



THE CASE OF A SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION COORDINATOR: SURMOUNTING THE CHALLENGES OF PUSH AND PULL IN EXPLORING INTERNATIONAL TEACHING OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

High rate of migration of Special Needs Education teachers is a concern in education. I explored the pull and push factors of a Special Needs Education Coordinator to teach abroad. Case study design, snowball sampling, semi-structured interview guide, in-depth interviews, and thematic analysis were utilized. The case of the Special Needs Education Coordinator revealed six push factors namely: limited career growth, low salaries, lack of professional development, social stigma and discrimination, inadequate resources, and professional isolation; six pull factors including better career opportunities, higher salaries abroad, global teaching standards, improved work conditions, comprehensive support systems, and professional growth; and accumulation of advanced educational credentials also perceived as a strategic mediating factor between push and pull dynamics. SNED teachers may consider the six-compounding push and pull factors as critical reference points in balancing personal career experiences toward international migration with the need for systemic reforms. Mediation, multiple regression, and exploratory factor analyses may utilize to further validate the relationships among the identified push and pull factors and advanced qualifications may be explored.

Keywords: *Case of special needs education coordinator, surmounting the challenges of push and pull, exploring international teaching opportunities*

INTRODUCTION

The lack of advanced training in Special Needs Education (SNED) limits the researcher's effectiveness as an educator and hinders career progression, making the pursuit of an international teaching opportunity essential for enhancing the researcher's teaching skills and expanding professional opportunities (Wilson College, 2024).

In developed nations such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, rigorous inclusive education frameworks have created sustained demand for educators with advanced specializations, particularly in areas such as autism spectrum disorders, assistive technology, and differentiated instruction (Saint Joseph's University, 2023; Education Next, 2024). For Filipino special education teachers, this global landscape presents both a compelling opportunity and a systemic challenge.

In the Philippines, legislative frameworks such as Republic Act No. 11650 reflect growing institutional commitment to inclusive education (DepEd Philippines, 2022). Despite these efforts, SNED practitioners continue to face significant barriers to professional advancement, including limited access to specialized training (Frontiers in Education, 2024; DepEd Inclusive Education Policy Framework, 2023). This condition not only constrain professional growth but also intensify aspirations for international teaching opportunities where qualifications may receive greater recognition and more equitable compensation (Grand Canyon University, 2025).

Without addressing the lack of advanced training for SNED professionals in the Philippines, educators would remain ill-equipped to implement evidence-based practices, assistive technologies, and differentiated instruction, progressively widening the gap between the specialized support that learners with disabilities deserve and what an undertrained workforce can deliver, ultimately perpetuating a cycle where qualified educators seek international opportunities abroad while Filipino students with special needs are left without the quality education they are entitled to. Hence, the researcher conducted this study.

Research Questions

In this study, the researcher aimed to explore the perceptions of a Special Needs Education (SNED) Coordinator at the chosen school locale who aspires to pursue international teaching opportunities. Specifically, this study sought to address the following questions:

1. What challenges do the SNED Coordinator face in teaching special needs education in the Philippines that are significant in considering opportunities abroad?
2. What coping mechanisms do the SNED Coordinator employ in addressing the challenges encountered in seeking international teaching roles?

3. What insights do the SNED Coordinator share regarding professional growth and qualifications as contributing factors to obtaining international teaching opportunities?

Theoretical Lens

In this study, the researcher anchored Everett S. Lee's Theory of Migration (1966), which posits that every place has positive factors that attract or retain people and negative factors that repel them, and that the decision to migrate depends on whether the balance of push and pull factors sufficiently overcomes natural inertia and intervening obstacles. Building on these factors, Lee further hypothesized that migration is selective, that push and pull factors operate bi-directionally, and that the propensity to migrate is shaped by an individual's life cycle and personal circumstances.

Paradigm

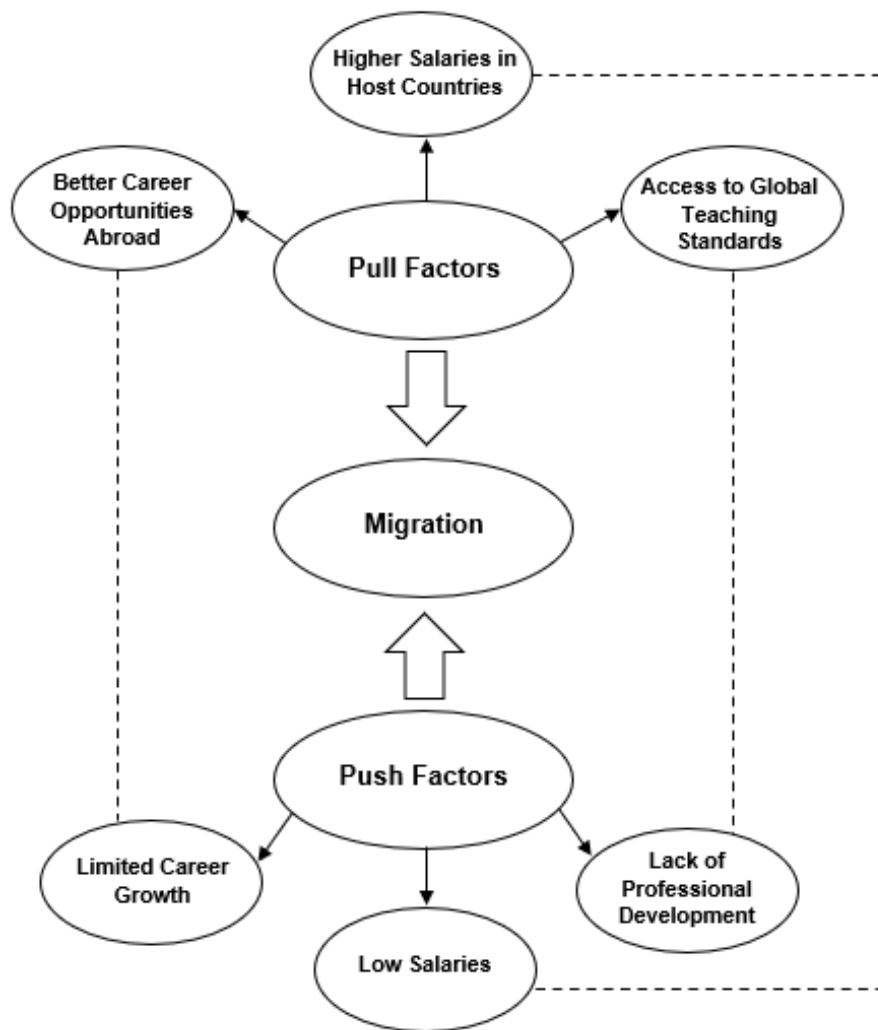


Figure 1. Migration Theory Paradigm

Significance of the Study

The researcher's case study offers valuable insights into the perceptions of a SNED Coordinator aspiring for international teaching opportunities, aligned with UN SDGs 4 and 8 on Quality Education and Decent Work, and with Holy Cross of Davao College's mission of excellence and social transformation. By exploring the coordinator's challenges and insights, this research aims to inform policymakers and administrators in designing interventions that empower SNED professionals, validate their lived experiences, and improve the quality of special needs education in a global context.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a single case study design to conduct an in-depth exploration of a SNED Coordinator's perceptions for international teaching opportunities. This approach allows for rigorous investigation within real-life context, drawing on multiple sources of evidence for a contextually rich account (Yin, 2018). Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and documentary evidence, enabling triangulation across multiple sources consistent with established qualitative research practice.

Research Locale

The case study was conducted at a public secondary institution in Koronadal City, South Cotabato, Philippines. The school was purposefully selected due to its established SPED department serving learners with diverse disabilities and its commitment to inclusive education. Its institutional context marked by dedicated professional engagement alongside systemic resource constraints provided an information-rich setting for exploring the SNED Coordinator's motivations, challenges, and international teaching experiences.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study's participants consisted of one SNED Coordinator and six SNED Teachers at the chosen school locale. Inclusion criteria required participants to be currently serving in their roles, holding at least five years of special education experience, and willing to participate in interviews (Creswell, 2013).

Snowball sampling was employed to identify the SNED Coordinator, ensuring that data were gathered from knowledgeable and experienced professionals (Patton, 2002). This purposeful selection enabled a rich and meaningful exploration of the coordinator's motivations, challenges, and international teaching experiences.

Data Gathering Technique

The researcher employed In-Depth Interviews (IDI) to capture the complexity of participants' experiences. The IDI utilized a researcher-designed, expert-validated interview guide, allowing in-depth exploration of the coordinator's motivations and decision-making processes while providing a platform for SNED teachers' collective insights. All interviews were audio-recorded for verbatim transcription accuracy, and supplementary documentary evidence including service records, payslips, and certificates were collected to provide contextual triangulation for the findings (Yin, 2018).

Data Analysis Technique

The researcher used thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework to analyze the data. The process involved verbatim transcription, thorough review for accuracy, and removal of identifying information to maintain anonymity. The researcher then conducted close reading to generate initial codes, which were iteratively grouped into broader themes aligned with the research questions. Findings were interpreted through comprehensive description, supported by participant quotes and situated within existing literature and the study's theoretical framework, ensuring analytical rigor and coherence throughout.

RESULTS

Push Factors in the Perspectives of a Special Needs (SNED) Coordinator for International Teaching Opportunities

Based on thematic analysis, six key push factors emerged: Limited Career Growth, Low Salaries, Lack of Professional Development, Social Stigma and Discrimination, Inadequate Resources, and Professional Isolation. These factors represent conditions and experiences within the Philippine educational context that collectively create professionally unsustainable circumstances, motivating the coordinator to consider international alternatives. Notably, the push factors do not operate in isolation, they compound one another collaboratively, making the cumulative burden far greater than any single factor alone.

Push Factor 1: Limited Career Growth

Limited Career Growth encompasses three sub-themes: Career Stagnation, Lack of Recognition, and Uncertain Future. This theme reflects the coordinator's experience of professional plateau within the Philippine special education system, where extensive qualifications and years of dedicated service fail to translate into meaningful advancement. When career growth is blocked despite significant professional investment, educators begin to question the long-term viability of domestic service.

Sub-theme 1a: Career Stagnation. Career stagnation describes a prolonged period of remaining in the same position without meaningful advancement despite acquiring multiple advanced degrees and accumulating years of dedicated service. This stagnation creates growing frustration as professional qualifications fail to translate into upward mobility within the educational hierarchy. Documentary evidence (Service Record) confirms that the SNED Coordinator has remained in the Master Teacher II position since 2016 despite holding three master's degrees and a doctorate with ongoing PhD enrollment which is a clear and documented contradiction between extensive qualifications and static position. She expressed this frustration:

I will spend my whole life here? And then after all what? When you... when you go out from the service, another teacher will come in. And then, the Department the DepEd will forget you... mostly of the teachers who are... inspired to work from the start will end up somehow very tired because of the system not only with the system but because of the lack of support, lack of financial assistance. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p4_L45)

This statement reveals how career stagnation transforms from a professional inconvenience into an existential crisis, where years of service culminate in institutional amnesia rather than meaningful legacy or advancement. P4 verified this as a systemic pattern rather than an isolated experience:

May epekto man ini sa professional growth. Kadamo sa mga educators, nahadlok nga mag-apply sa mga training kay daw kulang sila sang suporta sa ila administration, which can limit ang pag-uswag nila sa field. (This also has an effect on professional growth. Many educators are afraid to apply for training because they feel they lack support from their administration, which can limit their advancement in the field.) — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p7_L353-355)

Sub-theme 1b: Lack of Recognition. Lack of recognition reflects institutional failure to acknowledge the specialized expertise, extensive qualifications, and intensive work required in special education coordination. This absence creates professional invisibility where contributions go unacknowledged and dedication receives neither validation nor reward. Notably, despite achieving regional recognition as a DepEd resource speaker based on documentary evidence (Certificate of Recognition), the coordinator continues to experience marginalization within her own institution which is a contradiction that intensifies the push toward international opportunities where comprehensive expertise might receive appropriate recognition. She articulated this reality:

When they know that you are teaching learners with disabilities, they look at you very, they underestimate you because for them your diligence is little... but because you are

teaching learners with disabilities so you are less fortunate and for us we are just in uhh corner. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p2_L21)

The coordinator's characterization of being relegated to the "corner" (both physically and professionally) demonstrates how institutional structures create marginalized positions for special education professionals, signaling that inclusive education is a peripheral rather than central institutional priority. P2 validated this experience of persistent stigma:

Ang stigma nga nagalibot sa special needs education, nagapadayon gihapon, so medyo isolating gid siya usahay. (The stigma that surrounds special needs education continues, so it's quite isolating sometimes.) — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p5_L263)

P4 further documented how community attitudes compound the lack of institutional recognition:

Na-obsorbahan ko man nga may cultural aspect, noh, kundiin sometimes ang mga ginikanan wala sang full understanding ukon suporta sa special education. (I've observed that there's a cultural aspect, right, wherein sometimes parents don't have full understanding or support for special education.) — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p6_L269-271)

Sub-theme 1c: Uncertain Future. Uncertain future captures the existential questioning about career sustainability and long-term professional viability when advancement pathways remain systematically closed. When educators cannot envision a meaningful future in their current position, despite years of investment, international alternatives become increasingly compelling. The coordinator articulated this anxiety:

I will spend my whole life here? And then after all what?... I have a lot of plans, I have a lot of dreams for these learners, however, I'm only one. I'm only one. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p4_L45)

The repetition of "I'm only one" reveals how uncertain future compounds with professional isolation and overwhelming responsibilities, creating a cascading sense of career futility. P6 reflected similar existential concerns about professional sustainability:

And, ya, ang burnout, real gid siya. Ang emotional toll, medyo mabug-at, especially kung pirme ka nagakabudlay para sa resources kag pagkilala. (And, yes, the burnout is real. The emotional toll is quite heavy, especially when you're always

struggling for resources and recognition.) —
(**SNED_Teacher-IDI_p5_L277-279**)

Having established how Limited Career Growth creates professional stagnation and an uncertain future for the SNED Coordinator, it is equally important to examine how this career plateau is compounded by the financial inadequacy she simultaneously endures and for as what the researcher felt in every word she shared, it is not career frustration alone, but the convergence of stagnation with chronic economic hardship, that renders domestic service increasingly untenable and the prospect of leaving increasingly difficult to dismiss.

Push Factor 2: Low Salaries

Low Salaries encompasses three sub-themes: Insufficient Compensation, Personal Debt Burden, and Economic Struggles. This theme addresses the financial inadequacy of special education compensation structures in the Philippines. Inadequate salaries do not merely cause personal hardship, they directly compromise the coordinator's capacity to serve students, because program quality depends partly on resources that the institutional budget cannot provide and the coordinator personally fills the gap.

Sub-theme 2a: Insufficient Compensation. Insufficient compensation describes earnings that are inadequate relative to the coordinator's professional qualifications and management responsibilities. Documentary evidence (Payslip) reveals a gross salary of approximately 15,000–18,000 pesos reduced by deductions to a 5,000-peso monthly net which is approximately USD 85–90 monthly for a professional holding multiple advanced degree. International job postings referring on documentary evidence (International Job Postings with Salary Ranges) document special education positions in the United States, Canada, and Australia offering USD 50,000–75,000 annually, representing a salary differential of 2,000–3,000%. The coordinator disclosed:

I'm still here struggling to pay my debts... to manage... with a 5,000 monthly net take home pay. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p3_L41)

P5 identified compensation as a primary motivation for seeking international opportunities, adding that financial stability also enables greater professional focus:

Mas maayo man nga financial reward ang isa sa mga rason, noh? Kun magtrabaho sa abroad, mas mataas ang compensation, which could lead to better living conditions. With financial stability, mas mag-focus kami sa aton mga responsibilidad sa pagtudlo. (Better financial reward is one of the reasons, right? If we work abroad, the compensation is higher, which could lead to better living conditions. With

financial stability, we could focus more on our teaching responsibilities.) — **(SNED_Teacher-IDI_p8_L413-415)**

Sub-theme 2b: Personal Debt Burden. Personal debt burden refers to unresolved financial obligations that persist despite years of professional service, trapping the coordinator in a cycle of indebtedness that contradicts expectations of financial stability from professional employment. The persistence and repetition in her statement conveys that this is not a temporary setback but a chronic condition:

I'm still here struggling to pay my debts... I'm still here struggling... to manage... with a 5,000 monthly net take home pay. — **(SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p3_L41)**

She further contrasted her situation against former classmates who pursued international teaching, making the weight of her debt burden more vivid:

They they bought properties... they paid their debts in the Philippines but look at me, I'm still here struggling to pay my debts. — **(SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p3_L41)**

Sub-theme 2c: Economic Struggles. Economic struggles encompass the broader challenge of supporting family needs on inadequate wages, where financial hardship extends beyond personal inconvenience and directly impairs the coordinator's ability to implement quality programming. The connection she draws between personal poverty and program quality reveals an important systemic consequence of inadequate compensation:

We are earning not enough for the family, so... how can we share if we are not enough no how what how can we share of course it... it has a great impact in the supervision and the implementation of the program because we want to... we want to conduct different activities but we don't have money. — **(SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p2_L29)**

P3 described similar constraints affecting professional capacity:

Kag, you know, ang sweldo indi man always reflective sang effort nga ginhatag naton, which can limit our opportunities diri. (And, you know, the salary doesn't always reflect the effort we put in, which can limit our opportunities here.) — **(SNED_Teacher-IDI_p5_L267)**

While Low Salaries expose the financial unsustainability of the coordinator's domestic conditions, the absence of meaningful professional development further deepens her professional vulnerability and for as what the researcher heard in her voice, the pain of earning so little is matched only by the frustration of being given so few

opportunities to grow, and without access to contemporary training, specialized materials, and government support, even a committed and highly credentialed educator is systematically prevented from becoming the professional her students deserve.

Push Factor 3: Lack of Professional Development

Lack of Professional Development encompasses three sub-themes: Inadequate Training, Limited Materials Access, and Insufficient Government Support. This theme highlights systematic failures in providing opportunities and resources for professional growth. The absence of professional development is particularly damaging in special education, where the field evolves rapidly and educators must continuously acquire new knowledge in assistive technologies, assessment methodologies, and evidence-based practices.

Sub-theme 3a: Inadequate Training. Inadequate training describes the absence of access to contemporary methodologies, modern technologies, and specialized competencies essential for current special education practice. The coordinator emphasized a dual inadequacy, not only does she lack access to advanced professional development for herself, but financial barriers also prevent her from providing meaningful training to her teaching staff, creating a self-perpetuating cycle that hinders program quality:

We want to.. conduct trainings but the scarcity of uhh finances there, and then we want to... we want to coach teachers no.. then how what materials are we going to present to them if they themselves they are not trained before? — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p2_L29)

P1 validated this limitation through direct comparison with international professional development opportunities:

Plus, ang mga training opportunities diri, indi pareho ka grabe sa ibang mga pungsod, so, ya, feeling ko mabudlay nga makamiss out sa professional development. (Plus, the training opportunities here are not as strong as in other countries, so, yeah, I feel like I might miss out on professional development.) — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p5_L259)

Sub-theme 3b: Limited Materials Access. Limited materials access describes the persistent shortage of specialized educational resources necessary for serving diverse disability conditions. Without concrete instructional materials, effective teaching particularly for students requiring tangible representations for conceptual understanding is significantly compromised. The coordinator emphasized the critical importance of visible, hands-on materials:

It is very effective if we.. if we.. are holding something, presenting to them that they can see it and visible for them no?... how what materials are we going to present to them if they themselves they are not trained before? — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p2_L29)

P1 validated this resource scarcity and its emotional toll on educators who aspire to deliver quality instruction:

May mga tion nga wala kita sang husto nga mga gamit ukon materyales, kag medyo frustrating gid siya kung gusto mo nga mahatagan ang pinaka-maayo para sa imo mga estudyante. (There are times when we don't have the right tools or materials, and it's really frustrating when you want to give the best for your students.) — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p5_L257-259)

Sub-theme 3c: Insufficient Government Support. Insufficient government support is most critically evidenced by the gap between the allocated SNED Support Fund and the actual cost of comprehensive student assessment. This underfunding forces the coordinator to rely on inadequate evaluation methods, resulting in interventions built on incomplete diagnostic information. The coordinator stated:

The amount for assessment is running from 7,000 the least is 4,000-5,000 and the allocated amount for them is only 600. How do they get a good assessment if we... if the slot is only 600? — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p3_L33)

The consequence of this funding gap is a forced reliance on observational rather than comprehensive neurodevelopmental evaluation, significantly limiting both diagnostic accuracy and intervention effectiveness:

...so we just assess them according to the behavior... the behavior of analyst but getting uhm... neuro neurodevelopmental therapist we cannot, we cannot afford. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p3_L33)

Beyond the deficit in professional development opportunities, the SNED Coordinator also confronts a social and institutional dimension of her professional environment that further depletes her capacity and motivation, and as what the researcher has observed in the way she paused and searched for words, the weight of stigma and discrimination is not merely an inconvenience but a wound, one that undervalues both her students and her specialized work while adding an emotional and advocacy burden on top of already overwhelming professional demands.

Push Factor 4: Social Stigma and Discrimination

Social Stigma and Discrimination encompasses three sub-themes: Community Prejudice, Colleague Underestimation, and Devaluation of SNED Work. This theme addresses the societal devaluation of both students with disabilities and their educators. Stigma functions as a push factor not only by creating a hostile professional environment but by depleting the coordinator's emotional resources, adding advocacy and moral burden on top of an already overwhelming workload.

Sub-theme 4a: Community Prejudice. Community prejudice describes widespread discrimination where students with disabilities experience social rejection from peers and the broader community, creating additional emotional labor for the coordinator who must simultaneously provide educational services and advocate against discriminatory attitudes. She identified discrimination as a systemic phenomenon spanning peers, adults, and institutional culture:

...discrimination is rampant no. Children cannot accept children with disabilities, even teachers. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p2_L21)

P4 documented the cultural dimension of this prejudice, noting how lack of awareness spreads across stakeholder groups and becomes self-reinforcing:

Na-observehan ko man nga may cultural aspect, noh, kundiin sometimes ang mga ginikanan wala sang full understanding ukon suporta sa special education. Ang kakulang sang awareness, you know, bisa nakakapanghawa, ya? (I've observed that there's a cultural aspect, right, wherein sometimes parents don't have full understanding or support for special education. The lack of awareness, you know, is really contagious, right?) — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p5_L269-271)

Sub-theme 4b: Colleague Underestimation. Colleague underestimation describes the systematic undervaluation by fellow teachers who perceive special education as requiring less skill and effort which is a misconception that marginalizes SNED professionals despite the complexity and intensity of their work. Documentary evidence (School Organizational Chart) further substantiates this marginalization, showing the SNED office physically situated in a separate building disconnected from the main school campus, providing a tangible institutional manifestation of peripheral status. The coordinator articulated:

When they know that you are teaching learners with disabilities, they look at you very, they underestimate you because for them your diligence is little... for them they are having our relaxation only but without uhhh without knowing

that uh handling learners with disabilities are very hard. —
(SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p2_L21)

The characterization of special education work as "relaxation" is particularly revealing; colleagues perceive the work as easier or less valuable than mainstream instruction despite its intensive demands. P2 confirmed this collegial devaluation:

Ang stigma nga nagalibot sa special needs education, nagapadayon gihapon, so medyo isolating gid siya usahay. (The stigma that surrounds special needs education continues, so it's quite isolating sometimes.) —
(SNED_Teacher-IDI_p5_L263)

Sub-theme 4c: Devaluation of SNED Work. Devaluation of SNED work captures the institutional and societal perception that students with disabilities represent burdens rather than investments, a framing that diminishes both the students and the educators who dedicate their careers to serving them. This perception manifests in resource allocation, facility provision, and institutional messaging. The coordinator articulated this fundamental devaluation:

For them, learners with disabilities are liabilities, unlike other programs, when you join the program for arts, program for journalism, they are investment but for us we are liabilities. —
(SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p4_L45)

This characterization, special education as "liabilities" versus arts and journalism as "investments", reveals a profound philosophical difference in how students with disabilities are valued within institutional frameworks, creating professional environments where SNED educators must constantly struggle to justify the worth of their work. P4 reflected how this devaluation also manifests through limited community engagement with special education:

Na-obsorbahan ko man nga may cultural aspect, noh, kundiin sometimes ang mga ginikanan wala sang full understanding ukon suporta sa special education. (I've observed that there's a cultural aspect, right, wherein sometimes parents don't have full understanding or support for special education.) —
(SNED_Teacher-IDI_p5_L269-271)

While social stigma operates on the relational and emotional dimensions of the coordinator's professional experience, the inadequacy of physical resources constitutes an equally consequential material barrier and as what the researcher have seen in the photos of her classroom and the corners of that separate, disconnected building, no degree of professional commitment, specialized training, or emotional resilience can compensate for the chronic absence of the facilities, assistive devices, and instructional materials that effective special needs education fundamentally requires.

Push Factor 5: Inadequate Resources

Inadequate Resources encompasses three sub-themes: Poor Facilities, Lack of Assistive Devices, and Self-funded Materials. This theme highlights the chronic shortage of facilities, tools, and equipment necessary for effective special needs instruction. Resource inadequacy is particularly consequential because it directly prevents the implementation of evidence-based practices regardless of the educator's commitment or expertise, creating a situation where professional ambition consistently outpaces institutional provision.

Sub-theme 5a: Poor Facilities. Poor facilities describes the inadequacy of the physical school environment to support the diverse needs of students with disabilities. The SNED office is located in a separate building disconnected from the main school campus, lacking wheelchair-accessible pathways, ramps, accessible bathrooms, and adaptive learning spaces based on documentary evidence (Photos of Classroom/SNED Facilities). The coordinator emphasized the physical environment as not merely supportive but constitutive of learning itself:

...enabling environment facilities, facilities uhmm... learning environment which is constitutive to learning... — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p2_L25)

The repetition of "facilities" simultaneously conveys their critical importance and the coordinator's frustration with their absence. For students with mobility disabilities, visual impairments, or hearing loss, inadequate physical environments create barriers to participation that no amount of pedagogical commitment can overcome.

Sub-theme 5b: Lack of Assistive Devices. Lack of assistive devices describes the systematic absence of specialized technology required for students across the full range of disability conditions served by the program. Without these devices, students cannot fully access curriculum or develop independence. The coordinator enumerated the diversity of student needs left unaddressed, conveying the breadth of the institutional failure:

...we are handling learners with different disabilities like blind, deaf, cerebral palsy, we have the ortho, we have the ID, the AST, we have the global, we have also the Asperger's no... under the umbrella of this AST and we have a lot and we are not being given complete materials for those. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p2_L25)

Sub-theme 5c: Self-funded Materials. Self-funded materials describes the requirement for the coordinator to personally purchase classroom resources from her own income, already an insufficient 5,000-peso monthly net, creating an unsustainable model where program quality depends on individual financial sacrifice rather than institutional

provision. This sub-theme directly intersects with Push Factor 2 (Low Salaries), compounding an already acute financial crisis. She revealed:

...we are providing our own and we are we are uhh... getting from our pocket to provide. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p2_L25)

This self-funded provisioning means the coordinator personally absorbs what should be an institutional responsibility, simultaneously depleting her already inadequate income and masking the true extent of the system's resource failure.

The resource deprivation I documented compounds with yet another dimension of the coordinator's professional reality, one that may be the most isolating of all, and as what the researcher have felt sitting across from her during our conversation, the silence around her professional life speaks as loudly as her words. The next factor reveals how the coordinator navigates all of these compounding challenges without any meaningful collegial support, peer consultation, or shared accountability, alone in both burden and responsibility in ways that make systemic burnout not merely possible but inevitable.

Push Factor 6: Professional Isolation

Professional Isolation encompasses three sub-themes: Overwhelming Responsibilities, Lack of Peer Support, and Systemic Burnout. This theme addresses the experience of navigating complex professional challenges without adequate collegial support or institutional understanding. Professional isolation is particularly acute in special education because the field requires highly specialized knowledge that mainstream colleagues cannot provide, leaving the coordinator without any meaningful source of consultation, collaboration, or shared problem-solving.

Sub-theme 6a: Overwhelming Responsibilities. Overwhelming responsibilities captures the burden of singular accountability for comprehensive special education programming without adequate support systems or distributed responsibility. Documentary evidence (Job Description/Work Order) reveals extensive responsibilities: teacher supervision, coaching on pedagogical practices, monitoring student progress, overseeing academic and social-emotional learning, and managing department operations, all assigned to a single coordinator without supporting personnel. The absence of a team structure means that the coordinator's motivations for her students are structurally impossible to fulfill alone. She expressed:

I have a lot of plans, I have a lot of dreams for these learners, however, I'm only one. I'm only one. I cannot ano, I cannot share it with other departments because they cannot relate with my problems. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p2_L29)

The repeated phrase "I'm only one" powerfully conveys the weight of responsibility without infrastructure, not a complaint about capacity but a recognition that the institutional design itself makes comprehensive programming unachievable.

Sub-theme 6b: Lack of Peer Support. Lack of peer support describes the inability to access collegial collaboration, shared problem-solving, or professional community necessary for sustainable practice. The barrier is not merely social but structural; mainstream teachers cannot provide meaningful consultation on special education complexities because they lack the necessary specialized expertise. The coordinator stated:

I cannot share it with other departments because they cannot relate with my problems. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p2_L29)

P5 articulated the emotional toll of this structural isolation, describing how unresolved challenges without peer support become psychologically unbearable:

Daw nagataas ang feelings of isolation. Kon may mga challenges nga hindi masolusyunan, nagapanghawa gid kami sa amon kaugalingon, nga nagapahamtang sang emotional toll. (Feelings of isolation increase. When there are challenges that cannot be solved, we feel overwhelmed by ourselves, which takes an emotional toll.) — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p7_L357-359)

P5 further captured the depth of this isolation in a striking image:

Wala sang iban nga SNED coordinators nga akon maistorya parte sang akon mga problema sa trabaho. Nagabatyag ako nga nagaobra ako sa usa ka isla. (There are no other SNED coordinators I can talk to about my work problems. I feel like I am working on an island.) — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p7_L357-359)

Sub-theme 6c: Systemic Burnout. Systemic burnout reflects the transformation from initial dedication to exhaustion as a result of the cumulative impact of overwhelming responsibilities, inadequate support, and institutional limitations. Importantly, burnout here is not a personal failing but a predictable and systemic consequence of conditions that consistently exceed any individual's capacity to sustain over time. The coordinator described this trajectory from inspiration to disillusionment:

...when you enter the world of special education, you are inspired to work... but slowly, uhm.. the seclusion is uhh... putting you into a dilemma because you'll be asking what would be my future... mostly of the teachers who are...

inspired to work from the start will end up somehow very tired because of the system. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p4_L45)

P6 confirmed the systemic and widespread nature of this burnout:

And, ya, ang burnout, real gid siya. Ang emotional toll, medyo mabug-at, especially kung pirme ka nagakabudlay para sa resources kag pagkilala na dapat makuha sang special needs education. (And, yes, the burnout is real. The emotional toll is quite heavy, especially when you're always struggling for resources and recognition that special needs education deserves.) — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p5_L277-279)

As what the researcher have felt in the cumulative weight of her story, the six push factors do not merely inconvenience the SNED Coordinator, they collectively dismantle the conditions necessary for any dedicated professional to sustainably thrive. Yet as what I heard in the quiet shift of her tone whenever the conversation turned toward what lies beyond, the same passion the system has steadily worn down has never been fully extinguished. It is precisely in this tension between what pushes her away and what draws her forward that the pull factors of this study emerge, not as an escape from her vocation, but as a horizon where that vocation might finally find the conditions it deserves.

Pull Factors in the Perspectives of a Special Needs (SNED) Coordinator for International Teaching Opportunities

Based on thematic analysis, six key pull factors emerged: Higher Salaries Abroad, Better Career Opportunities, Access to Global Teaching Standards, Comprehensive Support Systems, Improved Work Conditions, and Professional Growth. These pull factors directly correspond to and address each of the push factor dimensions: higher salaries counter financial hardship, better career opportunities address stagnation, access to global teaching standards addresses professional development deficits, comprehensive support systems replace resource inadequacy, improved work conditions alleviate burnout, and professional growth pathways enable the skill development the coordinator actively seeks but cannot access domestically. For the coordinator, these factors represent not merely economic opportunity but a comprehensive vision of professional dignity and sustainable practice.

Pull Factor 1: Higher Salaries Abroad

Higher Salaries Abroad encompasses three sub-themes: Better Compensation, Debt Repayment Capacity, and Property Ownership. This theme addresses the financial advantages of international teaching positions, which represent not merely an income increase but a pathway to financial dignity and life aspirations, debt freedom and asset accumulation, that are currently impossible within the Philippine compensation framework.

Sub-theme 1a: Better Compensation. Better compensation describes significantly higher salaries available in international markets that properly reflect specialized expertise and advanced qualifications. Documentary evidence (International Job Postings with Salary Ranges) shows international special education positions advertising annual salaries of USD 50,000–75,000 which is a 2,000–3,000% differential against the coordinator's annual income of approximately 60,000 pesos. The coordinator contrasted this against her current situation by referencing former classmates who pursued international teaching:

...classmates have provided with the... a luxury of life.. and then, they they bought properties... they paid their debts in the Philippines. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p3_L41)

P5 identified better compensation as a primary motivation, noting that financial stability also enables greater professional focus which is a connection that reveals how economic wellbeing and professional effectiveness are inseparable:

Mas maayo man nga financial reward ang isa sa mga rason, noh? Kun magtrabaho sa abroad, mas mataas ang compensation, which could lead to better living conditions. With financial stability, mas mag-focus kami sa aton mga responsibilidad sa pagtudlo. (Better financial reward is one of the reasons, right? If we work abroad, the compensation is higher, which could lead to better living conditions. With financial stability, we could focus more on our teaching responsibilities.) — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p8_L413-415)

Sub-theme 1b: Debt Repayment Capacity. Debt repayment capacity refers to the possibility of using international earnings to eliminate accumulated financial obligations, a pathway to liberation from the debt cycle that currently constrains both personal wellbeing and professional effectiveness. The coordinator explicitly identified debt resolution as an aspirational outcome of international teaching by comparing herself to former classmates who have achieved it:

...they they bought properties... they paid their debts in the Philippines but look at me, I'm still here struggling to pay my debts. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p3_L41)

Sub-theme 1c: Property Ownership. Property ownership represents the opportunity to acquire assets and achieve economic security, markers of financial stability that nine years of domestic service have made impossible to attain. The coordinator's observation reflects a rational recognition that international teaching enables economic milestones that her current compensation structurally prevents:

...they they bought properties... they paid their debts in the Philippines. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p3_L41)

The convergence of better compensation, debt repayment, and property ownership reveals how higher salaries function as a comprehensive pull factor, addressing not merely immediate financial need but a broader aspiration for the financial dignity appropriate to the coordinator's professional level and qualifications.

The financial advantages of international teaching, while among the most immediately compelling, represent only one dimension of the coordinator's international journey, and as what the researcher have heard in the longing behind her comparisons of herself to former classmates who had already paid their debts and bought their properties, money alone does not fully capture what she is reaching for. Closely intertwined with the prospect of higher earnings is the recognition that international environments offer something she has long been denied domestically and as what the researcher have felt in the quiet determination behind her words, she is not merely chasing a salary but pursuing the professional dignity that her qualifications have always deserved.

Pull Factor 2: Better Career Opportunities

Better Career Opportunities encompasses three sub-themes: Credential Recognition, Professional Respect, and Leadership Positions. This theme highlights the enhanced recognition and advancement possibilities available internationally, where the coordinator's extensive qualifications are perceived to translate directly into career progression, a bare contrast to the Philippine system where the same credentials have yielded no advancement since 2016.

Sub-theme 2a: Credential Recognition. Credential recognition refers to the value assigned to the coordinator's advanced qualifications (master's and doctoral degrees) in international teaching markets. Unlike the Philippine context where three master's degrees and a doctorate have produced no positional change, international systems are perceived to create direct pathways from qualifications to career advancement, validating years of professional investment. The coordinator recognized this potential:

...when you are... graduate of masters and uhh... much more if you are graduate in doctoral degree, your- you'll earn a lot and you will land uhh... position there, which is not only teaching because you can handle the department, you can supervise, you can be a good leader. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p5_L97)

P1 affirmed the significance of advanced qualifications for international positioning:

Para sa mga SNED Coordinators, ang advanced qualifications, pareho sang master's ukon doctoral degrees, daku gid nga bulig sa pag-secure sang international teaching positions. Ang pagkakaroon sang mas mataas nga antas sa edukasyon nagapakita sang pagdedikar sa profession kag

nagahatag sang credibility sa mga aplikante. (For SNED Coordinators, advanced qualifications such as master's or doctoral degrees are a huge help in securing international teaching positions. Having a higher level of education demonstrates dedication to the profession and provides credibility to applicants.) — **(SNED_Teacher-IDI_p10_L511-513)**

Sub-theme 2b: Professional Respect. Professional respect describes the collegial validation and institutional acknowledgment available in international contexts, where teachers receive genuine support from peers and administrators, contrasting sharply with the marginalization experienced locally. The coordinator expressed her aspiration for an environment where her skills, training, and commitment are genuinely recognized rather than dismissed:

Teachers abroad who are... there and the foreigner and the teacher, Filipino, a foreigner to be there, there's a great difference. We have, we have a great patience in terms of dealing with children. So... what I want is, I want them to feel that in handling learners with disabilities, we are skillful, we are trained, and we are... we are having a great heart for children. — **(SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p4_L57)**

P4 similarly aspired to environments with more collaborative and informed professional relationships with parents and the broader community:

Indi lang ina, pero nagapati ako na ang mga ginikanan mas involved kag informed sa ila mga kabataan didto. Kung mas maayo ang communication sa tunga sang teachers kag parents, ya, mas madali ang pag-focus sa development sang mga estudyante. (Not only that, but I believe that parents are more involved and informed about their children there. If there's better communication between teachers and parents, yes, it's easier to focus on student development.) — **(SNED_Teacher-IDI_p7_L325-327)**

Sub-theme 2c: Leadership Positions. Leadership positions refer to opportunities for coordinators with advanced qualifications to assume supervisory and departmental management roles abroad, roles where doctoral degrees translate into tangible career advancement rather than remaining institutionally invisible. The coordinator articulated this aspiration clearly, reflecting a complex understanding of how credentials function in international systems:

...when you are... graduate in doctoral degree, you'll earn a lot and you will land... position there, which is not only teaching because you can handle the department, you can supervise,

you can be a good leader. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p5_L97)

P2 observed how international settings also provide platforms for professional visibility and leadership development through conferences and workshops:

Daw makahatag man ini sang opportunity na maka-attend sang global conferences and workshops, noh? Kun ari ka sa international setting, mas madamo ang access sa mga professional development activities. (This would give an opportunity to attend global conferences and workshops, right? If you're in an international setting, there's more access to professional development activities.) — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p9_L429-431)

As meaningful as career recognition and advancement are to the coordinator's international experiences, her pull toward international teaching extends beyond positional gains into the professional knowledge and competencies she seeks and as what the researcher have felt in the urgency of her words, she does not merely want a better title but a better version of herself as an educator. As what the researcher heard in how she spoke about learning and growing, the next dimension of her perspectives speaks not to where she wants to be positioned, but to how deeply she wants to be transformed.

Pull Factor 3: Access to Global Teaching Standards

Access to Global Teaching Standards encompasses three sub-themes: Modern Technology, Advanced Assessment, and Evidence-Based Strategies. This theme addresses the coordinator's desire for exposure to contemporary methodologies and tools that represent international best practices, these are the practices she recognizes as essential for effective inclusive education but currently inaccessible within the Philippine professional development context.

Sub-theme 3a: Modern Technology. Modern technology refers to current educational technologies, including assistive devices, learning management systems, adaptive software, and communication technologies, that are standard in international special education settings but largely unavailable domestically. The coordinator identified technology learning as her foremost professional aspiration:

Technology. Then, I want to learn more about assessment of learners with disabilities. Next, I want to learn more about IEP making. No? Uhh I would like to learn about the use of different assistive devices and also uhh what are the possible learning enabling environment. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p4_L77)

P1 recognized technology access as a major international advantage for professional development:

Ang exposure sa advanced technology in education is also a major plus. Many international schools utilize state-of-the-art tools and resources that enhance learning experiences. — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p9_L463-465)

Sub-theme 3b: Advanced Assessment. Advanced assessment describes comprehensive evaluation methodologies that properly diagnose student needs, methodologies impossible to implement in the Philippine context given inadequate funding. The coordinator expressed a strong aspiration to develop assessment expertise, including collaboration with specialized professionals:

I would like to assess learners with disabilities. I would like to enroll for uhhm... for different uhhh.. companies for PhilSci for... I would like to... a- to affiliate with the psychometricians and psychologists. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p5_L105)

Sub-theme 3c: Evidence-Based Strategies. Evidence-based strategies encompass diverse pedagogical approaches including Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and neurodevelopmentally grounded interventions representing current best practices largely absent in the Philippine special education context. The coordinator expressed not only a desire to learn these strategies but to apply and share them with others, reflecting her broader commitment to elevating the field:

I would like to... to share to them what have I uhh implemented here how I want them to to... to take the opportunity to help teacher to he- to to help a teacher like me, loving them because there's so a great difference... We have, we have a great patience in terms of dealing with children. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p4_L57)

P4 emphasized the value of exposure to innovative international practices for inspiring improved teaching approaches:

Ang pag-attend sa mga international conferences nagahatag man sang exposure sa mga innovative practices na makahatag inspirasyon sa ila teaching approach. (Attending international conferences would provide exposure to innovative practices that could inspire their teaching approach.) — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p11_L551-553)

The coordinator's aspiration for advanced teaching standards is further reinforced by the recognition that international systems provide the institutional backing necessary to implement those standards effectively and as what the researcher heard in her

enumeration of everything she wished she had, hers is not a wish list born of greed but of a professional who has seen what is possible and knows what her students are being denied. As what the researcher felt listening to her speak, the next dimension of her pull toward international teaching is less about what she wants for herself and more about what she has always believed her students unconditionally deserve.

Pull Factor 4: Comprehensive Support Systems

Comprehensive Support Systems encompasses three sub-themes: Training Access, Government Subsidies, and Complete Material Provision. This theme highlights the institutional backing available in international contexts which is a complete reversal of the systematic under-resourcing that characterizes the coordinator's current environment. Where the Philippine system requires individual educators to absorb institutional deficits, international systems treat resource provision as a non-negotiable institutional responsibility.

Sub-theme 4a: Training Access. Training access refers to consistent, institutionally supported, and specialized professional development opportunities provided to educators in international special education systems. Unlike the Philippine context where training is scarce and generic, international systems treat professional development as a sustained institutional priority rather than an occasional supplement. The coordinator aspired to this access:

I would like to... to learn more because I know that the uhm.. age is not a hindrance to be there... I want to learn uhm... about the modern technology no modern technology the... and then, I want to also learn more about different strategies in how to handle them. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p4_L61)

P1 identified training access as a significant international attraction, noting how regular, supported workshops keep educators current with best practices:

Daw importante man ang professional development opportunities nga gina-offer sa international educational settings. Usually, may mga regular training and workshops na ginasuportahan, which helps educators stay updated with the latest best practices and teaching strategies. (Professional development opportunities offered in international educational settings are also important. Usually, there are regular training and workshops that are supported, which helps educators stay updated with the latest best practices and teaching strategies.) — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p9_L467-469)

Sub-theme 4b: Government Subsidies. Government subsidies describe the comprehensive public funding that ensures students with disabilities in developed nations receive the services they need regardless of family financial resources, standing in bare

contrast to the 600-peso per-student Philippine allocation that covers only 8–20% of actual assessment costs. The coordinator referenced this inadequacy as a baseline comparison:

The amount for assessment is running from 7,000 the least is 4,000 and the allocated amount for them is only 600. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p3_L33)

Documentary evidence (United States IDEA Funding Documentation) demonstrates the comprehensive federal funding frameworks available in developed nations, a government commitment vastly exceeding Philippine levels and enabling the comprehensive service provision the coordinator aspires to deliver.

Sub-theme 4c: Complete Material Provision. Complete material provision refers to the institutional supply of teaching tools, assistive devices, and specialized equipment in international systems eliminating the personal financial burden the coordinator currently bears to maintain program quality. In international contexts, material provision is an institutional responsibility rather than an individual educator's burden. The coordinator expressed her aspiration for contexts where this comprehensive support enables broader programmatic engagement, including with parents and the community:

I would like also to.. to.. learn more about their culture or how to handle them and also the parents. I want to... I want to... to apply also what I have learned here in how to uhm... ano ng establish relationship with the stakeholders or the parents. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p5_L89)

P1 identified comprehensive support as one of the most attractive features of international educational systems:

Ang comprehensive support for special needs education amo ang isa sa mga features nga ginakabig attractive sang international educational systems... may mga klaro nga guidelines kag resources para sa mga estudyante nga may espesyal nga kinahanglanon. (Comprehensive support for special needs education is one of the features that make international educational systems attractive... there are clear guidelines and resources for students with special needs.) — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p9_L455-457)

The comprehensive institutional support available in international settings translates directly into more sustainable professional environments and as what the researcher felt listening to her describe arriving early and leaving late with work still in her bag, the exhaustion she carries is not weakness but the natural consequence of a system that has never truly shared her load. As what the researcher observed in the heaviness behind her laughter when she spoke of her daily routine, the next dimension of her

international experiences speaks directly to the sustainability of the professional life she has been living alone for far too long.

Pull Factor 5: Improved Work Conditions

Improved Work Conditions encompasses three sub-themes: Manageable Workload, Fixed Working Hours, and No Take-Home Work. This theme addresses the sustainable professional environments available internationally. For a coordinator currently carrying an overwhelming, boundaryless workload, improved work conditions represent not a luxury but a prerequisite for sustainable long-term service and personal wellbeing.

Sub-theme 5a: Manageable Workload. Manageable workload refers to the reasonable assignment of duties across multiple positions and support personnel, a team-based model that contrasts sharply with the coordinator's singular responsibility for the entire SNED program. In international contexts, responsibilities are distributed so that coordinators can focus on core instructional and student support activities rather than managing everything alone. She expressed the weight of the current arrangement:

I have a lot of plans, I have a lot of dreams for these learners, however, I'm only one. I'm only one. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p2_L29)

Sub-theme 5b: Fixed Working Hours. Fixed working hours describe defined schedules that establish clear boundaries between professional and personal time, boundaries entirely absent in the coordinator's current experience of early arrivals and indefinite evening work. The coordinator contrasted her own extended workdays against her classmates' international experience:

...they come to school at 8'o clock, they... they go home according to my classmates, they go home 2'o clock and then, they don't bring anything at home. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p3_L41)

Sub-theme 5c: No Take-Home Work. No take-home work refers to the ability to complete all professional responsibilities within designated school hours, eliminating the evening and weekend preparation that currently extends the coordinator's workday indefinitely into personal time. She emphasized this as a defining advantage of her classmates' international experience:

...they don't bring anything at home, they.. they do.. their... requirements or materials in- inside the classroom. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p3_L41)

Together, manageable workload, fixed working hours, and the absence of take-home work reveal how Improved Work Conditions functions as a comprehensive pull

factor. For an educator currently working without boundaries or backup, these conditions represent not comfort but the basic professional infrastructure that makes long-term commitment sustainable.

While the previous dimensions address the structural and environmental aspects of international teaching, the final pull factor speaks to the coordinator's innermost professional aspiration and as what the researcher observed in the way her eyes lit up whenever she spoke of learning, of affiliating with psychologists, of mastering assistive technologies, her desire for growth is not ambition for its own sake but a deeply felt responsibility to become more for the sake of her students. As what the researcher felt in every exchange we had, this final dimension does not merely close the discussion of pull factors, it opens a window into who she has always been striving to become.

Pull Factor 6: Professional Growth

Professional Growth encompasses three sub-themes: Technology Skills, Assessment Expertise, and Assistive Device Proficiency. This theme addresses opportunities for developing specialized competencies currently unavailable through the Philippine professional development system. Professional growth is particularly significant for the coordinator because it represents both a personal aspiration and a strategic preparation for international competitiveness, developing the practical expertise that complements her already extensive academic credentials.

Sub-theme 6a: Technology Skills. Technology skills describe training in modern educational technologies that enhance teaching effectiveness and align practice with contemporary standards. The coordinator identified technology skill development as her foremost career priority, reflecting her recognition that contemporary special education requires technological competence currently inaccessible through Philippine professional development systems:

Technology. Then, I want to learn more about assessment of learners with disabilities. Next, I want learn more about IEP making. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p4_L77)

P1 recognized technology skill development as a major professional growth opportunity in international settings:

Ang exposure sa advanced technology in education is also a major plus. Many international schools utilize state-of-the-art tools and resources that enhance learning experiences. — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p9_L463-465)

Sub-theme 6b: Assessment Expertise. Assessment expertise refers to comprehensive training in evaluation methodologies enabling proper diagnosis of diverse disability conditions and precise intervention planning, competencies the coordinator actively seeks but cannot access within the current Philippine context given underfunded professional development infrastructure. She expressed:

I would like to assess learners with disabilities. I would like to enroll for uhhm... for different uhhh.. companies for PhilSci for... I would like to... a- to affiliate with the psychometricians and psychologists. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p5_L105)

Sub-theme 6c: Assistive Device Proficiency. Assistive device proficiency encompasses specialized knowledge in adaptive technologies that support student access to curriculum and the development of independence. The coordinator explicitly identified assistive device training as a learning goal, recognizing that this competency is essential for serving the full range of disability conditions in her program:

I would like to learn about the use of different assistive devices and also uhh what are the possible learning enabling environment. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p4_L77)

P3 reinforced the appeal of seeing technology meaningfully integrated into classrooms, noting how international examples inspire greater interest in adopting similar practices:

Ang access sa advanced technology in education is also a major plus. Many international schools utilize state-of-the-art tools and resources that enhance learning experiences, which can be incredibly beneficial for both teachers and students. Seeing how technology is effectively integrated into the classroom makes us more interested in adopting similar practices. — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p9_L463-465)

As what the researcher felt throughout every interview and every document reviewed, the six pull factors collectively represent not merely economic incentives but a comprehensive vision of professional dignity the Philippine SNED system has consistently failed to provide. Yet aspiring toward these opportunities is insufficient without the qualifications to access them, and as what the researcher have seen in the diplomas she earned one by one across nine years of full-time service, she has never stopped preparing for a future she has not yet been given. This brings the discussion wherein the coordinator's advanced educational credentials emerge as the strategic bridge between the push conditions she seeks to leave behind and the pull opportunities she aspires to reach.

Pursuit of Professional Growth and Qualifications for Global Teaching Opportunities

This section addresses how the SNED Coordinator perceives professional growth and qualifications as contributing factors to obtaining international teaching opportunities. Drawing from Lee's Migration Theory (1966), professional qualifications function not merely as educational credentials but as strategic mediating factors bridging the push factors (unsustainable Philippine conditions) and pull factors (attractive international

opportunities). The key theme that emerged is Advanced Educational Qualifications, with the central sub-theme of Multiple Graduate Degrees.

Advanced Educational Qualifications

Sub-theme: Multiple Graduate Degrees. The coordinator's educational trajectory demonstrates systematic and deliberate investment in specialized knowledge across multiple disciplines and qualification levels: Bachelor of Science in Education Major in Filipino Education; Master of Arts in Teaching Filipino (Philippine Normal University); Master of Arts in Education Major in Filipino (Notre Dame of Marbel University); Master of Arts in Education Major in Special Education (Holy Cross of Davao College); Doctorate in Educational Management (Holy Cross of Davao College); and current enrollment in PhD in Special Education (University of Perpetual Delta System, Manila). Documentary evidence (Diploma Copies) substantiates the completion of these programs, with ongoing PhD enrollment demonstrating continued commitment to credential development even while holding a doctorate.

This accumulation presents a troubling but revealing contradiction: the same credentials that remain unrecognized domestically, failing to generate any positional advancement since 2016 despite extraordinary investment referring on documentary evidence (Service Record), function as the coordinator's primary competitive advantage in international job markets, where advanced degrees translate directly into higher compensation and leadership opportunities. Credentials that should enable domestic leadership instead become tools for international mobility when local institutions fail to appropriately utilize or reward specialized expertise. The coordinator articulated this strategic understanding:

...when you are graduate of masters and uhh... much more if you are graduate in doctoral degree, your- you'll earn a lot and you will land uhh... position there, which is not only teaching because you can handle the department, you can supervise, you can be a good leader. — (SNED_Coordinator-IDI_p5_L97)

P1 recognized the significance of multiple qualifications for securing international teaching positions:

Para sa mga SNED Coordinators, ang advanced qualifications, pareho sang master's ukon doctoral degrees, daku gid nga bulig sa pag-secure sang international teaching positions. Ang pagkakaroon sang mas mataas nga antas sa edukasyon nagapakita sang pagdedikar sa profession kag nagahatag sang credibility sa mga aplikante. (For SNED Coordinators, advanced qualifications such as master's or doctoral degrees are a huge help in securing international teaching positions. Having a higher level of education

demonstrates dedication to the profession and provides credibility to applicants.) — **(SNED_Teacher-IDI_p10_L511-513)**

P2 observed how specialized certifications create a competitive edge that is particularly valued in international settings:

Additional certifications, sa isa ka bahin, nagapakita sang specific skills kag expertise nga nagapangita sang mas competitive edge sa mga aplikante. Ang mga specialized certifications nagahatag sang emphasis sa particular nga areas of special needs education, nga ginapaboran gid sa international settings. (Additional certifications, on one hand, show specific skills and expertise that give a more competitive edge to applicants. Specialized certifications provide emphasis on particular areas of special needs education, which are really favored in international settings.) — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p10_L515-517)

P4 connected advanced qualifications directly to tangible compensation outcomes, reinforcing how credentials function as concrete mechanisms for economic mobility:

Nagahatag man ini sang oportunidad nga makabaton sang mas maayo nga sweldo kag benefits. Ang mga international schools kasagaran nagahatag sang paborable nga kompensasyon sa mga teachers nga may mataas nga antas sang edukasyon. (This also gives an opportunity to receive better salary and benefits. International schools usually give favorable compensation to teachers with higher education levels.) — (SNED_Teacher-IDI_p10_L523-525)

P6 emphasized how the narrative of continuous professional growth built through these qualifications strengthens international applications and communicates sustained commitment to excellence:

Sa katapusan, ang mga SNED Coordinators nagapati nga ang pag-emphasize sang ila professional growth sa mga applications importante gid sa paghimo sang strong case para sa ila. Pinaagi sa pagpakita sang ila continuous learning journey kag qualifications, mahimo nila ipakita ang makapukaw nga narrative sa potensyal nga mga employer. (In the end, SNED Coordinators believe that emphasizing their professional growth in applications is really important in making a strong case for themselves. Through showing their continuous learning journey and qualifications, they can

present a compelling narrative to potential employers.) —
(*SNED_Teacher-IDI_p10_L503-505*)

As what the researcher felt at the close of every conversation and as what the researcher have seen in every diploma, payslip, and photograph of that small, disconnected classroom, this is ultimately the story of a professional who refused to let a system's failure become her own. The push factors that rendered her domestic conditions unsustainable, the pull factors that illuminated what a more dignified professional life could look like, and the qualifications she strategically accumulated as the bridge between the two together tell a story that is at once deeply personal and urgently institutional, one that challenges Philippine special education not merely to retain its most dedicated professionals, but to finally become worthy of them.

Summary of Findings

The following summarizes the results of the study:

1. **Compounding Push Factors Toward International Teaching:** The researcher found out six compounding push factors collectively created professionally unsustainable domestic conditions for the SNED Coordinator: Limited Career Growth, Low Salaries, Lack of Professional Development, Social Stigma and Discrimination, Inadequate Resources, and Professional Isolation.
2. **Pull Factors Characterizing International Teaching Advantages:** The researcher found out six corresponding pull factors characterized the perceived advantages of international teaching: Higher Salaries Abroad, Better Career Opportunities, Access to Global Teaching Standards, Comprehensive Support Systems, Improved Work Conditions, and Professional Growth.
3. **Pursuit of Professional Growth and Qualifications for Global Teaching Opportunities:** The researcher found out that based on the pursuit of professional growth and qualifications for global teaching opportunities, advanced educational qualifications was identified by all participants as the foremost mediating factor between push and pull dynamics, particularly multiple graduate degrees, serving as the principal bridge toward global career mobility.

DISCUSSION

The researcher presents this discussion to contextualize the finding on the perspectives of a Special Needs Education (SNED) Coordinator at the chosen school locale for international teaching opportunities within the relevant literature and within Lee's Migration Theory (1966). The discussion is organized around the push factors, pull factors, and pursuit of professional growth and qualifications that emerged from thematic analysis, examining how systemic challenges within Philippine special education create compelling motivations for international mobility while perceived opportunities abroad attract highly qualified professionals toward global teaching contexts.

Compounding Push Factors Toward International Teaching

The researcher found out that six compounding push factors namely Limited Career Growth, Low Salaries, Lack of Professional Development, Social Stigma and Discrimination, Inadequate Resources, and Professional Isolation, collectively created professionally unsustainable domestic conditions for the SNED Coordinator, all rooted in the systemic institutional problem of the Philippine special education system. These push factors did not operate independently; rather, they compounded one another synergistically, making the cumulative burden far greater than any single factor alone, and collectively motivating the coordinator to consider international teaching as a more viable and dignified professional path.

The researcher's finding affirms the study of Rosales (2024), who highlighted that unstable employment conditions and delayed salary disbursements have made it difficult for teachers to sustain their livelihoods, and further emphasized that these push factors drive Filipino educators to seek better-paying, and more stable teaching opportunities overseas. The chronic financial inadequacy and career stagnation I documented in the SNED Coordinator's experience directly mirrors these systemic patterns reinforcing that the push factors I identified are not isolated personal grievances but deeply entrenched institutional realities that transcend individual cases.

The researcher's finding further confirms a study on early childhood education preparation in the Philippines published in *Frontiers in Sociology* (2025), which revealed that ECE stakeholders perceived low program quality, limited career advancement, financial instability, inadequate institutional support, and societal stigma as compounding factors, and that migration is both a response to systemic inequalities and an expression of professional autonomy. The convergence of these findings with my own confirms that the push factors the researcher documented are not unique to SNED but represent a systemic pattern affecting Filipino educators in specialized fields more broadly.

However, the researcher's study claims a contradicting view of Almonte-Acosta and Clamor-Torneo (2023), whose study on Filipino teachers' motivations for staying in the profession found that the most dominant motivation for staying is a sense of vocation and calling. This contradicts the researcher's finding that systemic push factors are the dominant drivers of international migration aspirations, suggesting that for many Filipino teachers, intrinsic motivations and vocational commitment remain powerful enough to outweigh structural inadequacies.

Pull Factors Characterizing International Teaching Advantages

The researcher found out that six pull factors: Higher Salaries Abroad, Better Career Opportunities, Access to Global Teaching Standards, Comprehensive Support Systems, Improved Work Conditions, and Professional Growth, characterized the perceived advantages of international teaching for the SNED Coordinator, with each pull factor directly and precisely addressing a corresponding domestic push condition. These pull factors collectively represented not merely economic incentives but a comprehensive

vision of professional dignity, institutional recognition, and sustainable practice that the Philippine SNED system had consistently failed to provide.

The researcher's finding agrees on a 2024 study published in *ScienceDirect* exploring the motivations and career choices of expatriate teachers in international schools, which found that expatriate teachers seek professional autonomy and freedom in international schools as an escape from education systems perceived as constraining or limited, and that the allure of working internationally extends beyond traditional notions of travel and adventure, with mobility serving as a means to achieve both personal and professional development. This resonates strongly with the SNED Coordinator's aspiration to escape not merely low salaries but a system that structurally marginalized her expertise, her students, and her professional dignity, affirming that pull factors in international teaching operate on multiple dimensions simultaneously.

Additionally, the researcher's finding substantiates ISC Research's international schools market analysis (2025), which found that teachers choose the international education sector predominantly for travel and cultural exploration opportunities, for a new challenge, and for competitive salaries, while respondents also cited improved career prospects elsewhere as the primary motivator behind their decision to leave, alongside professional development opportunities as one of the most important considerations. This supports my finding that the pull factors the researcher identified are not aspirational abstractions, but well-documented, empirically grounded motivations shared by educators across diverse professional contexts worldwide.

However, the researcher's finding disagrees the study of Cahilog et al. (2023), as cited in *Global Research in Higher Education* (2024), who found that both emotional and practical considerations influence teachers' decisions to migrate, with the desire for financial stability being contrasted by their deep emotional connection to students and the local education system. This challenged the researcher's finding that pull factors operate as straightforward incentives toward international migration, suggesting instead that the perceived advantages of teaching abroad are frequently tempered by profound relational and emotional anchors.

Pursuit of Professional Growth and Qualifications for Global Teaching Opportunities

The researcher found out that the SNED Coordinator's deliberate accumulation of multiple graduate degrees across nine years of concurrent full-time service functioned not as a response to domestic career incentives but as a strategic coping mechanism and her primary competitive advantage in pursuing international teaching opportunities. Advanced academic qualifications were identified by all participants as the foremost mediating factor bridging push and pull dynamics, serving as the principal bridge toward global career mobility, revealing the contradiction of a system that produces highly credentialed educators yet provides no structures to retain, recognize, or reward them.

The researcher's finding substantiates the study of Asian College of Teachers (2024), which confirmed that a master's degree enhances career mobility across universities, international schools, NGOs, and curriculum development organizations, providing a deeper understanding of education systems globally and helping teachers adapt to diverse contexts. This validates the SNED Coordinator's strategic investment in advanced degrees as a rational and purposeful response to the gap between her domestic career ceiling and her international career experiences.

The researcher's study also validates Johns Hopkins University's School of Education (2025), which noted that developing expertise in educational technology, assessment design, and research methodologies often positions candidates for leadership roles and career advancement within international education networks, while the demand for qualified international teachers has grown significantly, with a 2024 UNESCO report projecting that 44 million additional teachers will be needed worldwide by 2030. This global demand, paired with the SNED Coordinator's deliberately built credential portfolio, confirms that her qualification strategy is structurally aligned with international labor market realities, and that pursuing advanced degrees while in active service, though unrecognized domestically, is an evidently sound strategy for accessing international teaching opportunities.

However, the researcher's finding negates the study of Real et al. (2024), as cited in the International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (2025), who found that both emotional and practical considerations influenced teachers' decisions to work overseas, even when they held permanent teaching positions in the Philippines, with the pursuit of financial stability often conflicting with their emotional commitment to students and the local educational system. This challenges the researcher's finding that advanced qualifications serve as the foremost mediating factor toward international career mobility, suggesting that non-credential factors, particularly emotional ties, relational obligations, and the psychological weight of leaving one's students, may equally or even more powerfully shape the ultimate migration decision, regardless of how strategically and extensively an educator has built their academic qualifications.

The researcher's findings firmly affirm Lee's Migration Theory (1966) as a highly applicable framework for understanding the SNED Coordinator's international teaching experiences. The six identified push factors confirm that the Philippine special education system generates conditions of professional unsustainability that motivate migration, while the six pull factors validate the theory's assertion that destination contexts exercise compelling attraction through promises of better conditions. Furthermore, the coordinator's strategic accumulation of multiple graduate degrees substantiates the theory's recognition of personal characteristics as active mediating forces, extending it by demonstrating how credentials simultaneously intensify push motivation and bridge pull factor realization. Notably, this study enriches migration theory by revealing that non-material push factors, occupational stigma, professional devaluation, and absence of collegial dignity, carry motivational weight equal to, and at times surpassing, the material economic factors that dominated Lee's (1966) original conceptualization.

Modified Paradigm

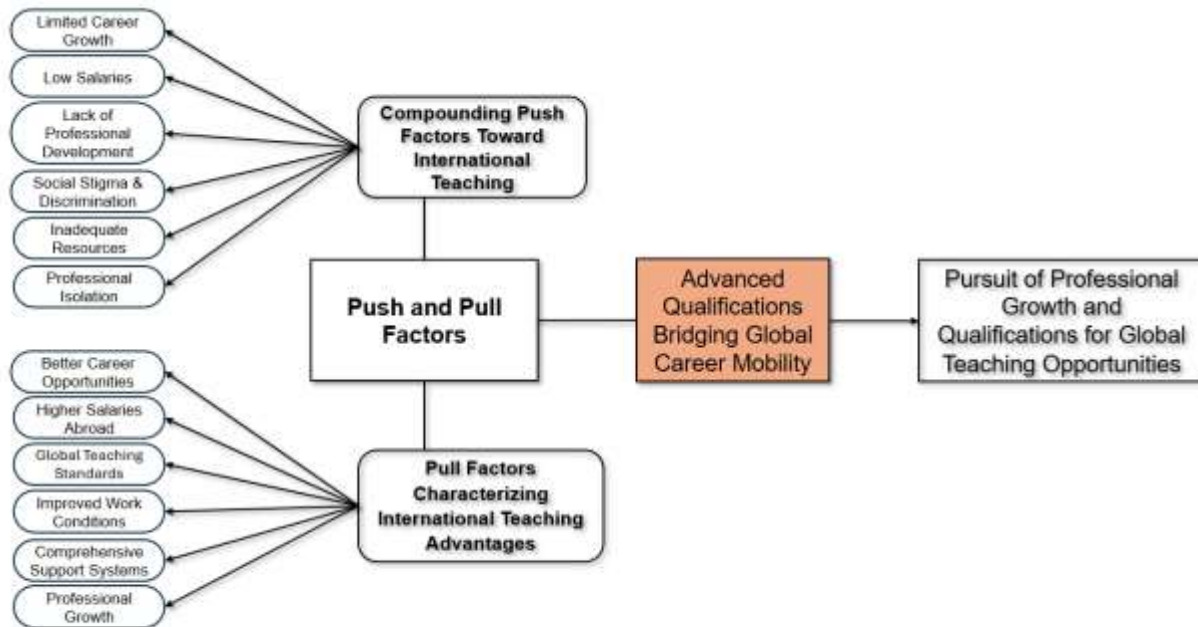


Figure 2. Modified Paradigm of Lee's Migration Theory

Conclusions

The six compounding push factors reveal that the Philippine special education system has remained challenged in providing SNED professionals with the career advancement, financial stability, and institutional support necessary for sustainable domestic service. Correspondingly, the six pull factors demonstrate that international teaching environments offer precisely the conditions the Philippine system has consistently withheld, making global opportunities not merely attractive but professionally necessary for highly qualified SNED educators. Collectively, these findings affirm that advanced educational qualifications serve as the critical bridge between professional frustration and global opportunity, transforming years of unrecognized domestic investment into a compelling competitive advantage in the international teaching market.

Recommendations

Based on the researcher's findings, the Philippine special education practitioners may urgently address the six compounding push factors that drive qualified SNED professionals toward international migration. The researcher humbly recommend that education leaders may reform the salary standardization framework to ensure advanced credentials translate into career advancement, correct the chronic underfunding of the SNED Support Fund, and provide adequate resources so coordinators no longer personally finance institutional responsibilities. The establishment of structured peer

support networks, anti-stigma advocacy programs, and re-entry programs for internationally experienced SNED educators would collectively reduce professional isolation, foster inclusive school communities, and transform brain drain into a sustainable cycle of professional enrichment that ultimately elevates the quality of special needs education for Filipino learners with disabilities.

Future directions of this study may include mediation analysis utilizing advanced educational qualifications as a mediating variable to examine the correlation between push and pull factors as determinant variables in pursuit of professional growth and qualifications as the criterion variable. Multiple linear regression may further be employed using the compounding push and pull factors as determinants of advanced educational qualifications. Lastly, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) may be conducted to develop standardized questionnaires derived from the identified themes and corresponding sub-themes as indicators.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Before conducting the study, the researcher secured formal permission from the DepEd Division Office of Koronadal City and from the principal of Koronadal National Comprehensive High School and received ethical clearance from the Society of Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE) of HCDC to ensure compliance with ethical research standards. The researcher explained to the participants the purpose of the study, the process, and their rights including voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time and obtained their informed consent, while using pseudonyms and removing any identifying information to maintain their confidentiality, in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173). The researcher also ensured the trustworthiness of the data by maintaining an audit trail throughout the entire research process. Claude AI was utilized in this study as an instrument for grammar correction, spelling, and translation.

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