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Teacher Motivation for Staying in the Profession: Insights from Timor-Leste

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Abstract

Examining teachers' motivation to stay in the profession may help sustain and expand the teaching workforce in Timor-Leste. Using quantitative methodologies, the study explored the factors that influence teachers' motivation to stay in their teaching careers. Descriptive statistics revealed that many Timorese teacher respondents are very highly motivated to remain serving as teachers. They also view all core and contributing motivational factors positively (i.e., 'sense of purpose and fulfillment', 'teaching as interest and passion', 'sense of growth and development', 'sense of being respected and valued', 'teacher well-being', 'school environment', 'salary, incentives and benefits', and 'government laws and policies'). Inferential statistics showed that the length of teaching is positively associated, albeit to a very weak extent, with teacher respondents' motivation levels. Hierarchical regression analysis, on the other hand, identified a combination of factors and variables that predict teacher respondents' motivation to continue teaching, including the factor 'sense of being respected and valued', length of teaching, participation in professional learning communities and/or networks, kindergarten as a grade level taught, and gender. Several policy recommendations were also proposed based on the results of the study.

I. Introduction

According to the Human Resources Department and the Educational Management Information System (EMIS) of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MOEYS), 15,524 teachers in Timor-Leste serve in 1,943 schools nationwide. A large majority of the teachers, 12,332 (79.44%), are in basic education, followed by 1,394 teachers (8.98%) in general secondary education, and by 1,030 teachers (6.63%) in pre-school education.

Formal education in the country started under the Portuguese missionaries in the 16th century. However, education was limited only to those of Portuguese descent and those who assimilated into its administration. Under Indonesia, from 1975 to 1999, access to education was expanded to the ordinary Timorese. However, after the 1999 independence vote, many infrastructure in East Timor was destroyed, including 95% of its classrooms. Most teachers, being Indonesian, also left, resulting in a 25% loss in primary school staff and 80% in high school. Many of the remaining educators were left untrained and underqualified (Quinn & Buchanan, 2022). As such, Timor-Leste had to rebuild its education system, including its teaching workforce.

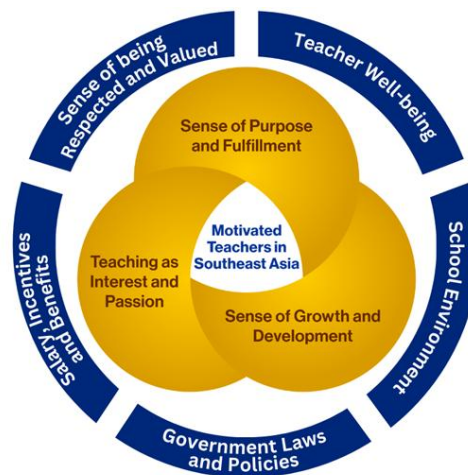
Teachers are highly respected in the country and are acknowledged for their significant role in educating future generations. The teaching profession is often seen as stable, providing a consistent source of income. However, there is a challenge in attracting highly skilled individuals to enter the field (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2023). Many potential candidates require further development of their skills (Albergaria-Almeida & Martinho, 2015). In response to this issue, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MOEYS) is implementing reforms aimed at professionalizing the teaching career through measures such as contracting, capacity building, performance evaluation, career progression, and promotion (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2023).

As the population of Timor-Leste grows and more children need to enter the education system, the country must sustain and expand its teaching workforce (Quinn & Buchanan, 2022). As such, teacher motivation is worthwhile to examine to aid the country in addressing current and emerging needs for educators. Several existing studies have defined the concept. Han and Yin (2016) describe it as “reasons that emanate from individuals’ intrinsic values to choose to teach and sustain teaching... influenced by a number of contextual factors” (p.3). In addition, Richardson (2014, as cited in Mangaleswarasharma, 2017) depicts it as “internal and external factors that stimulate desire or energy in teaching to be continuously interested and committed to make their best effort to support students’ learning goals” (p.2). These definitions show how a combination of personal drivers and external influences helps teachers stay committed to their roles.

Teacher motivation in this research is defined as the factors that influence teachers to remain in the profession, as adopted from Umali et al.’s (2024) *Southeast Asian Framework on Teacher Motivation in Staying in the Profession*. The framework claims that core and contributing factors support teachers in their decision to continue serving as educators. The core factors serve as key drivers that motivate teachers to stay in their careers. These include a sense of purpose and fulfillment, interest and passion for teaching, and a sense of growth and development. Contributing factors, on the other hand, are those that support the core factors, enabling teachers to continue teaching, such as a sense of being valued and respected, teacher well-being, school environment, salary, incentives and benefits, as well as government laws and policies (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Southeast Asian Framework on Teacher Motivation in Staying in the Profession



Several researches were conducted to study teacher motivation in Timor-Leste. Marques et al. (2020) discovered that work motivation positively contributes to teachers' performance. Similarly, Guterres and Pereira's study (2025) highlights that the availability of educational resources and work motivation (independent variables) play a crucial role in influencing lecturers' performance (dependent variable) at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Instituto Superior Cristal, Timor-Leste. Lastly, Correia (2014) investigated aspects that spark and influence primary school teachers' motivation. Quantitative and qualitative data revealed that the Ministry of Education's current policies and practices still fall short of addressing teachers' needs regarding salary and working conditions.

Acknowledging that teachers provide a critical service in society, the Regional Centre for Educational Innovation and Technology (INNOTECH) of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of Timor-Leste, collaborated on the Regional Teacher Motivation Study. The study aims to: 1) determine the relationship among the different factors that motivate teachers to stay in the teaching

profession; 2) develop a per-country framework for the motivations of teachers in Southeast Asia to stay in the profession; and 3) provide policy recommendations.

The research employed quantitative methodologies. A survey questionnaire was developed based on the Southeast Asian Framework on Teacher Motivation in Staying in the Profession (Umali et al., 2024) and other scholarly sources. The instrument was also validated by content experts and country representatives. When necessary, it was translated into the local language. Data were collected through the SurveyMonkey platform using a convenience sampling method. Table 1 presents the profile of survey respondents, comprising 402 valid responses. Data were then analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Hierarchical regression analysis was also conducted to form a predictive model for the countries.

Table 1
Profile of Survey Respondents in Timor-Leste

	Count	Percent
Age in years		
25-34	67	16.7
35-44	206	51.2
45-54	93	23.1
55-64	34	8.5
65-74	2	0.5
Gender		
Male	199	49.5
Female	190	47.3
Prefer not to say	2	0.5
Other	11	2.7
Marital status		
Single	37	9.2
Married	350	87.1
Divorced/ Annulled/ Separated	11	2.7
Widowed	3	0.7
Prefer not to say	1	0.2
Highest educational attainment		
Secondary Level	22	5.5
Associate Degree	61	15.2
Post-graduate certificate or Diploma	28	7.0
Bachelor's Degree	283	70.4
Master's Degree	7	1.7
Doctoral Degree	1	0.2
Type of school		
Public	371	92.3
Private	31	7.7
School location		
Urban	272	67.7
Rural	130	32.3
Length of teaching		
Early Career (1 to 5 years)	62	15.4
Mid-Career (6 to 10 years)	75	18.7
Experienced (11 years and Up)	265	65.9
Total	402	100.0

II. Results and Discussion

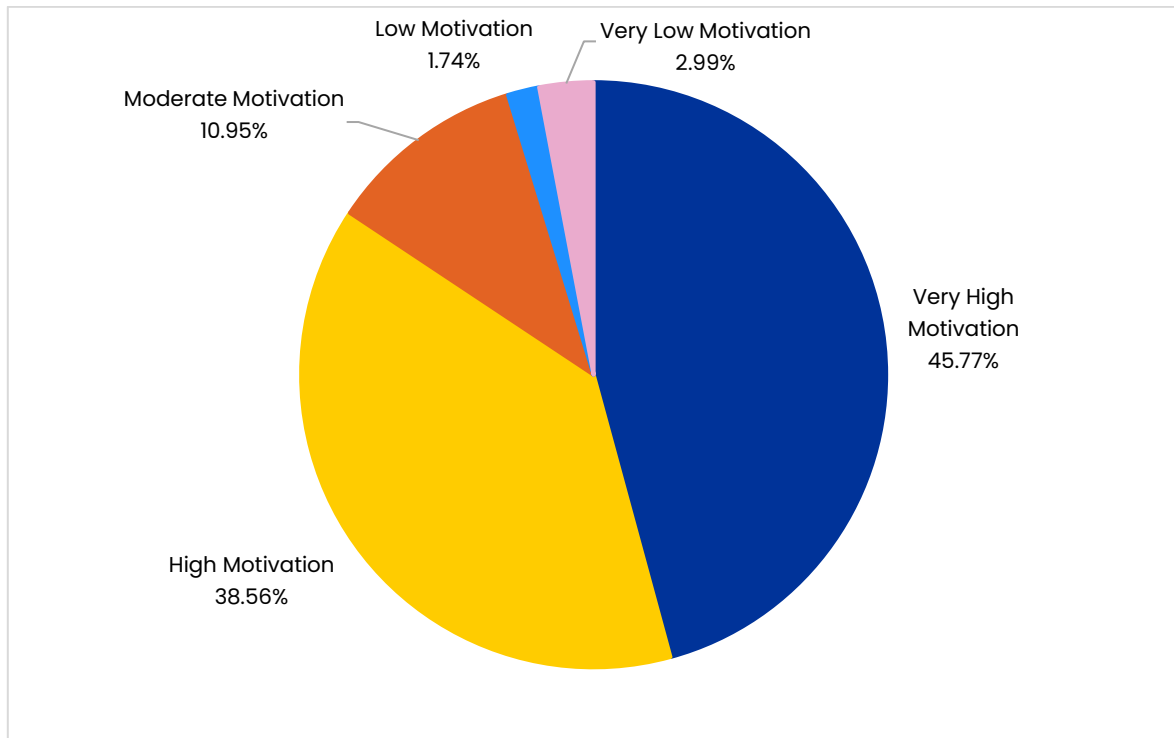
The findings of the study are presented in the following sections. Teacher respondents' level of motivation is shown at the beginning. This is followed by presentations on their perceptions of the core and contributing factors of motivation. The relationships between motivation levels and relevant indicators were also explored. Finally, the predictive model on teacher motivation to stay in the profession for Timor-Leste is discussed. The factors, in the context of this research, pertain to the core and contributing motivational factors as indicated in the regional framework (see Figure 1). Indicators, on the other hand, refer to contextual variables related to professional development, working conditions, career progression, and salary that policies may influence. The indicators may also include demographic variables, such as the highest educational attainment, school location, and grade level currently teaching, among others.

Level of Motivation of Teachers to Remain in the Profession

Teacher survey respondents in Timor-Leste were asked to rate their level of motivation to stay in the profession. Based on a rating from 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, most of them, at 45.77%, are very highly motivated (rated 9-10) to remain teaching. This is followed by those who reported having high levels of motivation (38.56%) (rated 7-8), then by those with moderate motivation (10.95%) (rated 5-6). A small percentage of teachers rated themselves as having low motivation levels (1.79%) (rated 3-4) and very low motivation levels (2.99%) (rated 1-2). Figure 2 illustrates the percentages of teachers categorized by their level of motivation. The mean score for Timor-Leste is 8.13, interpreted as high, based on the 10-point Likert scale interpretation (see Table 3 in the Appendix).

Figure 2

Percentage of Teacher Respondents in Timor-Leste According to their Level of Motivation to Stay in the Profession



These findings imply that many Timorese teacher respondents are willing to continue their service in the education sector, as manifested in their motivation levels to stay in the teaching profession.

Factors Relevant to Teacher Motivation in Staying in the Profession:

The research also examined the eight factors that motivate teachers to stay in the profession. Using a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 pertains to "strongly disagree" and 6 to "strongly agree", teacher respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with related statements.

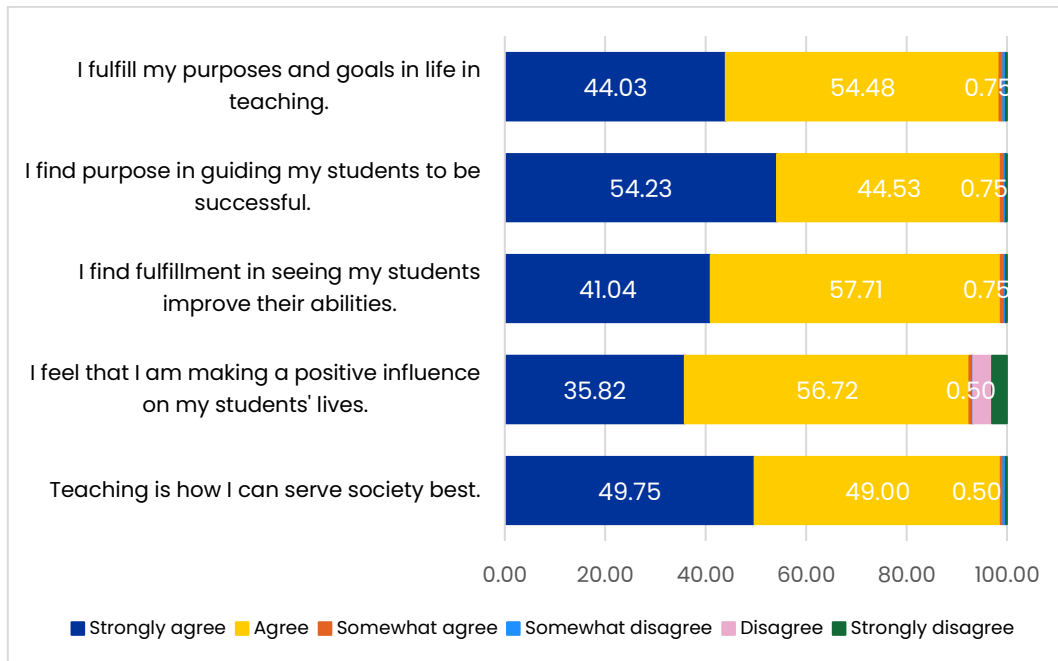
Core Factors of Teacher Motivation. The following section depicts teacher respondents' level of agreement with statements related to the three core factors of motivation to stay in the teaching profession, namely, 'sense of purpose and fulfillment', 'teaching as interest and passion', and 'sense of growth and development'. Contextual data from the survey is also shared when available.

Sense of Purpose and Fulfillment. The first core factor, 'sense of purpose and fulfillment,' refers to teachers' perception of their impact on students as well as on societal and national development.

On average, most teacher respondents from Timor-Leste resonate with the factor 'sense of purpose and fulfillment'. This is reflected in their agreement (strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree) with the following statements: "I fulfill my purposes and goals in life in teaching" (99.25%), "I find purpose in guiding my students to be successful" (99.50%), "I find fulfillment in seeing my students improve their abilities" (99.50%), and "I feel that I am making a positive influence on my students' lives" (93.04%) and "Teaching is how I can serve society best" (99.25%). Figure 3 presents the level of agreement of teacher respondents to statements relevant to the factor 'sense of purpose and fulfillment'. Overall, the mean score for this factor is 5.38 (rated as 'strongly agree'), using a 6-point Likert scale interpretation (see Table 4 in the Appendix).

Figure 3

Percentage of Teacher Respondents According to their Sense of Purpose and Fulfillment



These findings align with a couple of studies conducted in Timor-Leste. First, Quinn and Buchanan’s work (2022) revealed that Timorese teachers have a strong sense of personal contribution to national goals. Similarly, Quinn’s research (2005) discovered that teachers also strongly identify with national goals, highlighting their perspective on the importance of their job to national development.

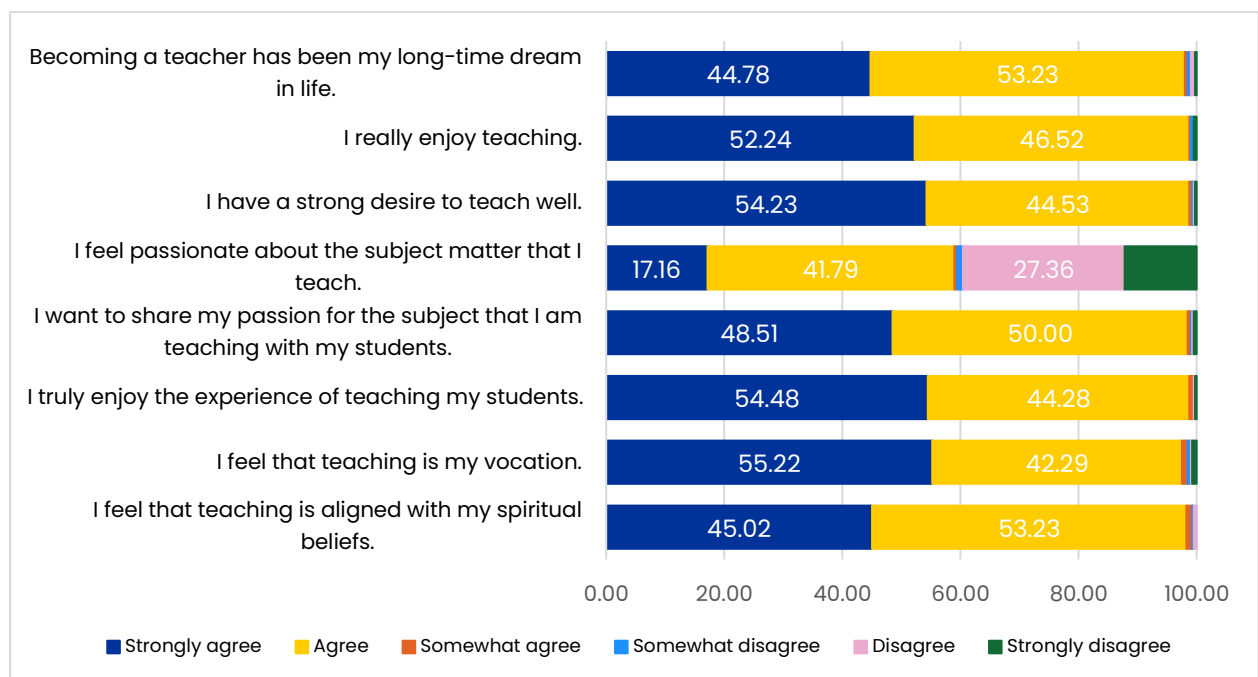
Teaching as Interest and Passion. The factor ‘teaching as interest and passion’ pertains to teachers’ aspiration to teach from childhood, their love for their craft, subject matter, and children, and alignment with their belief system.

Similarly, most teacher respondents in Timor-Leste, at over 94%, perceive teaching as aligned with their interests and passions. This is manifested in their

agreement (strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree) with the following statements: “Becoming a teacher has been my long-time dream in life” (98.51%), “I really enjoy teaching” (99.00%), “I have a strong desire to teach well” (99.25%), “I want to share my passion for the subject that I am teaching with my students” (99.00%), “I truly enjoy the experience of teaching my students” (99.50%), “I feel that teaching is my vocation” (98.51%) and “I feel that teaching is aligned with my spiritual beliefs” (99.25%). However, only 59.45% of the teacher respondents agreed with the statement “I feel passionate about the subject matter that I teach,” indicating a possible misalignment between their personal interests and the subjects they teach. Figure 4 presents respondents’ agreement level with statements related to the factor ‘teaching as interest and passion’. The mean score for this factor is 5.27 (rated as ‘strongly agree’).

Figure 4

Percentage of Teacher Respondents According to their Perception of Teaching as Interest and Passion

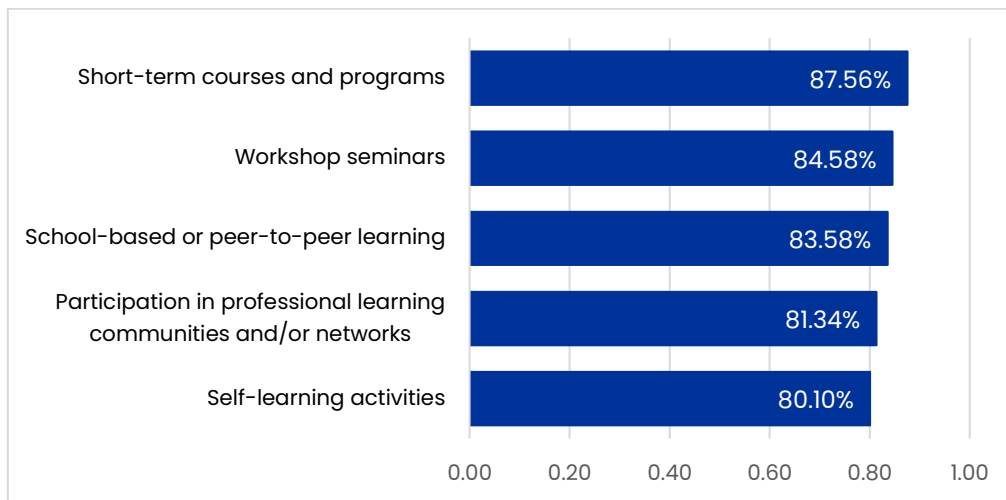


Sense of Growth and Development. The last core factor, 'sense of growth and development,' deals with teachers' desire to be better at teaching. This means having opportunities for professional development and recognizing that challenges contribute to their progress as educators.

Looking into the factor 'sense of growth and development', many teacher respondents in Timor-Leste engage in professional development. Figure 5 shows that 87.56% of them are enrolled in short-term courses and programs. This is followed by those who attend workshop seminars (84.58%) and those participating in school-based or peer-to-peer learning (83.58%). In a similar light, 63.93% of the teacher respondents from the country are currently enrolled in graduate studies. Among those pursuing higher education degrees, only 20.62% were able to receive scholarships. The large percentage of teacher respondents engaging in professional development is indicative of Timor-Leste's continued efforts to strengthen the qualifications and competencies of its teaching workforce. This includes establishing minimum qualifications for teachers and providing ongoing training, with the support of development agencies and bilateral and multilateral partners (Quinn & Buchanan, 2022).

Figure 5

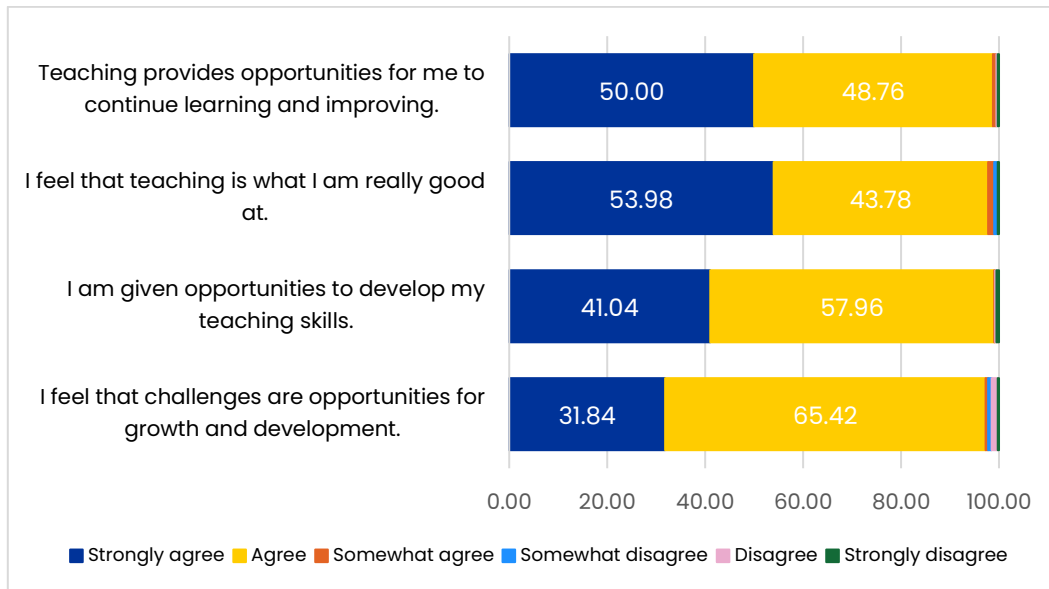
Percentage of Teacher Respondents Engaging in Professional Development



Additionally, on average, a large percentage of teacher respondents, exceeding 98%, believe they are growing in their teaching careers. This is manifested in their agreement (strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree) with the statements related to the factor ‘sense of growth and development’: “Teaching provides opportunities for me to continue learning and improving” (99.50%), “I feel that teaching is what I am really good at” (99.00%), “I am given opportunities to develop my teaching skills” (99.25%), and “I feel that challenges are opportunities for growth and development” (97.76%). Figure 6 depicts respondents’ agreement level with statements about ‘sense of growth and development’. The mean score for this factor is 5.40 (rated as ‘strongly agree’).

Figure 6

Percentage of Teacher Respondents According to their Sense of Growth and Development



Contributing Factors of Teacher Motivation. The section below shows teacher respondents’ level of agreement with statements related to the five contributing factors of teacher motivation to stay in the profession, such as ‘sense of being respected and valued’, ‘teacher well-being’, ‘school environment’, ‘salary, incentives and benefits’ and ‘government laws and policies’.

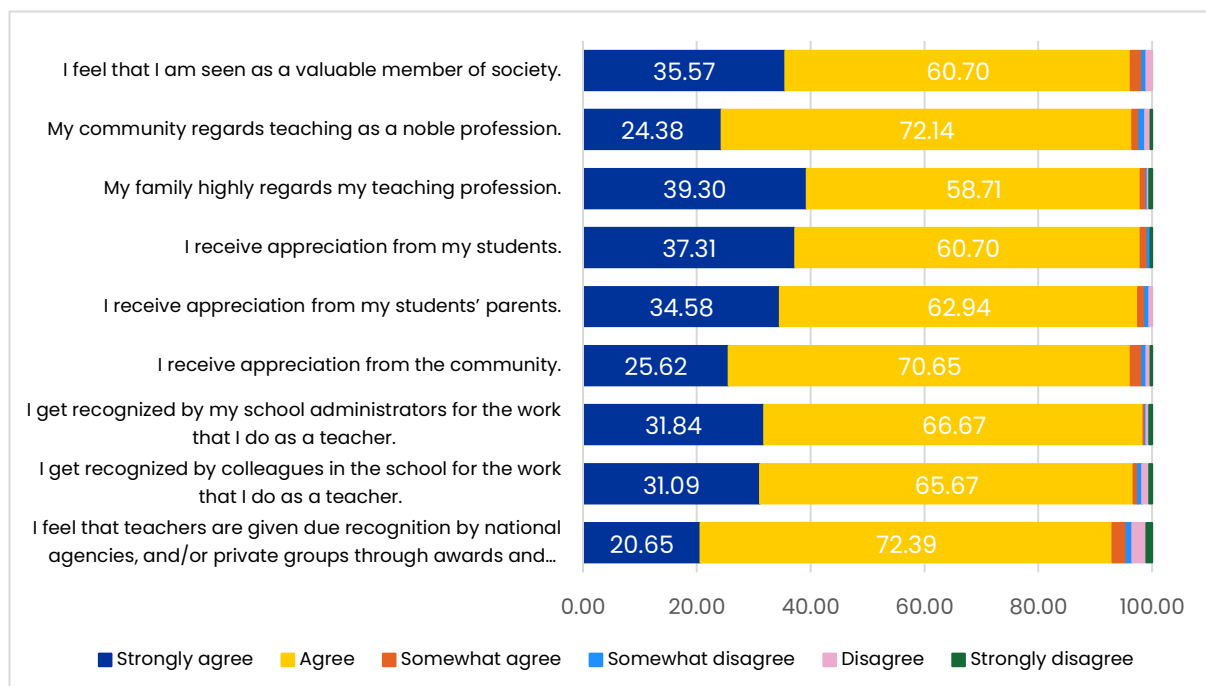
Sense of Being Respected and Valued. The ‘sense of being respected and valued’, as a factor, pertains to teachers’ views on how they are perceived as knowledgeable members of society and their work as valuable. This factor also revolves around their feelings of being appreciated by their family, students, and parents, as well as through awards and recognition.

On average, a considerable majority of teacher respondents from Timor-Leste, at more than 98%, feel they are being respected and valued as teachers. This

perception is reflected in their agreement (strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree) with the following statements: “I feel that I am seen as a valuable member of society” (98.26%), “My community regards teaching as a noble profession” (97.76%), “My family highly regards my teaching profession” (99.00%), “I receive appreciation from my students” (99.25%), “I receive appreciation from my students’ parents” (99.76%), “I receive appreciation from the community” (98.26%), “I get recognized by my school administrators for the work that I do as a teacher” (98.76%), “I get recognized by colleagues in the school for the work that I do as a teacher” (97.51%), and “I feel that teachers are given due recognition by national agencies, and/or private groups through awards and other acknowledgments” (95.52%). Figure 7 presents the respondents’ agreement level with statements related to the ‘sense of being respected and valued.’ The mean score for the factor is 5.25 (rated as ‘agree’).

Figure 7

Percentage of Teacher Respondents According to their Sense of Being Respected and Valued



Quinn and Buchanan's exploratory research (2022) provided a nuanced picture of this factor. Many of the teacher respondents in their study (79%) feel that they receive a lot of respect from their community. However, they also feel that the Ministry of Education lacks a deep understanding or appreciation for the work they do. Their results suggest that teachers might feel a disconnect between them and the broader teaching community, highlighting the importance of broadening their engagement with national-level stakeholders such as media, national officials, and recognized nongovernment organizations.

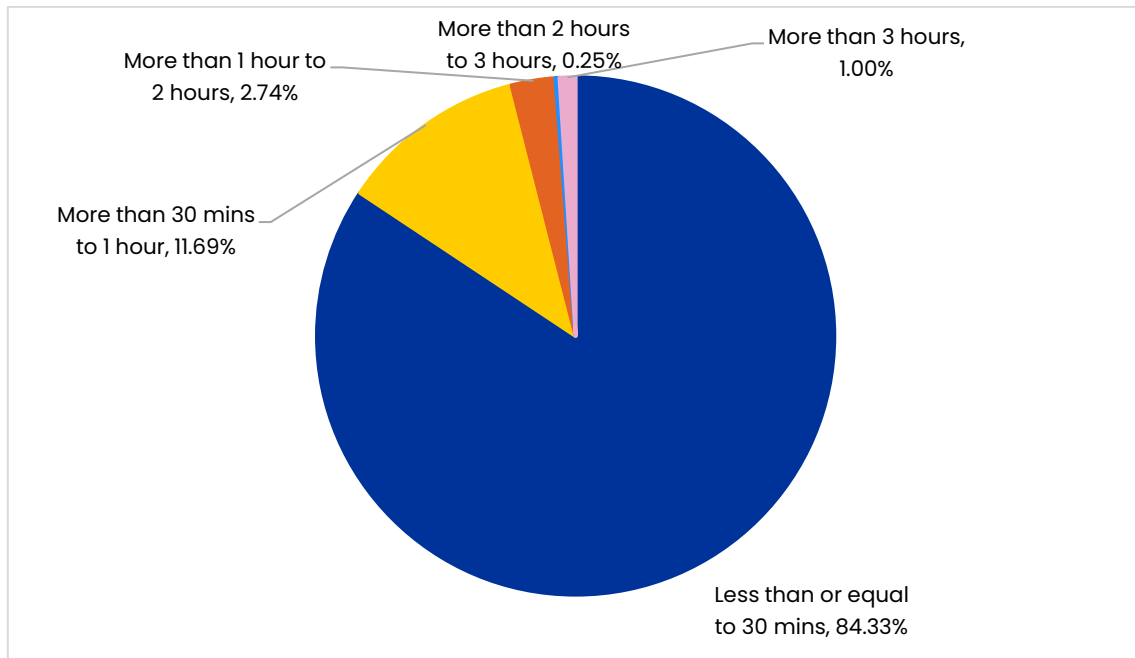
Teacher Well-being. Within the context of this study, the factor 'teacher well-being' only refers to having a work-life balance, flexible schedule, and home-to-school proximity.

Examining the work-life balance of teachers in Timor-Leste, respondents report spending an average of 24.98 hours teaching per week, which aligns with the 24 hours required for primary to upper secondary education, as outlined in the Education Base Law and Decree Law for Curriculum (da Costa Fernandes, 2023). More than a third, at 69.90%, have nonteaching-related tasks, which may include being assigned as classroom advisers, subject coordinators, club moderators, sports coaches, co-curricular and extracurricular committee members, project or program coordinators, community involvement services, and other school administrative committees. For such tasks, teacher respondents spend an average of 13.04 hours per week.

In addition, considering home-school proximity, teacher respondents spend an average of 26.45 minutes traveling to their educational institution one way. As shown in Figure 8, a large majority, at 84.33%, spend less than 30 minutes traveling to their schools. This is followed by those who allocate 30 minutes to an hour for travel time (11.69%).

Figure 8

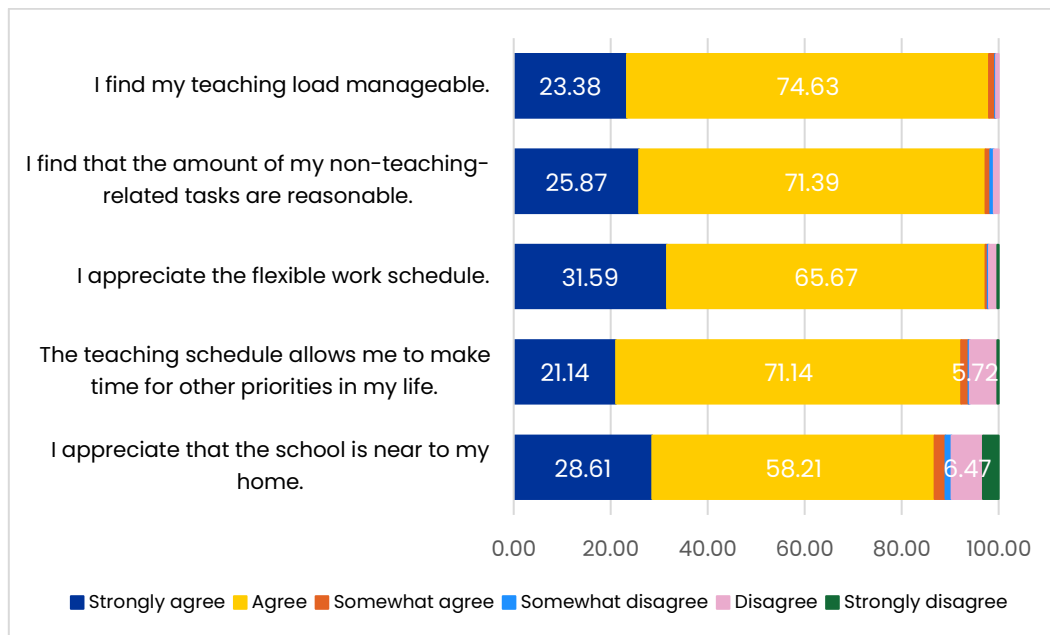
Percentage of Teacher Respondents based on their One-way Travel Time to School



On average, more than 95% of the teacher respondents from Timor-Leste perceive that their well-being is taken care of. This sentiment is reflected in their agreement (strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree) with the following statements: “I find my teaching load manageable” (99.25%), “I find that the amount of my non-teaching-related tasks are reasonable” (98.26%), “I appreciate the flexible work schedule” (97.76%), “The teaching schedule allows me to make time for other priorities in my life” (93.78%), and “I appreciate that the school is near to my home” (89.05%). Figure 9 illustrates the respondents’ agreement level with statements related to the factor ‘teacher well-being’. The mean score for the factor is 5.12 (rated as ‘agree’).

Figure 9

Percentage of Teacher Respondents According to their Sense of Well-being



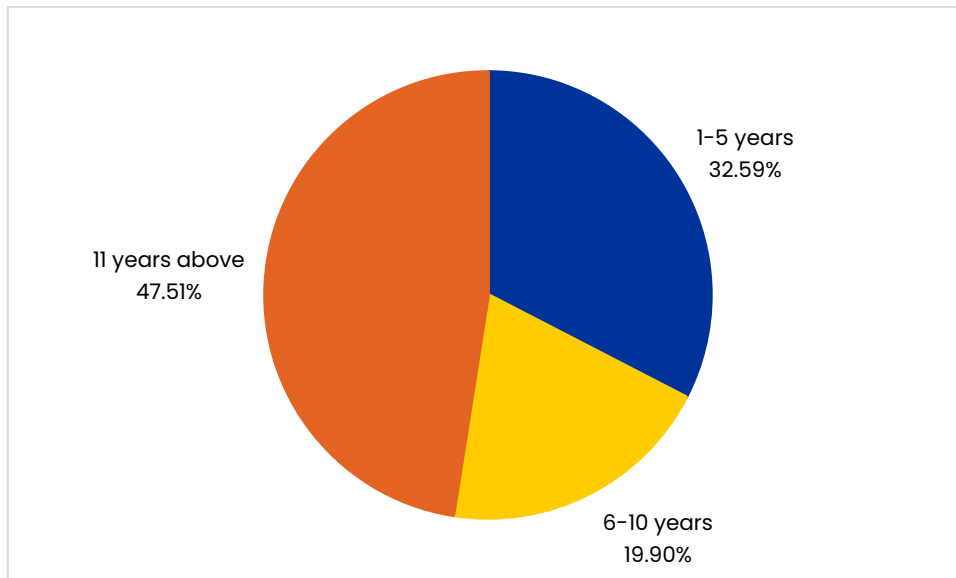
These findings are somewhat aligned with Quinn and Buchanan’s study (2022), which pointed out that teachers appreciate the practical advantages of their work. These include shorter working hours and holidays.

School Environment. The factor ‘school environment’ refers to teachers’ perception of having supportive school policies, practices and activities, opportunities for self-expression and innovation, good working relationships with colleagues, and adequate facilities and instructional resources.

Teacher respondents from Timor-Leste have been in their current schools for an average of 10.59 years. This is also reflected in Figure 10, where less than half, 47.51%, have served their schools for 11 years or more. This is followed by those who have stayed in their educational institutions for one to five years (32.59%) and those who have rendered service for six to ten years (19.90%).

Figure 10

Percentage of Teacher Respondents According to their Length of Teaching in the Current School



Figures 11 and 12 show teachers’ perceptions of the availability of teaching and learning resources and school facilities. Most view these as adequate. These findings are in contrast to the results of a couple of studies, such as those of da Costa’s qualitative research (2024) with 27 participants, which revealed that limited school resources were one of the challenges encountered by teacher students in the field. Similarly, Quinn and Buchanan’s work (2022), which uses a mixed methods approach, noted teachers’ perception of the lack of instructional resources to teach the curriculum and the need for more school classrooms. The discrepancies between the survey data of this study and the references cited may stem from differences in geographic coverage, and the time element of when the data were collected and possible improvements made by the MOEYS in between dates.

Figure 11

Percentage of Teacher Respondents According to their Perception of Adequacy of Teaching Materials in School

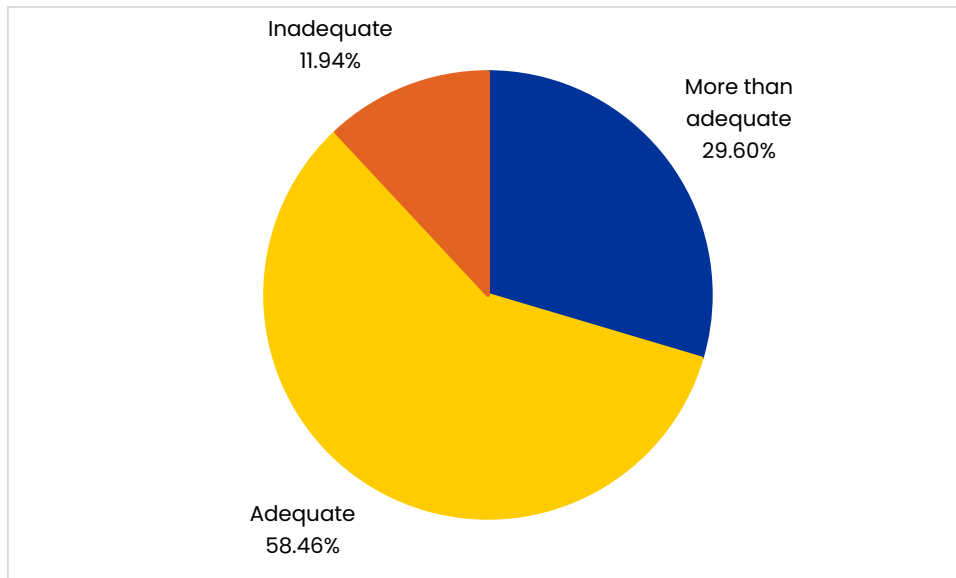
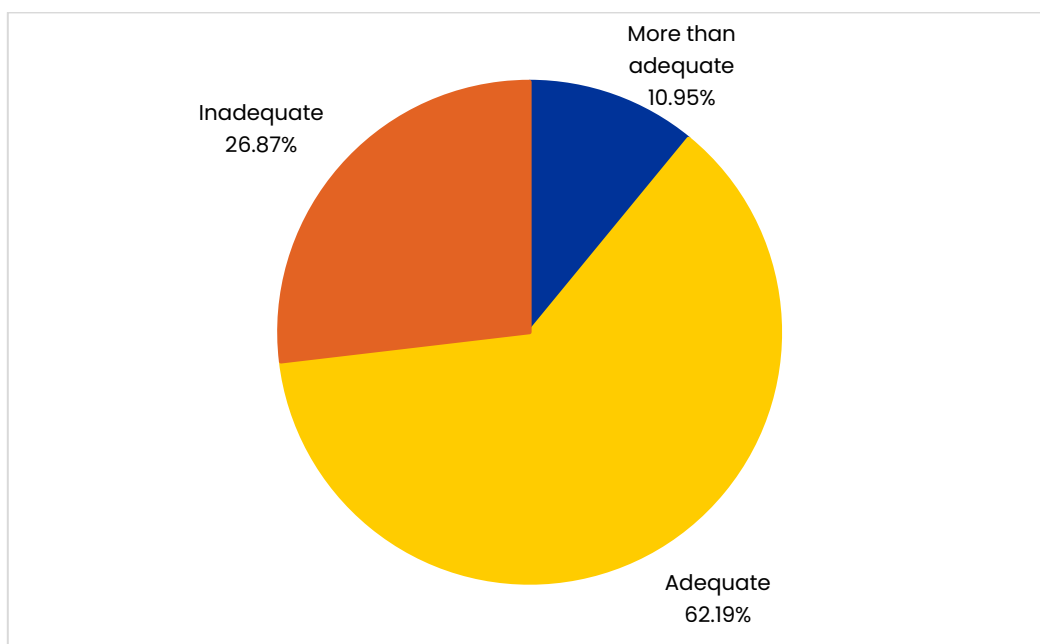


Figure 12

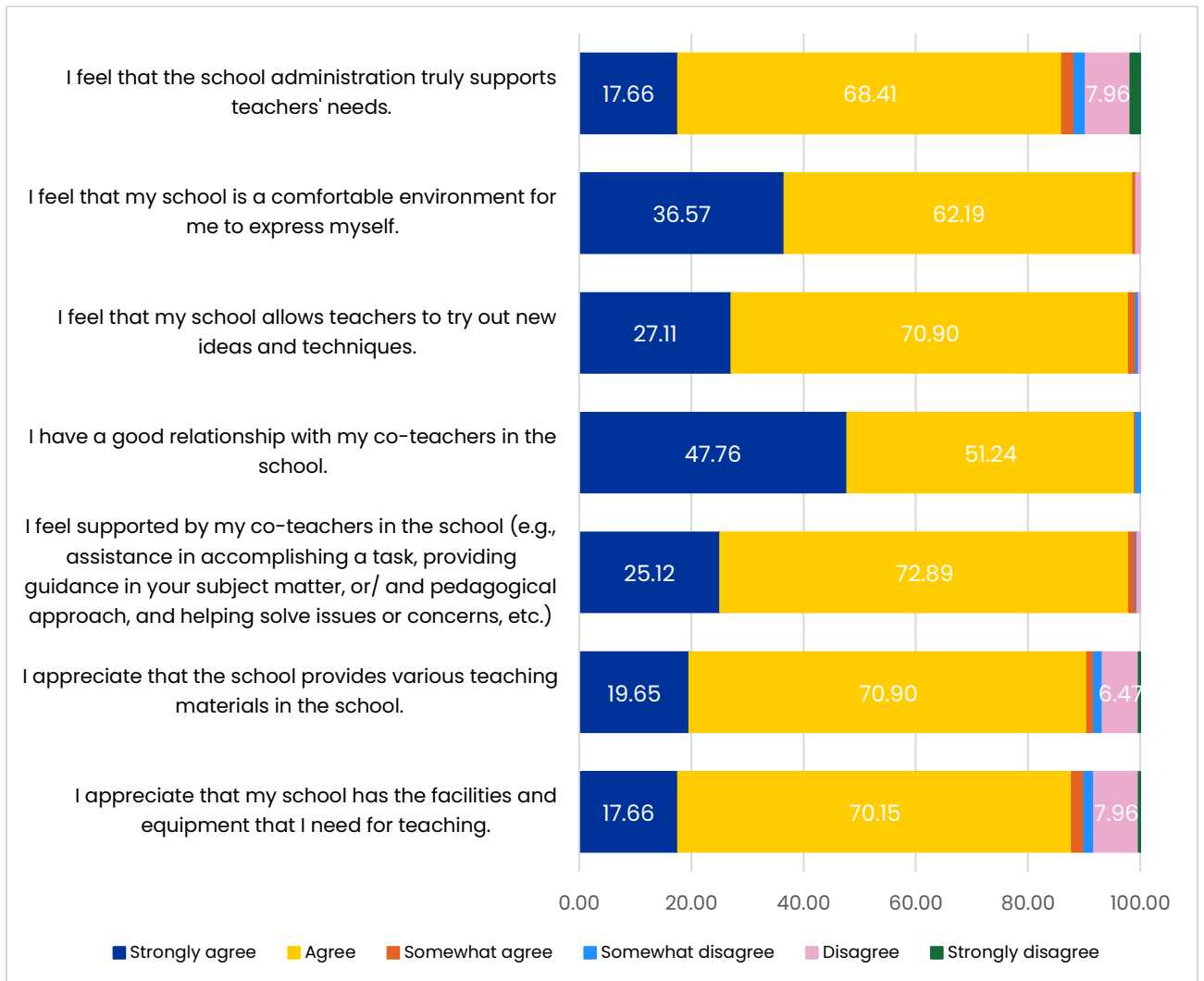
Percentage of Teacher Respondents According to their Perception of Adequacy of Facilities Available in School



On average, more than 95% of teacher respondents in Timor-Leste view their school environment as motivating. This is manifested in their agreement (strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree) with the following statements: "I feel that the school administration truly supports teachers' needs" (88.31%), "I feel that my school is a comfortable environment for me to express myself" (99.25%), "I feel that my school allows teachers to try out new ideas and techniques" (99.25%), "I have a good relationship with my co-teachers in the school" (99.25%), "I feel supported by my co-teachers in the school (e.g., assistance in accomplishing a task, providing guidance in your subject matter, or/ and pedagogical approach, and helping solve issues or concerns, etc.)" (99.25%), "I appreciate that the school provides various teaching materials in the school" (91.79%), and "I appreciate that my school has the facilities and equipment that I need for teaching" (90.05%). Figure 13 shows respondents' agreement level with statements related to the 'school environment' factor. The mean score for this factor in Timor-Leste is 5.13 (rated as 'agree').

Figure 13

Percentage of Teacher Respondents According to their Perception of School Environment



Salary, Incentives and Benefits. The factor 'salary, incentives and benefits' pertains to teachers' views of their profession as a source of income and financial security. It also deals with their impressions of being well-compensated.

On average, teacher respondents from Timor-Leste reported receiving an average monthly salary of USD 319.19. This figure falls within the salary range of teachers, from USD 298 to USD 400, depending on their level, according to Decree-

Law no. 23-2010 of December 9 (Ministério da Justiça, 2010). The salary also seems sufficient to meet the average monthly expenditure for the country, which was USD 297.28 in 2011 (Ministry of Finance, 2011). However, note that this figure is most likely outdated, and inflation has gone up over the years (The World Bank, 2022).

Figure 14 also shows that most teachers are their family’s main provider (89.80%). Similarly, Figure 15 illustrates that almost half of the teacher respondents support three to five dependents (47.51%). This is followed by those who reported having six to ten dependents (31.84%), and by those with one to two dependents (11.44%).

Figure 14

Percentage of Teacher Respondents as the Main Financial Provider

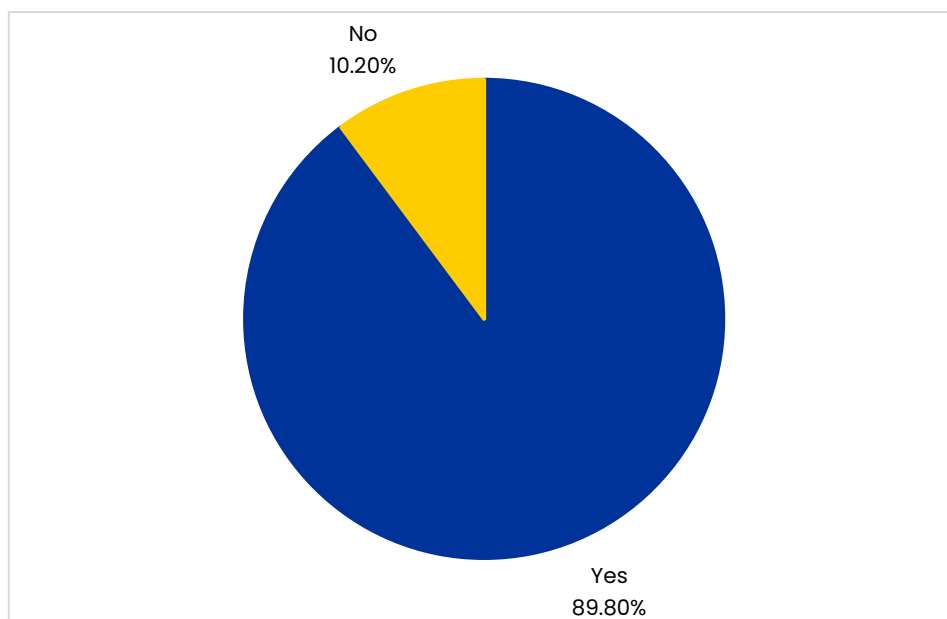
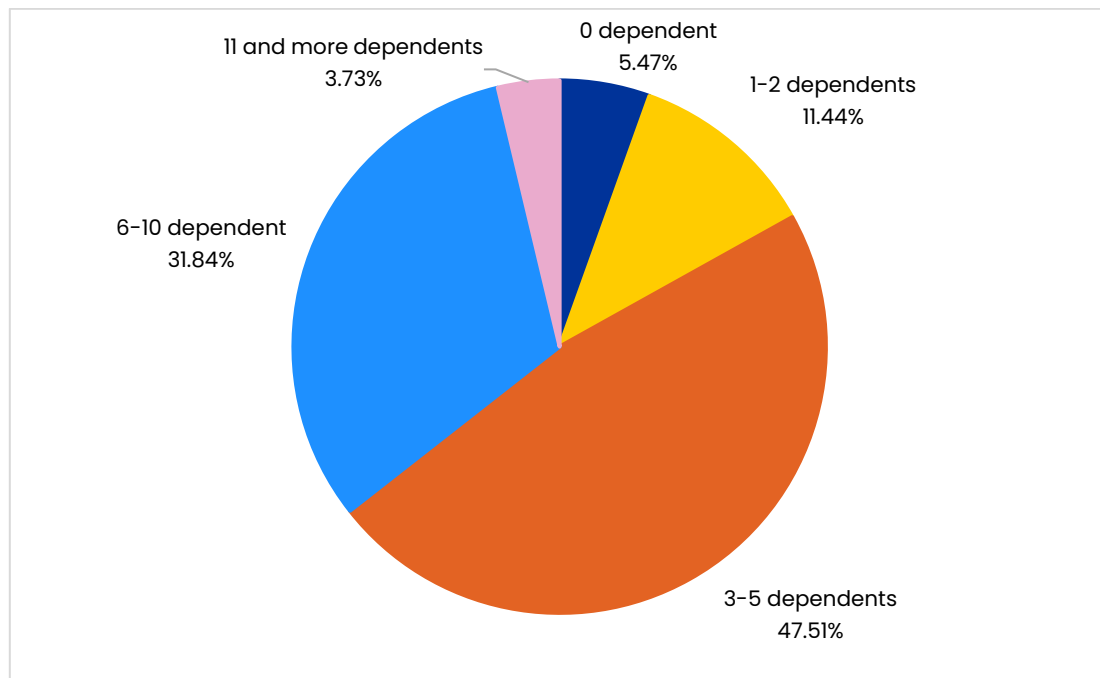


Figure 15

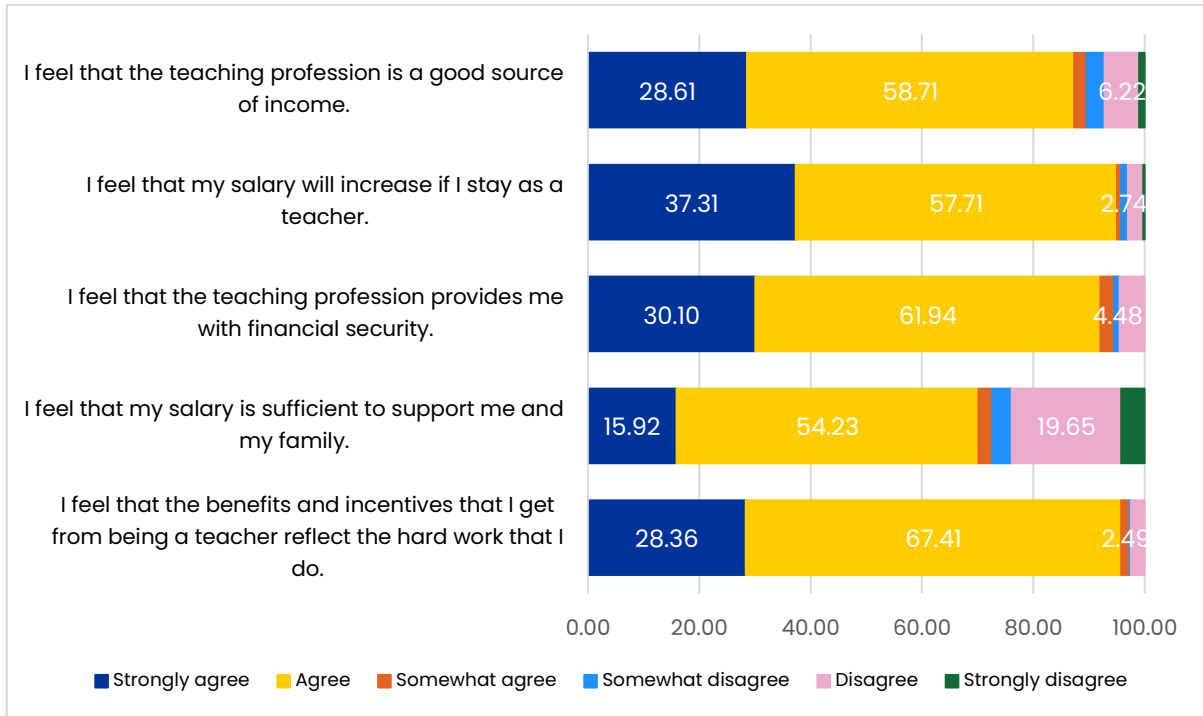
Percentage of Teacher Respondents According to the Number of their Dependents



On average, the majority of the teacher respondents from Timor-Leste, at about 89%, perceive their salary, incentives, and benefits positively. This is reflected in their agreement (strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree) with the following statements: “I feel that the teaching profession is a good source of income” (89.55%), “I feel that my salary will increase if I stay as a teacher” (95.77%), “I feel that the teaching profession provides me with financial security” (94.53%), “I feel that my salary is sufficient to support me and my family” (72.64%) and “I feel that the benefits and incentives that I get from being a teacher reflect the hard work that I do” (97.26%). Figure 16 presents respondents’ agreement level with statements related to the factor ‘salary, incentives, and benefits’. The mean score for the country for this factor is 4.97 (rated as ‘agree’).

Figure 16

Percentage of Teacher Respondents According to their Perception of Salary, Incentives, and Benefits

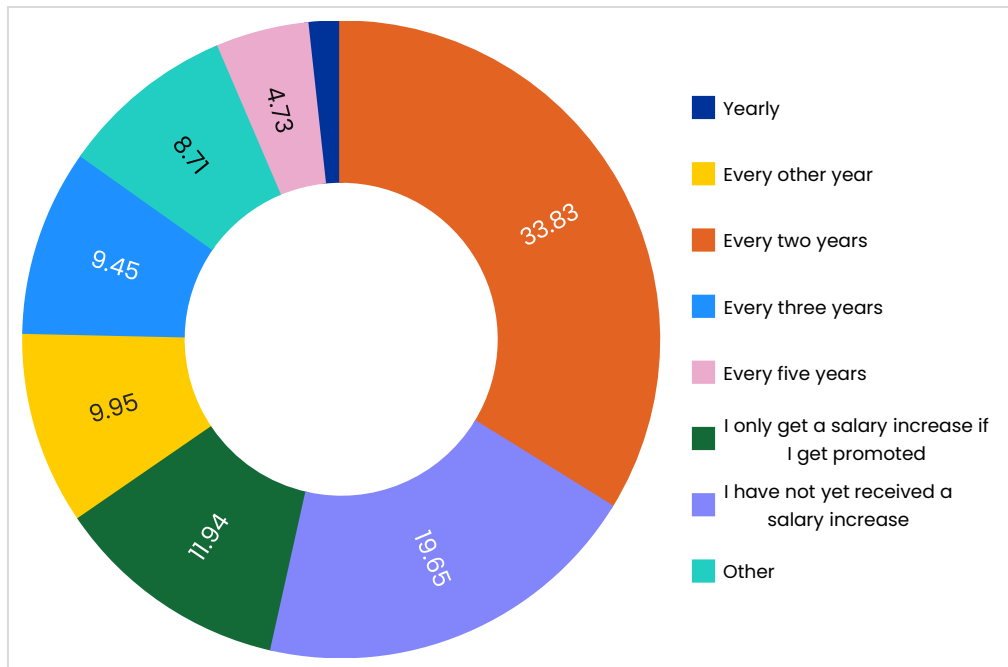


Government Laws and Policies. Six areas were examined regarding the factor ‘government laws and policies’: benefits and incentives, salary, working conditions, career progression, professional development and teacher deployment.

About salary, Figure 17 shows that 33.83% of teacher respondents from Timor-Leste receive a salary increase every two years. This is followed by those who reported not having received a salary increase (19.65%), and then by those who mentioned that they only receive a salary increase upon promotion (11.94%).

Figure 17

Percentage of Teacher Respondents According to the Frequency of Teacher Salary Increase

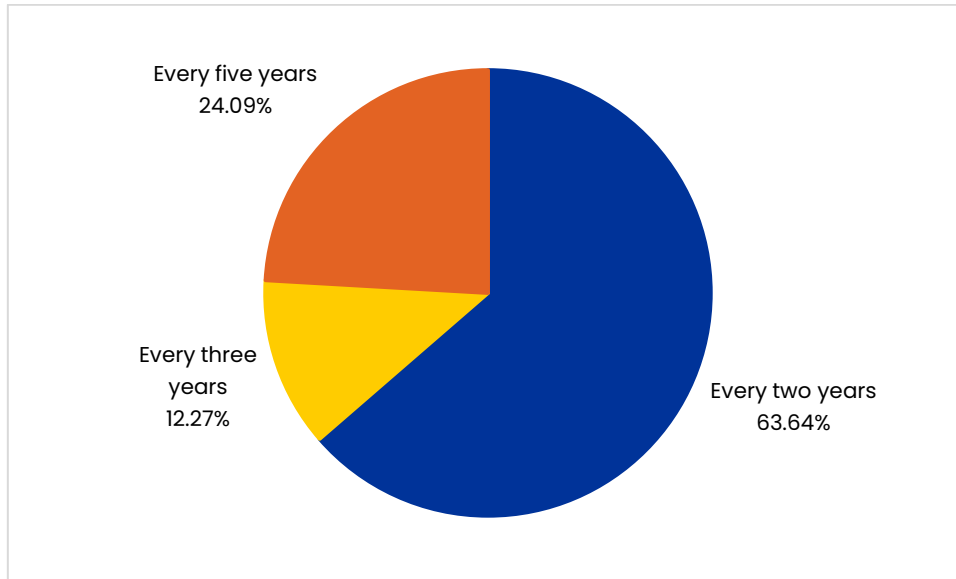


Concerning career progression, more than half of the teacher respondents (54.73%) have a history of promotion. When asked how often they were promoted, 63.64% reported being promoted every two years. This is followed by those who responded every five years (24.09%) and those who are promoted every three years (12.27%), as shown in Figure 18.

The results of the survey on salary increase and promotion, however, are difficult to compare with existing MOEYS policies and practices, as available information is quite limited. However, there are movements to link pay increases and promotion with teacher performance, upholding principles of equality and merit-based career progression (MOE, 2011; The World Bank & MOE, 2020).

Figure 18

Percentage of Teacher Respondents According to their Frequency of Promotion



Regarding professional development, Figure 19 indicates that 87.81% of teacher respondents from Timor-Leste reported using their personal funds for at least one professional development activity. This suggests that most teachers in the country spend their resources on accessing professional development. In a similar light, Figure 19 shows the percentage of teachers who used personal money according to professional development activities.

Figure 19

Percentage of Teachers Who Used Personal Money for Professional Development Activities

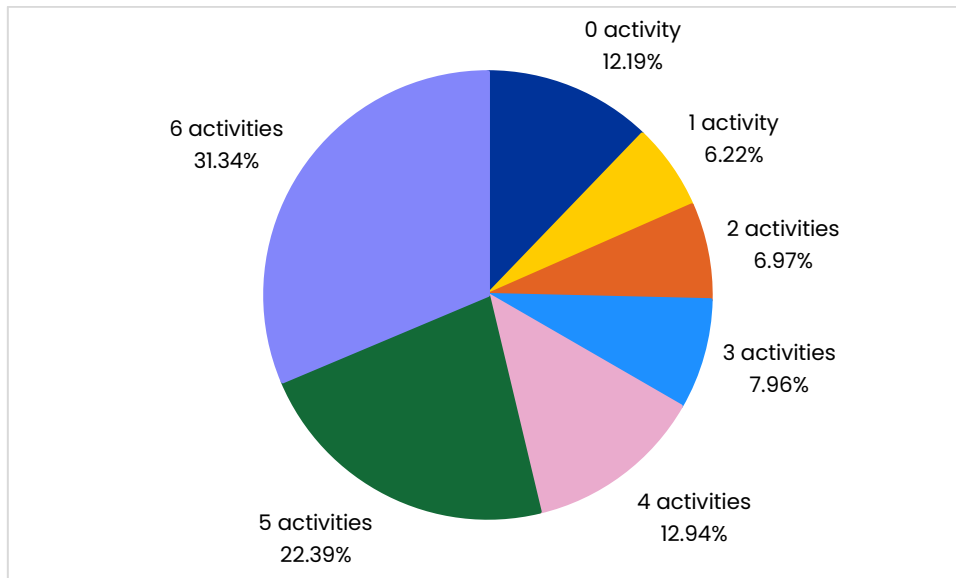
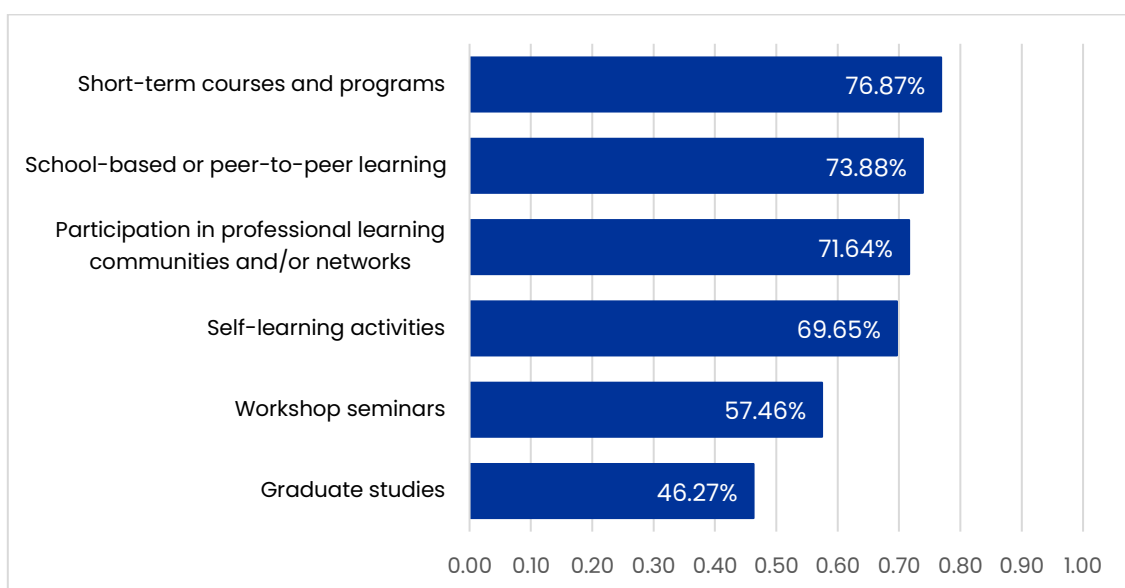


Figure 20

Percentage of Teacher Respondents Who Used Personal Money According to Professional Development Activities



On average, more than 73% of the teacher respondents in Timor-Leste are satisfied (strongly satisfied, satisfied, somewhat satisfied) with government policies that affect them. This is reflected in their responses to the following areas: “Benefits and incentives” (66.91%), “Working conditions” (76.37%), “Career progression” (87.06%), “Professional development” (91.29%) and “Teacher deployment” (68.16%). However, a little more than half of the teachers, at 52.49%, indicate their satisfaction with the area of “Salary”. Figure 21 presents respondents’ level of satisfaction with the factor ‘government laws and policies’. The mean score for Timor-Leste for this factor is 4.29 (rated as ‘somewhat satisfied’).

Figure 21

Percentage of Teacher Respondents According to their Perception of Government Laws and Policies



Summary. Descriptive statistics show that teacher respondents in Timor-Leste are highly motivated to stay in the teaching profession. The respondents

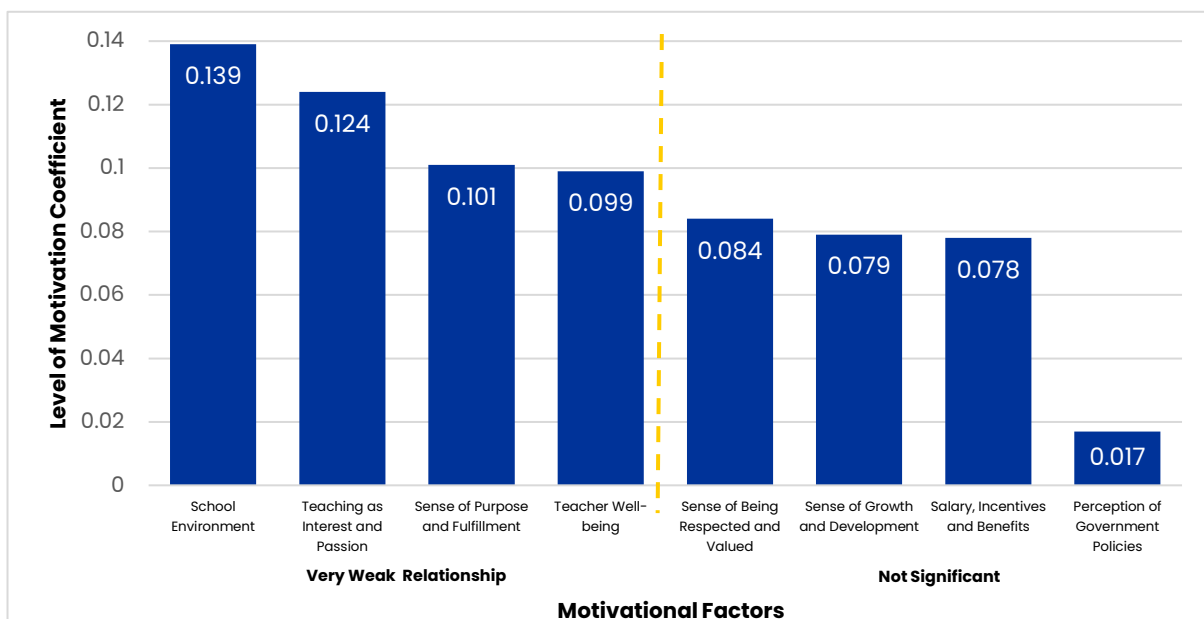
strongly agreed with statements related to the three core factors: ‘sense of purpose and fulfillment’, ‘teaching as interest and passion’, and ‘sense of growth and development’. They also agree with statements connected to most contributing motivational factors, except for ‘government laws and policies’, which they rated as somewhat satisfied.

Relationship between Factors of Motivation and the Level of Motivation of Teachers

The results of the Spearman’s rho correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive associations, though very weak in strength, between four of the motivational factors, namely, school environment, teaching as interest and passion, sense of purpose and fulfillment, and teacher well-being, and the overall level of motivation of teacher respondents in Timor-Leste (see Figure 22 and Table 5 in the Appendix).

Figure 22

Relationship between Factors of Motivation and Level of Motivation of Teachers



Examining the statistically significant factors individually, the results indicate that as teachers' perception of their school environment improves, their tendency to stay in the teaching profession also increases. This finding suggests the importance of creating a supportive atmosphere among teachers and their supervisors, as well as providing adequate instructional materials and facilities. This is also made evident in several literature wherein authors recognize that having sufficient school resources supports teachers in fulfilling their tasks well, thereby contributing to positive emotions about their work (Salifu, 2013, Adelabu, 2005, Bennell, 2004, Mathew, 2005, Hooker, et al., 2003, Park, et al., 2007, as cited in Handayani, 2016).

The factor 'teaching as interest and passion' is also positively associated with teacher respondents' motivation levels to stay in the profession. This means that as teachers foster their passion and interest in their job, the greater the likelihood is for them to continue teaching. The results suggest the need to strengthen teachers' love for their craft, including the subject matter that they are teaching as well as for their learners. They might also be encouraged to reflect on how the profession is aligned with their aspirations and belief system. According to Zee and Koomen (2016, as referenced in Almeida et al., 2021), having a genuine interest evokes positive emotions and cultivates a supportive atmosphere, which strengthens an individual's drive to remain engaged in teaching.

Moreover, as teachers' sense of purpose and fulfillment strengthens, they become more inclined to remain in their teaching careers. This finding underscores the significance of cultivating teachers' self-awareness of their influence on learners and their role in society. This aligns with existing research that shows the perceived impact on learners influences teachers' intrinsic motivations (Han & Yin, 2016; Koran, 2015, Csikszentmihalyi's, 1997, Alibakhshi & Nezakatgoo, 2019, Dörnyei's, 2001, as cited in Stezycka & Etherington, 2020).

Lastly, the factor 'teacher well-being' is also positively associated with respondents' level of motivation, albeit to a very weak extent. This implies that as teachers' perception of their well-being becomes more positive, the more likely they are to continue serving in the education sector. This finding highlights the importance of addressing teachers' work-life balance, home-school proximity, and other aspects that promote their well-being.

Relationships between Other Indicators and the Level of Motivation of Teachers

Spearman's rho correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships among indicators affecting teacher motivation to stay in the profession. In addition, the Mann-Whitney U test, ANOVA and chi-square tests were utilized to assess whether there are significant differences across the indicators. Attention was given to indicators that have potential implications for policy recommendations. Only significant results are reported. Table 2 shows the list of indicators examined.

Table 2
Indicators Covered in Inferential Statistical Analysis

Salary	Working conditions	Professional development	Career progression
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency of salary increase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Length of teaching* • Total grade levels taught • Hours spent teaching • Having nonteaching-related tasks • Hours spent traveling to school • Adequacy of teaching and learning resources • Adequacy of facilities in school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of personal money for professional development • Highest educational attainment • Currently taking graduate studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History of promotion • Frequency of promotion

* indicators with significant results

Indicators Related to Salary. One indicator related to salary, the frequency of salary increases, was examined. However, it did not yield significant results.

Indicators Related to Working Conditions. In a similar manner, seven indicators were investigated to determine the relationships between work conditions indicators and teacher respondents' level of motivation. These include the length of teaching, total grade levels taught, hours spent teaching, having nonteaching-related tasks, hours spent traveling to school, adequacy of teaching and learning resources and adequacy of school facilities. Only the length of teaching yielded significant results.

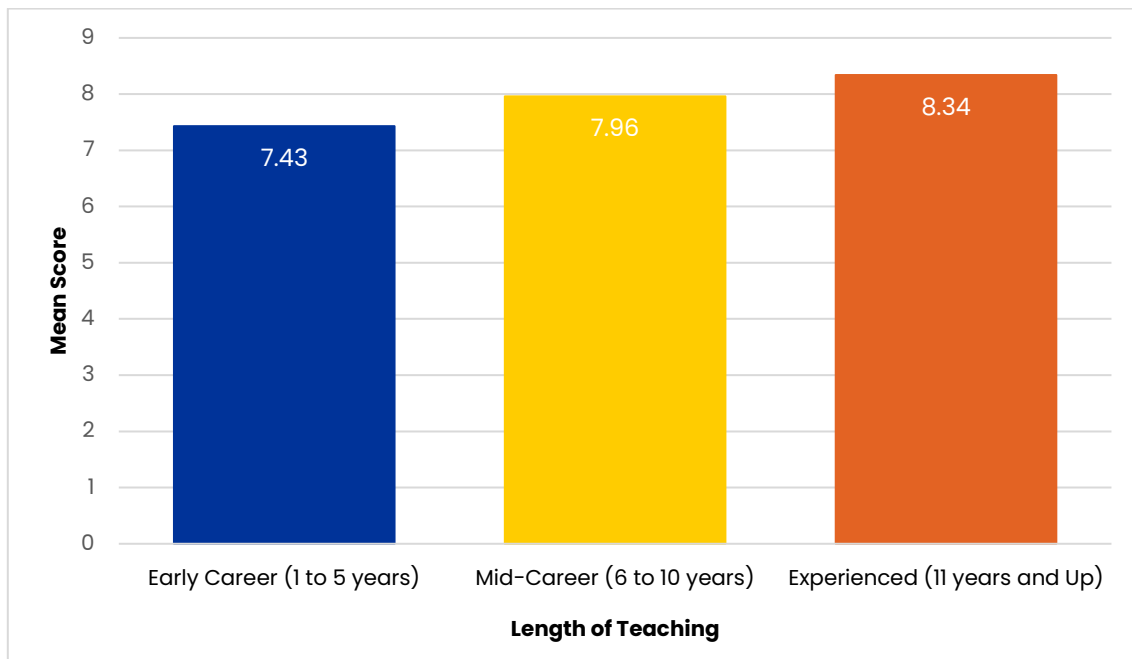
Relationship between Length of Teaching and Level of Motivation of Teachers. Spearman's rho test revealed that teachers' length of teaching is positively associated with their level of motivation to remain in the profession ($\rho = 0.194, p < .001$) (see also Table 6 in the Appendix). This means that the longer teachers continue teaching, their motivation to stay in the profession tends to become stronger. However, the strength of the relationship is very weak, which implies limited practical applications in real life. Nevertheless, this result aligns with the findings of previous studies (Anghelache, 2014, 2015; Day et al., 2006) that have examined the relationship between teacher motivation and seniority.

Differences in Teachers' Motivation based on Length of Teaching. Similarly, the correlation analysis is further supported by the results of the ANOVA test, which looked into the differences in mean scores based on the length of teaching. Showing statistically significant differences in teachers' level of motivation, Figure 23 depicts that experienced teachers, those serving 11 years or more, reported having the highest motivation levels ($M = 8.34$). This is followed by those in their mid-careers ($M = 7.96$). Teachers in their early careers, with one to five years of experience, reported having the lowest motivation to remain in the profession ($M = 7.43$) (see also Table 7 in the Appendix). The effect size of 0.027 suggests a small

effect of length of teaching on motivation levels, indicating little distinct differences between mean scores.

Figure 23

Differences in Teacher Respondents' Motivation based on Length of Teaching



Tukey's post-hoc test was also used to determine which pairs had significant differences in means. Among all pairwise comparisons, the level of motivation to remain in the teaching profession differs significantly between teachers in their early careers ($M = 7.43$) and those with more experience ($M = 8.34$).

These findings imply that teachers who have spent a longer period of time in the profession are more motivated to continue teaching. Various reasons could lead them to stay on. For instance, in Chiong et al's study (2017), which aimed to answer the question "why do long-serving teachers stay in the teaching profession?", they found two key factors for teacher retention, namely, a sense of

professional mastery and altruistic reasons. More experienced teachers might have attained a level of competence that enables them to fulfill their roles better. This perception also influences the attainment of other intrinsic motivational factors (i.e., feelings of being able to help one's learners, knowing the value and worth of their work, etc.). Longer time in the profession is also often associated with other extrinsic elements, such as higher pay and career advancement.

Indicators Related to Professional Development. Three indicators were examined to determine the relationships between indicators related to professional development and teachers' level of motivation. These include teachers' use of personal money for professional development, highest educational attainment, and engagement in graduate studies. However, none yielded significant findings.

Indicators Related to Career Progression. In a similar light, two indicators were explored to determine the relationships between career progression indicators and teachers' level of motivation. These include history and frequency of promotion. However, these also did not yield significant results.

Summary. Correlational analysis revealed that four motivational factors were positively associated, to a very weak extent, with teacher respondents' motivational levels to stay in the teaching profession. These include the factors 'school environment', 'teaching as interest and passion', 'sense of purpose and fulfillment', and 'teacher well-being'. The results underscore that a positive perception of these factors strengthens teachers' motivation to remain in the

profession, while a more negative outlook of the factors can lead to a decrease in motivation to continue teaching.

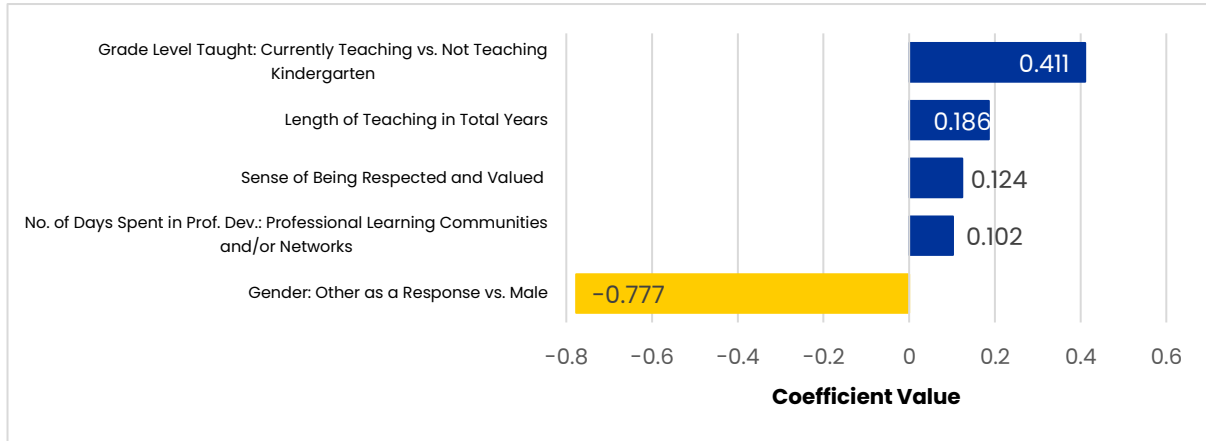
Moreover, the relationships between teacher respondents' motivation levels and relevant indicators (see Table 2) were explored. Correlation analysis exhibited a very weak positive association between the length of teaching and motivation levels. In a similar fashion, the ANOVA test affirmed that more experienced teacher respondents, with 11 years of experience or more, reported having the highest motivation to stay in the profession, followed by those in their mid-careers. Teacher respondents in their early careers reported having the lowest levels of motivation. These findings suggest that as teachers stay longer in the service, the less likely they are to leave the profession.

Predictive Model of Teacher Motivation in Staying in the Profession in Timor-Leste

Figure 24 presents the combination of motivational factors and profile variables that predicts teacher respondents' motivation to stay in the profession. The findings reveal that, among the core and contributing motivational factors, only one was identified as a statistically significant positive predictor of teacher motivation, the factor 'sense of being respected and valued' (standard estimate = 0.124, $p = 0.011$). This finding suggests that teachers who feel respected and valued tend to report higher levels of motivation to remain in their teaching careers.

Figure 24

Combination of Factors and Indicators that Predict Teachers' Motivation to Stay in the Profession



In addition, the length of teaching emerged as a strong predictor (standard estimate = 0.186, $p < .001$), suggesting that experienced teachers generally report higher levels of motivation to continue on with their careers. This might be because they have developed greater confidence in their skills at work, have gained promotion over the years, which may lead to higher compensation, and have developed strategies to solve problems they encounter on a daily basis. Additionally, participation in professional learning communities and/or networks positively influences motivation (standard estimate = 0.102, $p = 0.035$), suggesting the importance of fostering linkages and collaboration with fellow educators.

On the other hand, a few demographic variables were also found to be statistically significant predictors of teacher motivation to remain in the profession. These include grade level taught, in which Kindergarten teachers indicate having more motivation (standard estimate = 0.411, $p = 0.008$), and gender, in which those who responded 'others' are less motivated to continue teaching than male teachers (standard estimate = -0.777, $p = 0.009$).

Overall, the model explains 10% of the variance ($R^2 = .102$) in teacher motivation to stay in their profession.

Summary. The hierarchical regression analysis identified a combination of motivational factors, work conditions, and demographic characteristics that influence the motivation of teacher respondents to remain in their careers. The factor 'sense of being respected and valued' is the only motivational factor, among the eight, that was observed as a predictor of teacher motivation. Additionally, the length of teaching was identified as a predictor, with more experienced teachers tending to have higher motivations to stay in the profession. Engagement in professional learning communities and/or networks was also deemed a predictor; teacher respondents who spent time on this particular professional development activity tended to have higher motivation levels to continue teaching. Lastly, teaching Kindergarten and gender were also ascertained as predictors of motivation to continue serving in the field of education.

III. Conclusion

This study examined the factors that influence teachers' motivation to remain in the profession in Timor-Leste. The research aimed to determine the relationships among various factors that motivate teachers, develop a country-specific framework for teachers to remain in their teaching careers, and provide policy recommendations.

Teachers in Timor-Leste are very highly motivated to stay in their profession. They also rated high almost all of the core and contributing motivational factors investigated in this study, apart from the factor 'perception of government policies, which was rated 'somewhat satisfactory'.

In addition, indicators related to salary, working conditions, professional development and career progression were explored to determine their relationships with the level of teacher motivation. Only the length of teaching yielded significant statistical results through inferential statistics, suggesting that more experienced teachers tend to be more motivated to continue teaching.

In a similar light, the hierarchical regression analysis revealed the combination of motivational factors and profile variables that predict teachers' motivation to stay in the profession. These include the factor 'sense of being respected and valued', length of teaching, participation in professional learning communities and/or networks, kindergarten as a grade level taught, and gender.

In conclusion, although the findings of this study are limited to its specific sample due to the convenience sampling method used, the research nonetheless sheds light on various aspects of teacher motivation. Many teacher respondents from Timor-Leste indicate having very high motivation levels to stay in the teaching profession. A combination of motivational factors, work conditions, and demographic characteristics influences their motivation. As such, the study suggests that the MOEYS may consider measures that could strengthen teachers'

internal needs for recognition, as well as systemic incentives that would encourage them to remain in the service for longer and engage in collaborative professional development activities.

Several policy recommendations can be suggested as a result of this research:

- **WORKING CONDITIONS**

Incentivize continued service in the education sector: Since the length of teaching has been identified as a predictor of teacher motivation to stay in the profession, the MOEYS may consider awarding incentives to teachers who have reached career milestones. For example, recognition and even monetary incentives may be awarded to teachers who have served for five years, ten years, and so forth. This will encourage teachers to continue teaching and have something to look forward to as they render their service.

- **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Facilitate professional learning communities and/or networks among teachers: Teacher professional development is one of the key areas recognized by the MOEYS as critical to improve the quality of education in Timor-Leste (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2023). Although survey respondents in this study revealed that many teachers are enrolled in short-term courses and programs (87.56%) and 63.93% are currently taking graduate studies, the role of professional learning communities and networks, as another form of professional development, cannot be discounted. Professional learning communities at the school and cluster levels may help teachers address shared challenges and develop solutions that support their daily teaching experiences. One example of which is the Grupu Traballu ba Professor (GTP). With funding support from the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), teachers in Bobonaro and Viqueque meet in

clusters to share their challenges and reflect on their teaching practice. The experience of the project sheds light on making such professional learning communities sustainable, through adapting the intervention at the school level to reduce travel costs and address weather disturbances, and the use of educational technology by municipal and school leaders for follow-ups (Cassity & Chainey, 2021).

- SENSE OF BEING RESPECTED AND VALUED

Continue to institutionalize measures that recognize teachers: Quinn and Buchanan's research (2022) pointed out that educators feel that their work is not sufficiently recognized at the national level. However, the MOEYS has begun to explore initiatives to address this challenge. For instance, the MOEYS utilizes Best Teacher Awards to recognize well-performing teachers in the country (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2023). The ministry may further continue to consider other similar recognitions to boost teachers' feelings of being respected and valued, as this was found to be one of the predictors of teacher motivation to remain in the profession. Other measures may also include regular communication from education leaders about teacher appreciation and supporting school leaders in creating an environment of respect for teachers within their educational institutions. Strategic communication through mainstream media and visits of government officials to schools may help further improve teachers' sense of value for their jobs.

- PERCEPTION OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Conduct reviews of policies affecting teachers: As the lowest-rated motivation factor, the MOEYS may consider conducting reviews of policies that affect teachers. Based on the survey results, teacher respondents in Timor-Leste are most dissatisfied with their salary, with 47.51% of respondents indicating dissatisfaction. This is followed by benefits and incentives (33.08%) and working conditions (23.63%). Investigating these areas and introducing measures may support teachers to continue their careers in education.

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Appendix

Statistical Results of the Study

Table 3

Interpretation of the 10-point Likert Scale

Very High Motivation	8.20 – 10.00
High Motivation	6.40 – 8.19
Moderate Motivation	4.60 – 6.39
Low Motivation	2.80 – 4.59
Very Low Motivation	1.00 – 2.79

Table 4

Interpretation of the 6-point Likert Scale

Strongly Agree	Strongly Satisfied	5.17 – 6.00
Agree	Satisfied	4.34 – 5.16
Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Satisfied	3.51 – 4.33
Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Dissatisfied	2.68 – 3.50
Disagree	Dissatisfied	1.84 – 2.67
Strongly Disagree	Strongly Dissatisfied	1.00 – 1.83

Table 5
Relationship between Factors of Motivation and Level of Motivation of Teachers

Factors of Motivation	Level of Motivation		Interpretation
	ρ	p	
School Environment	0.139	0.005*	Very Weak Relationship
Teaching as Interest and Passion	0.124	0.013**	
Sense of Purpose and Fulfillment	0.101	0.044**	
Teacher Well-being	0.099	0.048**	
Sense of Being Respected and Valued	0.084	0.091	Not Significant
Sense of Growth and Development	0.079	0.116	
Salary, Incentives and Benefits	0.078	0.12	
Perception of Government Policies	0.017	0.728	

*p < .01, **p < .05

The interpretation of Spearman's rho correlation coefficient was adapted from Dancey and Reidy (2004):

- $\rho \geq 0.70$ indicates very strong relationship
- 0.40 – 0.69 indicates strong relationship
- 0.30 – 0.39 indicates moderate relationship
- 0.20 – 0.29 indicates weak relationship
- 0.01 – 0.19 indicates no or negligible relationship

Table 6

Relationship between Working Conditions Indicators and Level of Motivation of Teachers

Working Conditions	Level of Motivation		Interpretation
	ρ	p	
Total Grade Levels Taught	-0.013	0.802	Not Significant
Hours Spent Teaching	0.007	0.884	
Hours Spent Traveling to School	0.083	0.098	
Length of Teaching	0.194	< .001	Very Weak Relationship

p < .001

The interpretation of Spearman's rho correlation coefficient was adapted from Dancey and Reidy (2004).

Table 7

Differences in Teachers' Motivation based on Length of Teaching

Length of Teaching	M	df	F	P	Effect size	
					η^2p	interpretation
Early Career (1 to 5 years)	7.435	2	5.583	0.004	0.027	Small
Mid-Career (6 to 10 years)	7.96					
Experienced (11 years and Up)	8.336					

p < .01

Interpretation is based on National University's (2025) interpretation of ANOVA's partial eta-squared:

- $\eta^2p = 0.01$ indicates a small effect
- $\eta^2p = 0.06$ indicates a medium effect
- $\eta^2p = 0.14$ indicates a large effect

Source: <https://resources.nu.edu/statsresources/eta>

Table 8

Regression Estimates of Factors Affecting the Teachers' Level of Motivation in Timor-Leste

Predictor	Stand. Estimate
Sense of Being Respected and Valued	0.124
Length of teaching in total years	0.186
Days spent in Participation in professional learning communities and/or networks	0.102
Gender: Others - Male	-0.777
Currently teaching Kindergarten: Yes	0.411

Model: $F(7, 394) = 6.40, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.102$



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