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School Head Leadership Practices, Organizational Job Embeddedness, and Teacher Retention Intentions in Public Elementary Schools: An Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods Study in the Schools Division of Davao del Sur

Dina M. Hubag[1], Josie S. Malanog[1], Nourwena B. Apadan[1], Nonita B. Comapas[1], Ritchelle A. Brigole[1], Rosemarie A. Sumogod[1], Eduardo M. Tejeros III, PhD[2], Jaymie A. Rellon, PhD[2], Mark Gennesis B. Dela Cerna, PhD[2]

[1]Graduate School Education, Central Mindanao Colleges, Kidapawan City, Philippines
[2]Faculty, Graduate School Education, Central Mindanao Colleges, Kidapawan City, Philippines

Email of Corresponding Author: jaymierellon1020@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examined the relationships among school head leadership practices, organizational job embeddedness, and teacher retention intention among public elementary school teachers in the Schools Division of Davao del Sur, Philippines. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed, involving 300 teachers from 15 purposively selected schools and 18 interview participants representing contrasting retention profiles. Data were collected using a 35-item questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, analyzed through descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, hierarchical regression, and thematic analysis. Findings revealed high perceived leadership practices (M = 4.161), very high organizational job embeddedness (M = 4.377), and high retention intention (M = 3.901). Organizational job embeddedness demonstrated a stronger significant relationship with retention intention ($r = .687$, $p < .001$) than leadership practices ($r = .200$, $p < .001$). Embeddedness contributed an additional 9.6% to explained variance beyond leadership domains, although this increment was sensitive to respondent composition. Qualitative findings emphasized collegial relationships, workload fairness, community attachment, family circumstances, and career opportunities as important retention considerations. The study concluded that retention intention reflects interconnected organizational and personal circumstances rather than leadership practices alone. School administrators should strengthen participative decision-making, equitable workload distribution, mentoring, and professional support. Cross-sectional data, nonprobability sampling, and measurement limitations restrict causal interpretation and generalizability. The findings provide context-specific evidence for developing integrated leadership and workforce-support strategies that may strengthen institutional stability and sustainable educational management.

Keywords: Davao Del Sur; Job Embeddedness; Leadership Practices; Mixed-Methods Research; Organizational Attachment; Teacher Retention; Workload Fairness

1. Introduction

Teacher retention remains a significant concern in education because it affects instructional continuity, institutional stability, and workforce sustainability. Decisions to remain in a particular school differ from decisions to continue in the teaching profession, highlighting the distinction between retention intentions and actual employment outcomes (Gundlach et al., 2024). Recent studies associate teacher retention with working conditions, collegial relationships, professional opportunities, and personal circumstances (Arnold & Rahimi, 2025; Farahmandpour & Voelkel, 2025; Gundlach, 2025). UNESCO and the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (2024) also emphasize workload, professional support, and staffing shortages as major educational challenges. Accordingly, retention intention refers to teachers' reported preference to remain in their current schools rather than verified continued employment (T. D. Nguyen et al., 2025).

In the Philippines, teacher workload and institutional support remain important concerns. DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024 mandated the removal of administrative tasks from public school teachers (Department of Education, 2024a), while DepEd Order No. 005, s. 2024 addressed teaching workloads and overload (Department of Education, 2024b). Nevertheless, nonteaching responsibilities remain challenging (EDCOM 2, 2025). A recent synthesis also identified workload intensification and time pressures as persistent concerns for teachers and school leaders (Creagh et al., 2025). Philippine studies identify administrative, collegial, and family support as factors influencing teachers' decisions to stay (Almonte-Acosta & Clamor-Torneo, 2023), while research in Leyte reported that 67%–71% of teachers expressed willingness to remain in their school assignments (Casinillo et al., 2024). These findings provide national context but do not directly represent public elementary teachers in Davao del Sur.

School head leadership practices influence teachers' professional experiences through relational and emotional support, professional growth and feedback, participative and fair decision-making, and workload and resource assistance. Research highlights teacher autonomy, professional development, and participation in decision-making as important leadership considerations (D. Nguyen et al., 2026; Scallon et al., 2023). Principal instructional leadership has also been associated with organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Hallinger et al., 2025), while autonomy-supportive leadership relates to teacher motivation and turnover intentions (Collie, 2023b). Earlier studies established relevant dimensions of principal support (Littrell et al., 1994; DiPaola, 2012). However, leadership practices should be understood as interconnected organizational conditions rather than guaranteed determinants of retention (D. Nguyen et al., 2026).

Organizational job embeddedness provides another explanation for teachers' intentions to remain. Job Embeddedness Theory identifies fit, links, and sacrifice as dimensions reflecting compatibility with the organization, workplace relationships, and valued opportunities potentially lost through departure (Mitchell et al., 2001). Recent studies emphasize school-based embeddedness and supportive organizational environments (McCluskey, 2024; Smith Rouse et al., 2026). Southeast Asian research found that overall job embeddedness was negatively associated with turnover intention, particularly through fit and sacrifice, although these findings were based on employees outside the Philippine educational context (Setthakorn et al., 2024). Social Exchange Theory further explains how fairness, respect, and institutional support may encourage reciprocal workplace attachment (Blau, 1964).

The study is anchored in Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) and Job Embeddedness Theory (Mitchell et al., 2001), which provide complementary explanations of leadership-related organizational experiences and teachers' attachment to their schools. Leadership practices reflect perceived institutional treatment, while embeddedness captures the relationships, compatibility, and potential sacrifices associated with remaining employed. Contemporary research supports the importance of autonomy, professional development, teacher voice, and organizational conditions in understanding retention-related decisions (D. Nguyen et al., 2026; Smith Rouse et al., 2026; Leithwood et al., 2026). These perspectives guide the examination of relationships without implying causation.

Despite existing research, limited evidence explains how school head leadership practices, organizational job embeddedness, and teacher retention intention interact within the Schools Division of Davao del Sur. Flores and Quines (2022) examined leadership trust and willingness to remain in teaching, but professional retention differs from remaining in a specific school. Contemporary studies emphasize the combined influence of institutional conditions and professional goals (Cobb-Clark & Nguyen, 2026; Leithwood et al., 2026), while qualitative research in Mindanao highlights social relationships and teacher persistence without explaining the quantitative relationships examined in this study (Pregoner et al., 2026). Addressing this gap requires an integrated investigation of leadership, embeddedness, and retention intention.

The study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods framework, beginning with quantitative assessments of leadership practices, organizational job embeddedness, and retention intention, followed by qualitative

interviews exploring contrasting experiences. The quantitative phase examined their levels, associations, and the additional variance in retention intention explained by embeddedness beyond leadership practices. The qualitative phase explored workload, collegial relationships, fairness, professional opportunities, institutional resources, and family circumstances to explain the observed patterns. This approach integrates statistical findings with contextual experiences without assuming causal relationships, consistent with recent research on mixed-methods integration in education (Zhou et al., 2024).

The study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by examining conditions associated with teacher retention and instructional continuity, and Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by addressing supportive leadership, professional development, and sustainable working conditions. Its contribution to educational, organizational, and institutional sustainability lies in providing evidence that may inform school leadership practices, workload management, professional support, and workforce stability.

Therefore, this study aimed to determine the levels and relationships among perceived school head leadership practices, organizational job embeddedness, and teacher retention intention among public elementary school teachers in the Schools Division of Davao del Sur. It also examined whether job embeddedness explained additional variance in retention intention beyond leadership practices and explored teachers' contrasting experiences through qualitative interviews. By integrating quantitative and qualitative findings, the study sought to develop context-sensitive educational leadership implications for strengthening institutional support and teacher retention practices.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a pragmatic explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (QUAN → qual), following Creswell and Plano Clark (2018). The quantitative phase examined the levels and relationships among leadership practices, job embeddedness, and retention intention. Subsequently, 18 teachers representing contrasting survey profiles participated in interviews to explain the statistical findings and contextual influences. Both datasets were integrated to develop a comprehensive understanding of teacher retention intention.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in 15 selected public elementary schools across 15 districts under the Schools Division Office of Davao del Sur, Department of Education Region XI, Philippines. One school per district was purposively selected based on the availability of at least 20 eligible teachers, providing coverage across different school settings without claiming division-wide representativeness.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The quantitative phase involved 300 full-time public elementary classroom teachers with at least one school year of service in their current school and one semester under their current school head. School administrators, nonteaching personnel, and teachers on extended leave were excluded. The qualitative phase included 18 consenting teachers representing four profiles: consistently favorable (5), higher leadership but lower retention intention (4), lower leadership but higher embeddedness and retention intention (4), and consistently unfavorable (5).

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

A two-stage nonprobability sampling procedure involved purposive selection of 15 schools and voluntary recruitment of teachers, with an equal target quota of 20 respondents per school. Equal allocation balanced the planned school contributions rather than representing teacher populations proportionally (Australian Bureau of Statistics, n.d.; Statistics Canada, 2021). The 300 complete responses exceeded the calculated minimum sample sizes of 247 for regression and 259 for correlation analysis (Lakens, 2022). However, school-specific response rates and quota attainment could not be verified. Maximum-variation sampling was subsequently used to select 18 interview participants based on contrasting leadership, embeddedness, and retention-intention profiles.

2.5 Research Instrument

A 35-item questionnaire assessed school head leadership practices (20 items), organizational job embeddedness (9 items), and teacher retention intention (6 items). Leadership items covered relational support, professional development, participative decision-making, and workload and resource assistance, adapted from previous studies (DiPaola, 2012; Littrell et al., 1994) and informed by recent research (D. Nguyen et al., 2026; Scallon et al., 2023). Embeddedness items measured fit, links, and sacrifice (Mitchell et al., 2001; Crossley et al., 2007), while retention items included two reverse-scored statements (Bothma & Roodt, 2013). Responses used a five-point frequency scale from Never (1) to Always (5). Three experts reviewed the instrument, followed by pilot testing among 39 teachers. Pilot reliability coefficients ranged from .756 to .934, while final alpha and omega coefficients were

.968/.969 for leadership, .836/.837 for embeddedness, and .804/.825 for retention intention, exceeding the .70 criterion (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). However, confirmatory factor analysis indicated poor model fit (χ^2[531] = 3204.90, CFI = .750, TLI = .720, RMSEA = .130, SRMR = .116; Hu & Bentler, 1999), with overlapping leadership domains and weak reverse-scored retention items raising concerns about construct validity (Henseler et al., 2015). The composites were therefore interpreted cautiously, with domain-level comparisons treated as exploratory. A reviewed semi-structured interview guide explored leadership experiences, contextual conditions, and explanations of contrasting survey profiles.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Following ethical clearance on September 21, 2026, pilot testing was conducted on September 22–25, followed by the main online survey on September 26–27, 2026. With permission from the Schools Division Superintendent, eligible teachers received study information and voluntarily completed the questionnaire, yielding 300 complete responses. After preliminary analysis, 18 consenting teachers were interviewed from September 28 to October 2, 2026. Interviews were conducted with separate recording consent, transcribed, and de-identified. School heads did not participate in individual recruitment or access respondent information.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and 95% confidence intervals, summarized the three constructs using five interpretation levels from Very Low to Very High. Pearson correlations examined relationships at $\alpha = .05$, with magnitude interpreted using Evans's (1996) guidelines. Steiger's (1980) test compared dependent correlations, while hierarchical regression assessed the additional variance in retention intention explained by embeddedness beyond leadership practices. HC3 robust standard errors addressed heteroscedasticity (Long & Ervin, 2000). Partial correlations, Spearman correlations, and sensitivity analyses assessed the stability of results, although school-level clustering and measurement limitations remained unaddressed. Qualitative data were analyzed through an adapted Colaizzi-style process involving transcript review, significant-statement extraction, meaning formulation, and thematic development (Colaizzi, 1978; Pregoner et al., 2026). Quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to identify convergent and contrasting explanations (Fetters et al., 2013). Trustworthiness was supported through maximum-variation sampling, discrepant-case analysis, de-identification, and an audit trail consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical clearance from the Central Mindanao Colleges Research Ethics Committee (CMC-REC), Protocol GS-EC-2026-006, on September 21, 2026. All participants provided informed consent and participated voluntarily, with the right to decline or withdraw. Confidentiality was maintained through coded responses, de-identified transcripts, restricted data access, and secure storage in accordance with Republic Act No. 10173, the Data Privacy Act of 2012. School heads had no access to individual responses or participation decisions, and findings were reported without identifying participants or ranking schools.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Levels of School Head Leadership Practices, Organizational Job Embeddedness, and Teacher Retention Intention

3.1.1 School Head Leadership Practices

School head leadership practices were rated High overall (M = 4.161, SD = 0.766), with 85.7% of respondents reporting High or Very High ratings. Professional Growth and Feedback received the highest mean (M = 4.320), followed by Participative and Fair Decision-Making (M = 4.167), Relational and Emotional Support (M = 4.079), and Instrumental, Workload, and Resource Support (M = 4.077). Lower-rated practices involved respectful communication, conflict resolution, and responsiveness to instructional concerns. These findings indicate generally favorable leadership experiences, particularly in professional development. However, communication, fairness, and workload support remain areas for improvement. This aligns with studies emphasizing teacher autonomy, participation, and supportive instructional leadership (D. Nguyen et al., 2026; Scallon et al., 2023; Hallinger et al., 2025).

3.1.2 Organizational Job Embeddedness

Organizational job embeddedness was Very High (M = 4.377, SD = 0.516). Fit obtained the highest mean (M = 4.513), followed by Links (M = 4.456), both interpreted as Very High, while Sacrifice was High (M = 4.162). These findings indicate strong professional compatibility, workplace relationships, and perceived losses associated with leaving. The results suggest that teachers' attachment to their schools extends beyond leadership experiences to include professional relationships and established responsibilities. Maintaining collegial support, mentoring, and meaningful workplace connections may strengthen organizational attachment, consistent with McCluskey (2024), Arnold and Rahimi (2025), and Smith Rouse et al. (2026).

3.1.3 Teacher Retention Intention

Teacher retention intention was High (M = 3.901, SD = 0.743), with 76.3% reporting High or Very High intentions to remain. Positive retention items ranged from M = 3.940 to 4.353. However, 70.0% reported thinking about requesting a transfer or seeking employment elsewhere at least sometimes, indicating that favorable staying intentions coexisted with mobility considerations. These findings suggest that willingness to remain does not eliminate transfer-related thoughts. Family circumstances, professional opportunities, and working conditions may influence teachers' decisions. Retention intention also differs from actual employment outcomes (T. D. Nguyen et al., 2025). Related Philippine and international studies emphasize the importance of distinguishing school retention from professional commitment and mobility (Flores and Quines (2022); Casinillo et al. (2024); Arnold & Rahimi, 2025; Gundlach, 2025; T. D. Nguyen et al., 2025).

3.2 Relationships Among Leadership Practices, Job Embeddedness, and Retention Intention

3.2.1 Relationships Among the Main Variables

School head leadership practices showed a weak positive relationship with retention intention ($r = .200$, $p < .001$), while organizational job embeddedness demonstrated a strong positive relationship ($r = .687$, $p < .001$). Leadership practices and embeddedness were also positively correlated ($r = .379$, $p < .001$). The embeddedness–retention relationship was significantly stronger than the leadership–retention relationship (Steiger's $z = 9.22$, $p < .001$). Thus, H01, H02, and H03 were rejected under the reported individual-level tests. These findings suggest that organizational attachment was more closely associated with retention intention than leadership ratings alone. Teachers' workplace relationships, professional compatibility, and perceived sacrifices may help explain this pattern. Similar associations have been reported in studies on teacher autonomy, organizational commitment, and embeddedness (D. Nguyen et al., 2026; Arnold & Rahimi, 2025; Setthakorn et al., 2024). However, the cross-sectional findings do not establish causation or mediation.

3.2.2 Leadership Domains and Embeddedness Dimensions

Participative and Fair Decision-Making ($r = .329$, $p < .001$) and Instrumental, Workload, and Resource Support ($r = .424$, $p < .001$) were positively associated with retention intention. Relational and Emotional Support ($r = −.093$, $p = .107$) and Professional Growth and Feedback ($r = .090$, $p = .121$) were not significantly associated under Pearson analysis, although professional growth showed a significant Spearman correlation ($\rho = .245$, $p < .001$). Among embeddedness dimensions, Links ($r = .723$) and Sacrifice ($r = .639$) showed strong relationships, while Fit ($r = .180$) showed a very weak relationship. Excluding 20 respondents with low leadership ratings increased the overall leadership–retention correlation from .200 to .480. These results highlight the potential relevance of fair decision-making, manageable workloads, and established professional relationships. Teacher participation and autonomy have been associated with lower turnover intentions (Collie, 2023b), while excessive time pressure may increase intentions to leave (Collie, 2023a). Instructional leadership has also been linked with teacher commitment and job satisfaction (Hallinger et al., 2025). Nevertheless, overlapping leadership domains and sensitivity to respondent composition require cautious interpretation.

3.2.3 Predictive Contribution of Organizational Job Embeddedness

Hierarchical regression showed that leadership domains explained 52.3% of the variance in retention intention ($R^2 = .523$). Adding organizational job embeddedness increased explained variance to 61.9% ($R^2 = .619$, $\Delta R^2 = .096$, $p < .001$), supporting rejection of H04 under the reported model. The leadership–embeddedness interaction was not significant ($B = 0.012$, $p = .923$). Excluding 20 low-leadership respondents reduced the additional explained variance to .7% ($\Delta R^2 = .007$), while using only four positively worded retention items increased it to 14.1% ($\Delta R^2 = .141$). The findings indicate that embeddedness contributed additional statistical information beyond leadership ratings, although the magnitude depended on sample composition and measurement choices. The overlapping leadership domains and poorly fitting measurement model limit interpretation of individual regression coefficients. These results should not be interpreted as evidence of causal effects or mediation. Distinguishing transfer considerations from positive staying intentions is also important because mobility may reflect career advancement or personal circumstances (T. D. Nguyen et al., 2025; Gundlach, 2025; Arnold & Rahimi, 2025).

3.3 Leadership Experiences and Organizational Attachment

3.3.1 Participative Leadership

Interview participants described supportive school heads who communicated clearly, consulted teachers, provided constructive feedback, recognized accomplishments, and adjusted responsibilities according to instructional needs. These practices strengthened teachers' sense of respect and professional compatibility. The findings reinforce the importance of teacher participation and responsive leadership in developing favorable workplace experiences. They are consistent with research emphasizing professional development, teacher autonomy, and recognition (D. Nguyen et al., 2026; Scallon et al., 2023).

3.3.2 Relational Anchors

Teachers identified trusted colleagues, grade-level teams, learning action cells, learners, parents, and community relationships as important reasons for remaining in their schools. These connections sometimes sustained retention intention despite dissatisfaction with school leadership. The findings help explain the strong association between organizational links and retention intention. Established professional and community relationships may provide continuity and support beyond individual leadership experiences, consistent with Gundlach (2025), Almonte-Acosta & Clamor-Torneo (2023), and Pregoner et al. (2026).

3.3.3 Perceived Sacrifice

Participants described mentoring responsibilities, leadership roles, professional reputation, familiar routines, and community trust as valued resources they might lose through transfer. Teachers with fewer established responsibilities and relationships generally viewed relocation as more manageable. These experiences reflect the Sacrifice dimension of Job Embeddedness Theory (Mitchell et al., 2001). Accumulated professional roles and relationships may strengthen teachers' perceived reasons for remaining, providing qualitative context for the strong sacrifice–retention association.

3.3.4 Embeddedness Despite Unfavorable Leadership

Some teachers reported limited consultation, delayed instructions, and inadequate leadership support but maintained strong intentions to remain because of established collegial relationships and community attachment. Others with weaker organizational ties considered transfer more realistic. These contrasting experiences suggest that favorable leadership is not always necessary for strong retention intention, while supportive leadership alone may not prevent mobility. The findings help contextualize the weak overall leadership–retention association without establishing that embeddedness statistically moderates this relationship.

3.4 Contextual Factors Influencing Teacher Retention

3.4.1 Workload Fairness

Participants identified reasonable task distribution, clear priorities, and early consultation as conditions supporting retention. Conversely, excessive ancillary duties, overlapping reports, unequal assignments, and insufficient instructional preparation time encouraged transfer considerations. These findings emphasize workload management as an important organizational concern. They align with the policy direction of reducing teachers' administrative responsibilities (Department of Education, 2024a), continuing reports of nonteaching workload challenges (EDCOM 2, 2025), and evidence linking time pressure with turnover intentions (Collie, 2023a).

3.4.2 Community Attachment

Teachers with long service, dependable colleagues, established routines, and strong learner and parent relationships expressed intentions to remain despite less favorable leadership experiences. Community connections and local support networks provided additional reasons for staying. This finding helps explain why embeddedness demonstrated a stronger association with retention intention than leadership ratings. Established relationships and community familiarity may sustain organizational attachment independently of current leadership satisfaction.

3.4.3 Family and Location

Family proximity, spouse assignments, commuting distance, transportation expenses, and relocation requirements influenced teachers' retention decisions. Some participants considered transferring despite favorable leadership because their personal circumstances made another school more practical. These findings indicate that retention decisions involve personal and geographic considerations beyond school management. This interpretation is consistent with research identifying family responsibilities and financial considerations as factors influencing teacher mobility (Gundlach, 2025; Pregoner et al., 2026).

3.4.4 Career Mobility

Participants identified professional development, promotion, graduate studies, and leadership opportunities as influences on their decisions to stay or transfer. While meaningful professional growth encouraged some teachers to remain, limited advancement opportunities motivated others to consider alternative assignments. The findings suggest that professional development does not necessarily result in stronger retention intention when teachers' career goals require mobility. This interpretation aligns with evidence that school transfers may reflect professional advancement rather than dissatisfaction (Gundlach, 2025).

3.4.5 Procedural Fairness

Teachers emphasized transparent decisions, respectful communication, equitable recognition, meaningful feedback, and fair assignment of responsibilities. Inconsistent consultation and repeated allocation of additional duties to particular teachers weakened perceptions of workplace fairness. These findings support the importance of teacher voice, organizational transparency, and sustainable working conditions. They are consistent with

research emphasizing participative leadership and supportive organizational practices (D. Nguyen et al., 2026; Smith Rouse et al., 2026).

3.5 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

3.5.1 Layered Retention Decisions

The integrated findings showed that retention intention reflected several interacting considerations. Teachers with favorable leadership and strong embeddedness generally intended to remain, while those reporting favorable leadership but lower retention intention cited family location, commuting, or career opportunities. Conversely, teachers with less favorable leadership sometimes remained because of strong organizational ties. These findings explain why leadership and retention intention were only weakly associated overall, while embeddedness demonstrated a stronger relationship. The qualitative accounts provide contextual explanations for contrasting survey profiles but do not establish causal pathways.

3.5.2 Unmeasured Professional and Personal Commitments

Participants identified long-term trust with families, classroom autonomy, community responsibility, household expenses, commuting difficulties, and accumulated dissatisfaction as considerations not fully captured by the questionnaire. These factors influenced how teachers interpreted their leadership experiences and intentions to remain. The findings suggest that numerical ratings may not fully represent the personal and relational circumstances influencing teacher mobility. Combining survey results with interview accounts therefore provided a more contextualized understanding of retention intention.

3.5.3 Consultative Leadership

Participants recommended consultation before assigning additional tasks, transparent workload distribution, timely communication, constructive feedback, and equitable recognition. These priorities corresponded with the positive quantitative relationships involving participative decision-making and instrumental support. The integrated findings indicate that leadership improvement efforts may reasonably emphasize fairness, teacher participation, and manageable responsibilities. However, the overlapping leadership domains prevent conclusions about the independent effects of specific practices.

3.5.4 Division-Level Support

Teachers identified coordinated reporting schedules, advance communication of activities, leadership development, transparent transfer procedures, and accessible career pathways as needed division-level improvements. These recommendations reflected concerns about workload, family location, and professional mobility. The findings suggest that school-level leadership practices should be complemented by division-level policies addressing administrative demands, career development, and teachers' personal circumstances. Such measures respond to the contextual concerns identified by participants rather than demonstrating established intervention effects.

3.5.5 Overall Mixed-Methods Interpretation

The integrated results confirmed that organizational job embeddedness was more strongly associated with retention intention ($r = .687$) than school head leadership practices ($r = .200$). Qualitative findings identified collegial relationships, community attachment, professional responsibilities, workload fairness, family location, and career opportunities as explanations for contrasting retention profiles. Although embeddedness added 9.6 percentage points to explained variance in the primary regression, this increment was sensitive to the inclusion of 20 respondents with unfavorable leadership ratings. Overall, the findings are consistent with Social Exchange Theory's emphasis on workplace treatment (Blau, 1964) and Job Embeddedness Theory's fit, links, and sacrifice dimensions (Mitchell et al., 2001). However, the cross-sectional design, measurement limitations, and unadjusted school clustering prevent causal conclusions. The results support consideration of participative leadership, equitable workloads, professional relationships, and flexible division-level support as complementary approaches to teacher retention (D. Nguyen et al., 2026; Smith Rouse et al., 2026).

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study revealed that public elementary school teachers in the Schools Division of Davao del Sur generally perceived school head leadership practices positively, demonstrated very high organizational job embeddedness, and expressed strong intentions to remain in their current schools. Organizational job embeddedness showed a stronger significant relationship with retention intention than leadership practices, highlighting the importance of professional relationships, organizational fit, and perceived sacrifices associated with leaving. Although leadership practices contributed to explaining retention intention, the additional contribution of embeddedness varied across sensitivity analyses. Qualitative findings further revealed that workload fairness, collegial relationships, community attachment, family circumstances, and career opportunities influenced teachers' decisions to remain or consider transferring. These findings are consistent with Job Embeddedness Theory

(Mitchell et al., 2001) and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), emphasizing the importance of organizational and personal circumstances in understanding teacher retention intention (Leithwood et al., 2026).

School heads should strengthen participative leadership through transparent decision-making, respectful communication, constructive feedback, and equitable distribution of teaching and ancillary responsibilities. Regular confidential consultations should identify workload concerns, instructional barriers, and professional development needs. Schools should maintain supportive collegial relationships through mentoring, Learning Action Cells, and collaborative professional activities while protecting teachers' instructional preparation time. The Schools Division Office of Davao del Sur should coordinate reporting requirements, minimize overlapping administrative deadlines, and provide leadership development focused on consultation, workload management, and fair personnel practices. Transparent transfer procedures and accessible career advancement opportunities should also consider legitimate family, commuting, and professional circumstances. Schools and division administrators may pilot an integrated retention-support program combining these strategies and evaluate its effectiveness through confidential teacher feedback and appropriately authorized records of actual school transfers. Future researchers should further examine the relationships among leadership, embeddedness, and retention using improved measurement instruments, broader sampling procedures, and longitudinal approaches.

The study employed a cross-sectional, nonprobability design involving 300 teachers from 15 purposively selected schools, limiting generalizability and causal interpretation. Self-reported responses may have introduced common-method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), while retention intention did not establish actual teacher retention (T. D. Nguyen et al., 2025). Unavailable school-level response records and identifiers prevented verification of school-specific participation and adjustment for clustering. The questionnaire demonstrated poor factorial fit, overlapping leadership dimensions, and sensitivity to reverse-scored retention items and respondent composition. The brief data collection period and purposive selection of 18 interviewees further limited transferability. Future studies should employ validated instruments, probability sampling, cluster-adjusted analyses, and longitudinal tracking of teacher mobility.

5. Compliance with ethical standards

The authors affirm that no conflicts of interest exist in relation to this study. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Central Mindanao Colleges Research Ethics Committee (CMC-REC), Protocol Code GS-EC-2026-006, on September 21, 2026, and permission was secured from the Schools Division Superintendent for the participation of public elementary school teachers in Davao del Sur. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw; data were collected through non-invasive questionnaires and interviews. Participant confidentiality was protected through coded responses, de-identified interview transcripts, restricted data access, and secure storage in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, with findings reported without identifying individual participants or schools.

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