicants during the public school hiring process. The phenomenological approach was appropriate because it sought to understand how individuals experienced and interpreted the realities of teacher recruitment from their own perspectives. By focusing on participants' narratives, the study captured the meanings they attached to their experiences, the challenges they encountered, the coping mechanisms they employed, and the insights they gained throughout the application process. The goal was to describe the shared essence of these experiences while preserving the authenticity of the participants' voices.

### **Locale**

The study was conducted in the Compostela District, Division of Davao de Oro, Philippines. The district served as the research setting because it regularly conducts teacher recruitment activities under the Department of Education's standardized hiring guidelines. It also provided access to teacher applicants who had firsthand experience with the recruitment process during the 2025–2026 hiring cycle. The setting was considered appropriate because it reflected the realities of aspiring public school teachers competing for limited permanent teaching positions within a merit-based recruitment system.

### **Participants**

The participants consisted of ten (10) Department of Education teacher applicants who had firsthand experience with the public school hiring process. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that they possessed rich and relevant experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation. To qualify for inclusion, participants were required to have participated in at least three hiring cycles, possess a valid professional teaching license, and be willing to share their experiences voluntarily. Individuals who had not completed the recruitment process or declined to participate were excluded from the study. The sample size was considered sufficient because data collection continued until no new insights or themes emerged from the interviews.

### **Instrument**

Data were collected using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide. The interview questions were designed to encourage participants to describe their recruitment experiences in detail while allowing flexibility for probing questions whenever clarification or elaboration was necessary. The interview guide focused on participants' experiences throughout the hiring process, the challenges they encountered, the strategies they used to cope with these challenges, and the personal meanings they derived from their experiences. Prior to data collection, the interview guide underwent content validation by experts to ensure that the questions were clear, relevant, and aligned with the objectives of the study.

### **Procedure**

Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the appropriate school authorities, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Each participant received an explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Individual face-to-face interviews were conducted at a mutually convenient time and location. With participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate documentation of their responses. Field notes were also maintained throughout the interviews to capture non-verbal behaviors, observations, and contextual information that complemented the recorded narratives. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes. After the interviews, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were carefully reviewed for accuracy before proceeding with data analysis. Participants were given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts to verify that their responses were accurately represented.

### **Analysis**

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. Initially, the transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' narratives. Meaningful statements related to the research objectives were identified and assigned preliminary codes. Similar codes were then grouped into categories that represented common patterns across participants' experiences. The categories were subsequently refined into broader themes that captured the shared essence of the participants' lived experiences. Throughout the analysis, the researcher continuously compared emerging themes with the original interview transcripts to ensure that the findings accurately reflected the participants' accounts. The final themes were organized according to the study's research objectives and served as the basis for interpreting the participants' lived experiences during the Department of Education hiring process.

### **Trustworthiness**

Several measures were implemented to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with the data, careful transcription of interviews, and participant verification of interview transcripts. Dependability was promoted by maintaining detailed documentation of the research process, including data collection procedures, coding decisions, and theme development. Confirmability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail and practicing researcher reflexivity throughout the study to minimize personal bias during data interpretation. Transferability was supported by providing rich descriptions of the research setting, participant characteristics, and research procedures, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar contexts.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study adhered to established ethical principles throughout the research process. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms or participant codes were used in place of real names during transcription and reporting. All interview recordings, transcripts, and research documents were securely stored and were accessible only to the researcher. The collected data were used exclusively for academic purposes, and every effort was made to present the findings honestly, respectfully, and without misrepresenting the participants' experiences.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Theme 1. Full of Joys, Hardships, and Faith**

Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that the application journey of public elementary school teacher applicants was characterized by a combination of joy, hardships, and unwavering faith. Participants described the recruitment process

as emotionally meaningful because it represented the realization of a long-held aspiration to become public school teachers. However, their enthusiasm was accompanied by numerous challenges, including financial burdens, documentary requirements, repeated assessments, travel expenses, and prolonged waiting periods. Although these circumstances created emotional and physical exhaustion, participants consistently emphasized that their commitment to the teaching profession enabled them to persevere. Their narratives illustrate that the recruitment process was not merely an administrative requirement but a transformative journey that strengthened their resilience and reinforced their professional aspirations.

One participant shared: "My application journey was full of joy and hardships. When I started, I was very excited because I had always dreamed of becoming a teacher. But after the first week, I realized that it was not as easy as I thought... Looking back, I realized that although the journey was difficult, it was worth it because I was one step closer to fulfilling my dream of becoming a teacher." (Informant 2)

Similarly, another participant reflected on the challenges encountered throughout the hiring process: "My journey was full of joy and hardships... The process was not easy, but the journey was truly fulfilling." (Informant 9)

Faith likewise emerged as a recurring source of strength, as expressed by another participant: "My application journey was full of joy, hardships, and faith... Even though I was already very tired, I kept going because teaching is my dream." (Informant 10)

These narratives suggest that participants attached meanings to their experiences that extended beyond employment acquisition. Although they encountered financial limitations, demanding documentary requirements, repeated evaluations, and uncertainty throughout the hiring process, they interpreted these challenges as necessary sacrifices in pursuit of a meaningful profession. Rather than weakening their determination, these experiences reinforced their commitment to becoming public school teachers and strengthened their confidence in overcoming future professional challenges. The findings support previous studies indicating that teacher recruitment is often accompanied by institutional and personal challenges that require applicants to demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and sustained commitment. Teacher applicants frequently invest considerable time, financial resources, and emotional energy while navigating highly competitive recruitment systems, particularly in contexts where available teaching positions remain limited (Berry et al., 2011; Rhinesmith et al., 2023). Similar findings have been reported in the Philippine context, where aspiring public school teachers commonly experience emotional struggles, financial burdens, and prolonged uncertainty while remaining committed to their professional aspirations (Pimienta & Romo, 2024). These studies collectively suggest that recruitment is not solely a process of evaluating qualifications but also an experience that develops perseverance and emotional resilience among future educators. The participants' experiences also reflect broader perspectives regarding teacher recruitment and professional preparation. Effective recruitment systems increasingly recognize that successful teachers possess not only pedagogical competence but also personal characteristics such as commitment, persistence, and adaptability that enable them to respond effectively to professional challenges (Cannata, 2010; Harris et al., 2010). Likewise, workforce entry experiences significantly influence teachers' professional identity and long-term commitment to the profession because recruitment often represents the first substantial encounter with the realities of educational service (Goldhaber et al., 2022). Consequently, the challenges experienced during recruitment contribute to applicants' professional socialization by fostering greater appreciation for the responsibilities associated with teaching. The findings may likewise be understood through the lens of Self-Determination Theory, which proposes that individuals remain motivated when pursuing goals that satisfy deeply valued personal aspirations and psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Participants demonstrated strong intrinsic motivation by remaining committed despite repeated setbacks and prolonged uncertainty. Their persistence was driven not merely by the expectation of obtaining employment but by their genuine desire to become educators and contribute meaningfully to society. This internal source of motivation enabled participants to interpret challenges as opportunities for growth rather than barriers to success.

## **Theme 2. Emotional Rollercoaster Experience**

The findings revealed that participants experienced the Department of Education hiring process as an emotional rollercoaster characterized by alternating feelings of excitement, hope, anxiety, frustration, uncertainty, and fulfillment. Applicants initially viewed the recruitment process with optimism because it represented an opportunity to achieve their professional aspirations. However, as they progressed through documentary preparation, examinations, interviews, ranking procedures, and prolonged waiting periods, these positive emotions gradually gave way to stress and uncertainty. Despite these emotional fluctuations, participants remained determined to complete every stage of the hiring process, demonstrating remarkable resilience throughout their journey. One participant described the experience as follows: "My application journey felt like a carnival ride because it kept going in circles, up and down. It started with so much excitement because I was finally doing what I had always wanted. However, after the first few days, I began to realize how challenging it was. Every requirement felt like a mountain to climb... But when I eventually got the job, I felt proud of how far I had come despite all the difficulties." (Informant 3)

Another participant similarly reflected: "My journey felt like an emotional rollercoaster. I started excited, hoping that I would pass all the requirements. But after the first week, stress began to set in... The waiting period was the most stressful part because you wait for weeks just to hear any update from them. In the end, I was able to pass all the stages and felt a strong sense of fulfillment." (Informant 6)

These narratives illustrate that applicants continuously shifted between confidence and uncertainty as they navigated each stage of the recruitment process. Successfully completing one requirement often generated optimism; however, subsequent assessments and prolonged waiting periods introduced new emotional challenges that required participants to repeatedly regulate their emotions. Rather than viewing these fluctuations as failures, participants gradually accepted them as natural components of pursuing a meaningful career in public education. The findings are consistent with previous studies

showing that teacher applicants commonly experience psychological stress throughout recruitment because of competition, uncertainty, and institutional expectations. Public school teacher applicants frequently encounter emotional strain associated with prolonged waiting periods, repeated evaluations, and concerns regarding hiring outcomes (Pimienta & Romo, 2024). Likewise, recruitment systems often expose aspiring teachers to institutional pressures requiring considerable emotional endurance before entering the profession (Berry et al., 2011). These experiences highlight the importance of resilience during workforce entry. Research likewise demonstrates that effective stress management and adaptive coping strategies enable educators and teacher candidates to maintain motivation despite demanding professional circumstances. Teacher candidates commonly employ optimism, emotional regulation, and problem-solving strategies that strengthen their ability to cope with recruitment-related stress (Çapan, 2024; Cheema et al., 2022). Similar findings indicate that adaptive coping mechanisms contribute significantly to sustaining professional commitment while reducing the negative effects of occupational stress (Bacamante & Sabud, 2025). Although these studies focus primarily on practicing teachers and teacher candidates, the present findings suggest that resilience begins developing even before individuals formally enter the profession. Furthermore, psychological characteristics such as resilience, self-efficacy, and emotional stability have been identified as important predictors of teachers' professional engagement and long-term career success (Bardach et al., 2022; Johnson, 2022). Participants in the present study demonstrated these characteristics by maintaining confidence despite repeated emotional setbacks throughout the recruitment process. Their experiences indicate that successfully navigating emotional uncertainty contributes to stronger professional identity and greater readiness for future teaching responsibilities.

### **Theme 3. Tough and Rewarding Journey**

The findings revealed that participants perceived the Department of Education hiring process as a journey that was both demanding and rewarding. While applicants encountered numerous challenges throughout the recruitment process, they consistently described these experiences as worthwhile because they represented meaningful steps toward achieving their lifelong aspiration of becoming public school teachers. The participants viewed every requirement, examination, interview, and waiting period not merely as obstacles but as opportunities to demonstrate their commitment to the profession. Consequently, the recruitment journey became a valuable learning experience that strengthened their confidence, perseverance, and appreciation of the responsibilities associated with becoming educators.

One participant described the experience as follows: "For me, the journey started with a lot of excitement, but later I became overwhelmed by the number of requirements. I began feeling confident, but after the first week, I felt drained of energy. I had to prepare clearances, exams, and interviews, and it was very tiring. The waiting period was the most difficult part because I was waiting for feedback without knowing whether I would be accepted or not. When I finally received the call that I had been approved, it was a huge relief, and I felt that all my struggles were worth it. In the end, the journey was tough but very rewarding." (Informant 1)

This narrative illustrates that participants interpreted the recruitment process as more than a series of administrative requirements. Although applicants experienced fatigue, uncertainty, and repeated setbacks, these challenges became meaningful because they contributed to their personal growth and professional development. Participants consistently emphasized that the value of success was not solely measured by obtaining employment but by successfully overcoming every stage of the recruitment process. Their reflections demonstrate that perseverance and sustained effort enhanced the significance of their accomplishments, making the eventual opportunity to serve as public school teachers even more meaningful. The findings support previous research indicating that workforce entry represents a significant developmental stage in teachers' professional careers. Recruitment experiences shape applicants' confidence, professional identity, and long-term commitment by exposing them to the realities and expectations of the teaching profession (Goldhaber et al., 2022). Likewise, teacher recruitment systems that employ multiple stages of screening and evaluation encourage applicants to demonstrate perseverance, adaptability, and professional competence before entering the classroom (Nelson et al., 2025). These perspectives suggest that the recruitment process itself functions as an important component of teacher preparation by cultivating qualities essential for effective educational practice. The findings are likewise consistent with studies emphasizing the increasing complexity of contemporary teacher recruitment. Hiring systems now require applicants to satisfy multiple institutional expectations, including documentary compliance, professional interviews, competency assessments, and evaluations of professional dispositions (Andersson, 2025). Similarly, school administrators recognize commitment, adaptability, and persistence as valuable characteristics that complement pedagogical competence during teacher selection (Harris et al., 2010). Consequently, applicants who successfully navigate demanding recruitment procedures demonstrate professional qualities that are likely to contribute to future teaching effectiveness. Recent research further suggests that comprehensive teacher selection procedures contribute to applicants' professional readiness by encouraging continuous preparation throughout the recruitment process. Modern recruitment systems increasingly evaluate communication skills, critical thinking, instructional competence, and professional dispositions to ensure that successful applicants possess the competencies required in contemporary educational settings (Klassen et al., 2020; Haataja et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2023). Although these procedures increase the demands placed upon applicants, they also provide opportunities for individuals to strengthen their professional confidence before assuming teaching responsibilities.

The participants' experiences also reflect the importance of long-term career aspirations in sustaining motivation throughout difficult professional transitions. Individuals with well-developed career plans are more likely to interpret recruitment challenges as temporary obstacles rather than permanent barriers because they remain focused on achieving meaningful professional goals (Li & Fan, 2025). This perspective was evident throughout the participants' narratives, where each completed stage of the recruitment process represented progress toward fulfilling their aspirations despite experiencing emotional and practical difficulties. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, participants

demonstrated strong autonomous motivation throughout the hiring process because teaching represented a personally meaningful vocation rather than merely a source of employment (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Their intrinsic commitment enabled them to remain optimistic despite repeated setbacks, allowing them to interpret difficulties as opportunities for personal growth rather than reasons to abandon their aspirations. The findings therefore illustrate how internal motivation strengthens perseverance and contributes to successful professional development.

#### **Theme 4. Struggles that Made Every Exhaustion Worthwhile**

The findings revealed that participants regarded the numerous struggles encountered during the Department of Education hiring process as meaningful sacrifices that ultimately made their success more fulfilling. Applicants described the recruitment process as physically exhausting, emotionally demanding, financially challenging, and psychologically taxing. Nevertheless, they consistently emphasized that every hardship became worthwhile because it represented progress toward achieving their dream of becoming public school teachers. Rather than discouraging participants, these experiences reinforced their determination and deepened their appreciation of the teaching profession.

One participant reflected on the demanding nature of the application journey: "In my experience, the journey felt like a long-distance race without a clear finish line. I started feeling excited and hopeful, but as I went through the process, I began to feel the weight of every requirement and every step. I had to submit many documents and go through exams and interviews. The places I needed to go to were far, and there were many expenses, so it was financially difficult. I pushed through every challenge, and in the end, getting hired made all the exhaustion worth it. The whole process really showed me how much I wanted this job." (Informant 4)

The participant's account illustrates that the recruitment process required substantial investments of time, effort, and financial resources long before employment was secured. Participants repeatedly described traveling to different offices, obtaining documentary requirements, preparing for assessments, and enduring prolonged waiting periods as unavoidable components of their journey. Although these experiences generated physical fatigue and emotional strain, they also strengthened participants' perseverance by reinforcing the importance of the professional goals they sought to achieve. Their willingness to continue despite repeated exhaustion demonstrates the depth of their commitment to public service and their belief that meaningful accomplishments require sustained effort and sacrifice. The findings support previous studies indicating that teacher recruitment often presents considerable logistical and structural challenges for aspiring educators. Applicants frequently invest significant personal resources while navigating complex recruitment procedures, particularly in contexts where permanent teaching positions are limited (Rhinesmith et al., 2023). Similarly, teacher applicants commonly encounter institutional barriers requiring resilience, persistence, and adaptability before entering the profession (Berry et al., 2011). These studies reinforce the present findings by suggesting that recruitment demands extend beyond professional qualifications to include emotional and practical readiness for the realities of educational service. Within the Philippine context, similar experiences have been documented among public elementary school teacher applicants who reported financial burdens, prolonged uncertainty, and emotional struggles while pursuing public school employment (Pimienta & Romo, 2024). Despite these difficulties, applicants maintained optimism because they viewed teaching as a meaningful vocation characterized by service and personal fulfillment rather than financial reward alone. Likewise, educators who employ adaptive coping strategies demonstrate greater capacity to manage stress and sustain professional commitment when confronted with occupational challenges (Bacamante & Sabud, 2025). The present findings suggest that these adaptive coping mechanisms begin to develop during recruitment as applicants learn to respond constructively to repeated challenges and uncertainty.

The findings also align with research emphasizing the importance of resilience and psychological readiness among educators. Teachers possessing stronger resilience, emotional stability, and professional commitment are better equipped to manage workplace demands and sustain long-term engagement within the profession (Bardach et al., 2022). Similarly, higher levels of self-efficacy contribute to greater persistence and professional engagement when individuals encounter challenging situations (Johnson, 2022). Participants demonstrated these psychological characteristics by continuing to pursue employment despite repeated setbacks, illustrating that resilience developed during recruitment may serve as a valuable foundation for future professional practice. Furthermore, career planning has been identified as an important factor influencing applicants' ability to overcome professional challenges. Individuals who maintain clear career aspirations are more likely to interpret temporary hardships as investments in achieving meaningful long-term goals rather than as reasons to discontinue their professional pursuits (Li & Fan, 2025). This perspective was reflected throughout the participants' narratives, where every sacrifice strengthened rather than diminished their commitment to becoming public school teachers.

#### **Theme 5. Full of Obstacles to Accomplishment**

The findings revealed that participants perceived the Department of Education hiring process as a journey characterized by numerous obstacles that had to be overcome before achieving their professional aspirations. Applicants consistently described the recruitment process as consisting of successive stages that required continuous preparation, persistence, and emotional endurance. Documentary requirements, competitive assessments, interviews, ranking procedures, and prolonged waiting periods were viewed as significant barriers that tested their determination. Despite these difficulties, participants regarded each obstacle as an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to becoming public school teachers. Rather than discouraging them, the cumulative challenges strengthened their resilience and increased the value they attached to eventually achieving their professional goals. One participant described the recruitment process as a long and demanding journey toward success: "My journey felt like I was following a long road filled with obstacles. I started excited because becoming a teacher has always been my dream, but after submitting the requirements, I began to feel overwhelmed. There were many documents that needed to be secured, and the deadlines were difficult to follow. When I submitted everything, I

thought I was already done, but there were still many more steps such as exams, interviews, and others. The waiting period was the most stressful part for me because every day I was just waiting for updates. I felt like I was at the mercy of the process, and it was very frustrating. But when I finally received the call, everything suddenly felt worth it. I felt so relieved, and it finally felt like I had reached the end of the journey. After everything, I felt accomplished because I knew I worked hard for it. It was not easy, but I managed to overcome it." (Informant 5)

The participant's narrative demonstrates that the recruitment process was experienced as a continuous progression of interconnected challenges rather than isolated administrative tasks. Completing one stage frequently led to another requirement, requiring applicants to repeatedly adapt, prepare, and persevere despite uncertainty. These experiences fostered a sense of accomplishment because success was earned through sustained effort rather than immediate achievement. Participants therefore viewed obstacles not merely as barriers but as developmental experiences that enhanced their confidence and reinforced their professional aspirations. The findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that contemporary teacher recruitment involves increasingly comprehensive evaluation systems requiring applicants to demonstrate professional competence across multiple stages of assessment. Recruitment procedures commonly include documentary screening, competency assessments, interviews, and evaluations of professional dispositions to ensure that successful applicants possess the knowledge, skills, and personal qualities necessary for effective teaching (Klassen et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2023). Similarly, educational institutions have strengthened recruitment practices by incorporating more rigorous selection procedures intended to improve teacher quality while ensuring fairness and accountability throughout the hiring process (Andersson, 2025; Nelson et al., 2025). Although these systems enhance recruitment standards, they also increase the complexity of the application process, requiring applicants to invest considerable effort before obtaining employment. The participants' experiences likewise support research emphasizing that successful teacher applicants must demonstrate perseverance and adaptability alongside academic competence. School administrators increasingly value applicants who exhibit commitment, resilience, and the capacity to navigate professional challenges because these qualities contribute to long-term effectiveness within the teaching profession (Cannata, 2010; Harris et al., 2010). Furthermore, workforce entry experiences significantly influence beginning teachers' confidence and professional identity by exposing them to institutional expectations before entering classroom practice (Goldhaber et al., 2022). These perspectives reinforce the present findings by suggesting that overcoming recruitment obstacles contributes positively to applicants' professional development. The obstacles encountered by participants also reflect the importance of long-term career planning in sustaining motivation. Individuals who possess well-defined professional goals are more likely to interpret temporary setbacks as challenges to overcome rather than reasons to abandon their aspirations (Li & Fan, 2025). The participants consistently demonstrated this future-oriented perspective by maintaining their commitment despite repeated delays, documentary requirements, and competitive evaluations. Their experiences indicate that clear professional aspirations enabled them to remain focused on their ultimate goal while successfully navigating the demanding recruitment process. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, participants demonstrated strong autonomous motivation because becoming a public school teacher represented a deeply meaningful personal aspiration rather than simply an employment opportunity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Their intrinsic commitment enabled them to remain persistent despite repeated obstacles and prolonged uncertainty. Instead of interpreting recruitment challenges as permanent barriers, participants viewed them as necessary steps toward achieving meaningful professional fulfillment. This internal motivation strengthened their resilience and sustained their efforts throughout every stage of the hiring process.

#### **Theme 6. Full of Ups and Downs**

The findings revealed that participants experienced the Department of Education hiring process as a journey characterized by continuous ups and downs that shaped both their personal and professional development. Applicants described alternating experiences of optimism and discouragement as they progressed through the various stages of recruitment. Initial excitement gradually gave way to moments of uncertainty brought about by documentary requirements, examinations, interviews, ranking procedures, and prolonged waiting for official results. Despite these fluctuations, participants remained committed to their aspirations, demonstrating that resilience and perseverance enabled them to navigate the unpredictable nature of the recruitment process. Their experiences illustrate that professional growth often occurs through repeated exposure to both success and adversity. One participant reflected on the dynamic nature of the application journey: "My application journey was full of ups and downs. I started feeling excited because I knew this was my chance for my dream to finally come true. However, after the first few weeks, I began to feel exhausted from the process. The paperwork, requirements, and travel seemed endless. The offices I needed to visit were far, which consumed a lot of time and money. The exams were very stressful because I did not know what to expect. The interview was also nerve-wracking because it felt like everything depended on it. The most challenging part was the waiting period after submitting all the documents. It felt like waiting for weeks without knowing whether I was moving forward or not. But when I finally received the call that I had passed, it felt like all my efforts had paid off." (Informant 7)

The participants' narratives demonstrate that the recruitment process was not a linear progression toward employment but rather a series of alternating experiences that continually challenged their emotional stability and professional confidence. Every successful accomplishment provided renewed optimism, whereas each subsequent stage introduced new uncertainties requiring further emotional adjustment. Instead of allowing temporary disappointments to discourage them, participants gradually accepted these fluctuations as natural components of pursuing a meaningful teaching career. Consequently, every setback became an opportunity to strengthen perseverance and deepen appreciation for the profession they aspired to enter. The findings support previous research indicating that teacher recruitment represents a critical transitional period during which applicants develop professional resilience and readiness for educational practice. Workforce entry experiences expose aspiring teachers to institutional expectations that significantly influence their

confidence, professional identity, and long-term commitment to teaching (Goldhaber et al., 2022). Likewise, recruitment systems involving multiple stages of assessment often require applicants to repeatedly adapt to changing demands and expectations, contributing to both professional growth and emotional development (Nelson et al., 2025). These findings suggest that the challenges encountered during recruitment prepare future teachers for the dynamic nature of educational work. The participants' experiences also align with research emphasizing the importance of adaptability within teacher recruitment. Modern hiring systems increasingly require applicants to demonstrate flexibility, perseverance, and professional competence throughout successive stages of evaluation (Andersson, 2025). Similarly, effective teacher selection extends beyond measuring academic qualifications by considering applicants' commitment, adaptability, and readiness to respond to complex educational environments (Harris et al., 2010). These perspectives reinforce the present findings by highlighting that successfully navigating fluctuating recruitment experiences contributes to stronger professional preparation. Furthermore, the emotional fluctuations described by participants correspond with studies examining resilience and psychological well-being among educators. Psychological characteristics such as resilience, emotional stability, and self-efficacy contribute significantly to teachers' professional engagement, well-being, and long-term career success (Bardach et al., 2022; Johnson, 2022). Likewise, resilience develops through repeated engagement with challenging experiences that require individuals to adapt, recover, and continue pursuing meaningful goals despite adversity (Turner & Garvis, 2023). Participants demonstrated these characteristics by consistently rebuilding their motivation following periods of uncertainty, suggesting that emotional resilience begins developing during recruitment rather than after employment.

The findings also support previous studies indicating that adaptive coping strategies enable educators to respond constructively to stressful situations while maintaining professional commitment. Teacher candidates commonly employ optimism, emotional regulation, and problem-solving strategies that strengthen their capacity to manage professional challenges (Çapan, 2024; Cheema et al., 2022). Similarly, adaptive coping contributes to sustained motivation and resilience among educators confronted with occupational stress (Bacamante & Sabud, 2025). The present findings extend these observations by demonstrating that similar coping mechanisms emerge during teacher recruitment as applicants repeatedly respond to changing circumstances and prolonged uncertainty.

#### **Theme 7. Strengthened Faith and Patience**

The findings revealed that the Department of Education hiring process strengthened participants' faith and patience as they navigated the uncertainties associated with public school teacher recruitment. Although applicants initially regarded the recruitment process as a means of obtaining permanent employment, their experiences gradually evolved into opportunities for personal reflection, emotional growth, and professional maturity. Prolonged waiting periods, repeated documentary requirements, multiple evaluations, and unpredictable hiring outcomes required participants to cultivate patience while maintaining confidence in their ability to achieve their aspirations. These experiences enabled applicants to develop greater emotional resilience and reinforced their commitment to the teaching profession despite circumstances beyond their immediate control. One participant reflected on how the recruitment journey became a profound lesson in patience and perseverance: "My journey was a strong test of my faith and patience. I started with hope because I knew I was finally getting closer to my dream, but as the process continued, I encountered more challenges. There were documents that I needed to secure, and some of them took a long time to process. The stress affected me because I had to balance my current job and the application process at the same time. Every step was full of uncertainty, and there were moments when I doubted whether I was good enough or prepared for everything. The waiting period, especially after submitting all the requirements, was the most difficult part. There were no clear updates, so I kept wondering whether I was moving forward or not. But in the end, when I received the call that I had passed, all the exhaustion and sacrifices felt worth it. The happiness I felt was not because of the salary, but because I achieved my dream job. The whole journey was difficult, but now I am grateful for the experience." (Informant 8)

The participant's narrative illustrates that the hiring process extended beyond professional preparation and became a transformative personal experience. Participants acknowledged that uncertainty and repeated delays initially generated anxiety and frustration. However, these challenges gradually encouraged them to become more patient, emotionally resilient, and appreciative of the value of persistence. Their reflections suggest that faith functioned as a psychological resource that sustained optimism during periods when outcomes remained uncertain. Rather than focusing solely on immediate frustrations, participants maintained confidence in their long-term aspirations, allowing them to continue pursuing their professional goals despite repeated setbacks. The findings support previous research indicating that public school teacher applicants commonly experience emotional uncertainty, financial challenges, and prolonged waiting periods while pursuing employment. Despite these obstacles, applicants often remain committed because teaching represents a meaningful vocation characterized by service, purpose, and professional fulfillment rather than financial reward alone (Pimienta & Romo, 2024). Likewise, aspiring teachers frequently encounter institutional and personal challenges that require considerable emotional endurance before entering the profession, reinforcing the importance of resilience throughout workforce entry (Berry et al., 2011).

The participants' experiences also align with studies emphasizing the role of adaptive coping strategies in managing professional stress. Teacher candidates commonly employ emotional regulation, optimism, and problem-solving strategies that strengthen their capacity to overcome stressful situations and maintain commitment to their career aspirations (Çapan, 2024; Cheema et al., 2022). Similarly, educators who demonstrate adaptive coping are more capable of sustaining professional engagement despite occupational pressures and uncertainty (Bacamante & Sabud, 2025). These perspectives support the present findings by suggesting that resilience and patience begin developing during recruitment and continue to strengthen throughout professional practice. Furthermore, resilience has been identified as an essential characteristic associated with teachers' professional well-being and long-term effectiveness. Teachers possessing stronger psychological

resilience and emotional stability are better equipped to respond constructively to professional challenges while maintaining motivation and commitment (Bardach et al., 2022). Likewise, resilience develops through repeated exposure to demanding experiences requiring individuals to adapt and recover from adversity rather than through the absence of stress (Turner & Garvis, 2023). Participants demonstrated this developmental process by gradually learning to accept uncertainty while maintaining confidence in their future careers. The findings further correspond with research highlighting the importance of long-term career planning in sustaining professional motivation. Individuals with clear professional goals remain more committed despite temporary setbacks because they perceive challenges as necessary components of achieving meaningful aspirations (Li & Fan, 2025). The participants consistently demonstrated this future-oriented perspective by interpreting delays and uncertainty as temporary obstacles rather than permanent failures. Their willingness to remain patient despite prolonged waiting periods illustrates the strength of their commitment to becoming public school teachers.

Viewed through the lens of Self-Determination Theory, participants demonstrated strong autonomous motivation because their desire to become educators was grounded in deeply valued personal aspirations and professional purpose (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Their intrinsic motivation enabled them to maintain faith, patience, and perseverance despite uncertainty, reinforcing the idea that meaningful vocational goals foster resilience and sustained commitment. Rather than allowing external challenges to diminish their aspirations, participants transformed these experiences into opportunities for personal and professional growth.

### **Integrative Discussion**

Collectively, the seven themes describe the lived experiences of Department of Education teacher applicants as a transformative journey characterized by perseverance, resilience, sacrifice, emotional growth, and unwavering commitment to the teaching profession. Although participants narrated unique personal experiences, their accounts converged around a common essence: the pursuit of becoming a public school teacher required applicants to continuously overcome personal, emotional, financial, and institutional challenges while remaining committed to a meaningful professional goal. The themes illustrate that teacher recruitment extends beyond administrative procedures and serves as a formative process through which aspiring educators develop resilience, patience, confidence, and professional identity. The findings reinforce previous literature indicating that teacher recruitment is a critical stage of professional socialization that significantly influences applicants' readiness for educational practice and long-term career commitment (Goldhaber et al., 2022). Contemporary recruitment systems increasingly require applicants to demonstrate not only academic competence but also adaptability, emotional resilience, communication skills, and professional dispositions necessary for effective teaching (Klassen et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2023; Nelson et al., 2025). Consequently, the recruitment process itself contributes to the development of professional qualities essential for success in the teaching profession. The participants' experiences further highlight the importance of psychological resilience and adaptive coping during workforce entry. Previous studies have consistently shown that resilience, self-efficacy, emotional regulation, and effective coping strategies contribute to teachers' well-being, professional engagement, and long-term effectiveness (Bardach et al., 2022; Johnson, 2022; Turner & Garvis, 2023). The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that these characteristics begin developing during recruitment rather than after employment. Participants learned to manage uncertainty, disappointment, financial constraints, and repeated setbacks while maintaining confidence in their professional aspirations, suggesting that resilience is cultivated through lived experience rather than innate personal characteristics alone. The findings also underscore the importance of supportive and applicant-centered recruitment systems. While rigorous hiring procedures remain necessary to ensure teacher quality, recruitment practices that promote transparency, timely communication, and institutional support may reduce unnecessary stress while preserving the integrity of merit-based selection (Andersson, 2025; Harris et al., 2010). Strengthening orientation programs, improving communication regarding application timelines, and providing clearer guidance throughout recruitment may contribute to more positive applicant experiences without compromising recruitment standards. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, the participants' experiences demonstrate that intrinsic motivation served as the primary force sustaining perseverance throughout the hiring process (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Their aspiration to become public school teachers was driven by deeply valued personal goals rather than external rewards alone. Consequently, challenges such as financial burdens, repeated assessments, documentary requirements, and prolonged waiting periods became opportunities for growth rather than reasons to abandon their aspirations. This finding highlights the significant role of autonomous motivation in fostering resilience, emotional maturity, and long-term professional commitment. Overall, the study demonstrates that the Department of Education hiring process functions not only as a mechanism for selecting qualified teachers but also as a developmental experience that shapes future educators before they formally enter the classroom. By illuminating the lived experiences of teacher applicants, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of teacher recruitment and provide evidence that may inform more responsive, transparent, and applicant-centered recruitment policies. Such improvements have the potential to strengthen both the quality of teacher selection and the well-being of aspiring educators, ultimately benefiting the broader educational system.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This phenomenological study revealed that the lived experiences of Department of Education teacher applicants are best understood as a transformative journey characterized by perseverance, resilience, uncertainty, and personal growth. Although participants encountered numerous challenges, including financial constraints, extensive documentary requirements, repeated assessments, and prolonged waiting periods, these experiences strengthened rather than weakened their commitment to the teaching profession. The essence of their lived experiences lies in their ability to transform adversity into opportunities for emotional growth, professional development, and stronger vocational commitment. The findings further demonstrate that the Department of Education hiring process functions not only as a recruitment mechanism but also as a developmental experience that shapes future educators' emotional readiness and professional identity. By

highlighting the voices of aspiring teachers, this study contributes to the growing body of qualitative literature on teacher recruitment and provides evidence that applicant-centered recruitment practices can enhance both the effectiveness and the human dimension of teacher selection.

Based on the findings of the study, the Department of Education may consider enhancing its recruitment and hiring process by providing clearer communication, regular updates on applicants' status, and transparent timelines throughout every stage of the selection process. Such initiatives may reduce applicants' uncertainty and emotional stress while promoting a more supportive and applicant-centered recruitment system. Likewise, school administrators and recruitment personnel may strengthen orientation programs and provide guidance regarding documentary requirements, examinations, and interviews to help applicants better prepare for each stage of the hiring process. Teacher education institutions are likewise encouraged to strengthen career preparation initiatives by incorporating seminars, mock interviews, document preparation workshops, and resilience-building activities into their programs. These interventions may help future graduates become more prepared for the realities of public school recruitment. In addition, future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies involving teacher applicants from different school divisions or regions and employ broader qualitative or mixed-methods approaches to generate a more comprehensive understanding of teacher applicants' experiences and identify strategies that can further improve recruitment policies and practices.

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