

Factors influencing teacher educators' decision to work at Battambang Teacher Education College: Challenges and strategies for recruitment and retention

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Received 16 October 2024
Revised 04 December 2024
Accepted 26 December 2024

Citation: Bou, D., & Chhen, S. (2024). Factors influencing teacher educators' decision to work at Battambang Teacher Education College: Challenges and strategies for recruitment and retention. *Journal of Management, Economics, and Industrial Organization*, 8(3), 73-92.
<http://doi.org/10.31039/jomeino.2024.835>



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Abstract

This study explores the factors influencing teacher educators' decisions to work at Battambang Teacher Education College (BTEC) in Cambodia, including their challenges and BTEC's strategies for attracting and retaining qualified staff. Through semi-structured interviews with faculty and administrative personnel, the research identifies that professional opportunities, personal motivations, and financial incentives significantly impact career choices. However, challenges such as inadequate resources, limited professional development, and insufficient administrative support hinder job satisfaction and retention. The study underscores the need for effective strategies, like competitive compensation and targeted marketing, and a supportive workplace culture through mentorship programs. Addressing these challenges can enhance BTEC's attractiveness as a premier educator development college, ultimately improving educational outcomes and fostering stakeholder optimism.

Keywords: Professional development, Recruitment and retention, Teacher educators, Challenges and strategies

JEL Classification Codes: J24, J44, J62, M53

1. Introduction

Since its establishment in 2017, BTEC has undergone significant changes to improve its education quality. Despite these positive changes, BTEC faces a key challenge: a need for more teacher educators in various subject areas, particularly in science, mathematics, literature, linguistics, and social sciences. This deficiency significantly hinders the college's mission (BTEC, 2018; MoEYS, 2023) to provide high-quality teacher education and prepare competent educators for the future (Zeichner, 2017).

While BTEC has taken proactive measures to address this issue by recruiting new teacher educators, there is an urgent need to understand the factors that motivate these professionals to choose BTEC as their place of work. Identifying these motivating factors is critical to developing effective strategies to attract and retain talented educators committed to providing quality education and shaping the future of teaching in Battambang (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

The recruitment and retention of teacher educators are not just essential but urgent determinants of the quality of teacher education programs. One cannot overlook the significant impact these factors have on student learning outcomes. At BTEC in Cambodia, various factors influence educators' decisions to join and remain at the college. The Cambodian government's commitment to enhancing educational quality through initiatives like the Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023 adds to the urgency. Economic factors, such as low salaries relative to the cost of living, pose significant challenges in attracting qualified individuals (Monk, 2007; Varghese, 2009). At the same time, limited professional development opportunities further discourage potential educators from pursuing careers at BTEC. Research highlights that continuous professional growth is essential for job satisfaction and retention in teaching (Aulia & Haerani, 2022; Toropova et al., 2021).

The economic landscape presents an urgent and pressing challenge in recruiting and retaining teacher educators at BTEC. People often perceive teacher salaries in Cambodia as inadequate, particularly in light of the rising cost of living (Benveniste et al., 2008; Evans & Yuan, 2018; Kim & Rouse, 2011). This economic disparity makes it difficult for BTEC to attract individuals with advanced qualifications and experience, as many potential educators seek more lucrative opportunities in other sectors (Brehm & Silova, 2014; OUM, 2015). Furthermore, the lack of monetary rewards, such as performance bonuses or housing allowances, exacerbates this issue, leading to high turnover rates among educators who may leave for better-paying positions elsewhere (Johnson, 1986; Nye et al., 2004; Podolsky et al., 2019). Research indicates that competitive compensation is critical in attracting and retaining talent in the education sector (Guarino et al., 2006).

In addition to economic factors, the availability of professional development opportunities significantly

influences teacher educators' decisions. Continuous professional growth is crucial for job satisfaction and retention (Darling-Hammond, 2006). At BTEC, limited access to training programs and workshops can deter potential educators from pursuing a career at the college. Educators who feel stagnant in their professional development are more likely to seek opportunities elsewhere, where they can enhance their skills and advance their careers. Establishing structured professional development programs that align with educators' needs and aspirations can help BTEC retain its faculty and improve overall job satisfaction.

The institutional environment at BTEC also plays a crucial role in influencing educators' decisions. Administrative support, collegial relationships, and resource availability significantly impact job satisfaction and commitment (De Nobile, 2017; Singh & Manser, 2008). A positive work environment fosters collaboration and innovation, essential for effective teaching and learning (Seren Intepeler et al., 2019). Conversely, a lack of administrative support or a negative workplace culture can lead to dissatisfaction and increased turnover (Ogony & Majola, 2018; Shakoor et al., 2023). Research shows that institutions promoting a culture of collaboration and professional growth tend to attract and retain quality educators (Hargreaves, 2003). Therefore, the need for BTEC to create a supportive, inclusive work environment that encourages teamwork and professional development is not just essential but urgent.

Moreover, teachers are experiencing burnout due to various job-related stressors. According to Doan et al. (2024), teachers' primary stress sources include managing student behavior, dealing with inadequate salaries, and coping with excessive administrative work outside of teaching. Long working hours and the need to support students' learning after lost class time also pose challenges for teachers. Teachers also have the responsibility of addressing the mental health and well-being of students and preparing them for state-standardized tests. Many teachers feel overwhelmed by seemingly unattainable expectations and need more support from school management. Staff shortages exacerbate the situation by forcing educators to take on additional responsibilities, leading to general stress and burnout.

As educational policymakers, academic researchers, and administrators in teacher education, you play a crucial role in addressing these challenges at BTEC. Your decisions and actions can significantly impact the recruitment and retention of teacher educators. To address these challenges, BTEC must develop targeted strategies to enhance recruitment and retention. One potential strategy involves improving salary structures and benefits for teacher educators. Research suggests that competitive compensation is critical in attracting and retaining talent in the education sector (See et al., 2020). Furthermore, Harrison (2024), Grima-Farrell (2015), and Coldwell (2017) established clear pathways for professional development that can enhance educators' skills and increase their engagement with the institution. This could include offering mentorship programs, facilitating peer collaboration, and providing access to resources that aid teaching and research.

Creating a supportive work environment is also essential. Institutions that foster a culture of collaboration and professional growth tend to attract and retain quality educators (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Podolsky et al., 2016). Promoting mentorship programs, facilitating peer collaboration, and ensuring access to resources that support teaching and research can achieve this. Additionally, BTEC could establish regular feedback mechanisms to assess educator satisfaction and pinpoint areas for enhancement, guaranteeing the recognition and appreciation of faculty voices.

This study aims to examine the factors that influence teacher educators' decisions to work in BTEC, identify the challenges they face, and explore strategies for recruitment and retention. By gaining insight into these aspects, BTEC can strengthen its efforts to create a supportive work environment that attracts qualified educators and promotes their long-term commitment to the college (Lunenberg et al., 2014). The objective of this research is to:

1. To examine the factors influencing teacher educators' decision to work at BTEC
2. To identify the challenges teacher educators face at BTEC
3. To explore BTEC's strategies to attract and retain qualified teacher educators

2. Literature review

2.1. Review of literature on recruitment and retention of teacher educators

The recruitment and retention of teacher educators are critical issues that significantly impact the quality of teacher education programs. This literature review explores the various factors that influence these factors, with a specific focus on the Battambang Teacher Education College (BTEC) in Cambodia. The review synthesizes findings from international research and studies relevant to the Cambodian educational landscape.

2.2. Importance of teacher educators

Teacher educators play a pivotal role in shaping the competencies and skills of future teachers, directly influencing the quality of teacher training programs and, consequently, student learning outcomes. Darling-Hammond (2012) and Stronge (2018) emphasize that effective teacher education relies on the curriculum and the educators who deliver it. This assertion is particularly relevant for BTEC, where teacher educators' quality significantly impacts Cambodia's educational landscape. Research indicates that well-prepared and supported teacher educators are likelier to produce competent teachers who can adapt to diverse student needs (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Sleeter & Milner, 2011). Furthermore, teacher educators are instrumental in shaping educational policies and practices within

their institutions (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) and Strahan (2003) note that those who engage in collaborative practices and continuous professional development contribute to a culture of excellence in education. In Cambodia, where educational reforms are ongoing, the need for qualified and committed teacher educators is paramount (Fullan et al., 1998). The Cambodian government's initiatives, such as the Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023, underscore the importance of high-quality teacher education as a foundation for improving overall educational outcomes (Belsito, 2016; Hightower et al., 2011; Liston et al., 2008). Therefore, investing in the recruitment, training, and retention of teacher educators is vital for the sustainable development of the education sector in Cambodia (Abu-Tineh et al., 2023; Baba, 2018; Chen et al., 2022; Malik, 2018).

2.3. Economic factors

Economic considerations are among the most significant barriers to recruiting and retaining teacher educators (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Carver-Thomas, 2018). Research indicates that low salaries relative to the cost of living in Cambodia deter qualified individuals from pursuing careers in education (Khim & Andermann, 2021; Nakahara et al., 2009). Andrew and Schwab (1995) highlight that many potential educators seek more lucrative opportunities in other sectors, leading to a need for more qualified teacher educators at institutions like BTEC. Ibidunni et al. (2016) and Bibi (2018) further support this notion, stating that competitive compensation is essential for attracting and retaining talent in the education sector. In addition to salary, the lack of economic benefits, such as performance bonuses or housing allowances, exacerbates the retention challenge (Abubakar et al., 2020; Henderson & Tulloch, 2008; Yousaf et al., 2014). Teacher educators who feel undervalued financially are more likely to leave for better-paying positions, contributing to high turnover rates within the institution (Combs, 2015; Ingersoll, 2001). This economic instability affects individual educators and undermines the overall quality of teacher education programs at BTEC. Research by Rodriguez (2019) indicates that financial dissatisfaction significantly predicts teacher attrition, reinforcing the need for competitive compensation packages. Additionally, a study by Burch and Spillane (2004), Lehmann et al. (2008), and Sims (2003) emphasize that inadequate financial support can lead to decreased job satisfaction, further impacting retention rates.

2.4. Professional development opportunities

The availability of professional development opportunities is a critical factor influencing teacher educators' decisions to remain in their positions (Ortan et al., 2021; Shiri et al., 2023). Continuous professional growth is essential for job satisfaction and retention in teaching (M. Mlambo et al., 2021; Shiri et al., 2023). Research indicates that limited access to training programs and workshops at higher

institutions can deter potential educators from pursuing a career at the college (García & Weiss, 2019). Educators who feel stagnant in their professional development are more likely to seek opportunities elsewhere to enhance their skills and advance their careers (Abu-Tineh et al., 2023; Gu, 2017). Moreover, the lack of structured professional development programs can lead to feelings of isolation among educators, further contributing to attrition. For instance, a study by Lambert and Gray (2022) and Rogers (2024) highlights that institutions prioritizing ongoing training and development create environments where educators feel supported and valued, which is crucial for retention. Effective professional development improves teaching practices and fosters a sense of community among educators, enhancing their commitment to the institution (Gast et al., 2022; Yu & Chao, 2023). Implementing comprehensive professional development initiatives that align with educators' needs and aspirations is vital for BTEC. Providing opportunities for mentorship, peer collaboration, and access to resources can significantly enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover rates. Furthermore, Donath et al. (2023), M. Mlambo et al. (2021), and Guskey (2002) suggested that regular assessments of professional development offerings help ensure they meet the evolving needs of faculty, ultimately benefiting both educators and their students.

2.5. Institutional environment

The institutional environment at BTEC significantly impacts educators' decisions to join and remain at the college. Factors such as administrative support, collegial relationships, and resource availability play crucial roles in determining job satisfaction and commitment among teacher educators (Ortan et al., 2021; Singh & Gautam, 2024). Zhenjing et al. (2022) and Huang et al. (2022) say a positive work environment fostering collaboration and innovation is essential for effective teaching and learning. Research by See et al. (2020) indicates that institutions promoting a culture of teamwork and professional growth tend to attract and retain quality educators. Conversely, according to McMahan et al. (2017), a lack of administrative support or a negative workplace culture can lead to dissatisfaction and increased turnover rates. Insufficient administrative support is often cited by educators as a primary reason for leaving their positions, underscoring the importance for BTEC to foster a supportive institutional culture. According to Straus et al. (2013) and Kaihoi et al. (2022), schools that provide robust mentorship and collegial support create environments where educators feel valued and engaged, contributing to their overall job satisfaction.

Furthermore, Gause et al. (2022) and Timotheou et al. (2023) described that the availability of resources—such as teaching materials, technology, and professional development opportunities—can significantly influence educators' experiences. When institutions adequately equip their educators, it enhances their ability to deliver quality instruction and fosters a sense of professional efficacy (Altmiller & Pepe, 2022; Artino, 2012; Mandlenkosi Mlambo et al., 2021). Therefore, BTEC must

prioritize creating a supportive and inclusive work environment that encourages collaboration, provides necessary resources, and promotes professional development to enhance retention and job satisfaction among its faculty.

2.6. Strategies for improvement

We must develop targeted strategies to enhance BTEC's appeal to potential educators and support the existing faculty, effectively addressing the institution's recruitment and retention challenges. One critical strategy involves improving salary structures and benefits for teacher educators (Hanushek, 2011; Lavy, 2007). Research indicates that competitive compensation is fundamental in attracting and retaining talent within the education sector (Hajnal & Dibski, 1993; Kelley & Finnigan, 2004). BTEC should consider conducting a salary review to align compensation packages with the cost of living and market standards, potentially including performance bonuses and housing allowances to incentivize educators (Cabral Vieira* et al., 2005; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007; Plecki & Loeb, 2004). Another essential strategy is the establishment of comprehensive professional development programs (Creemers et al., 2012; Lunenberg & Willemse, 2006). Continuous professional growth is vital for job satisfaction and retention (Desimone, 2009). BTEC can enhance its offerings by implementing structured mentorship programs, facilitating peer collaboration, and providing access to workshops and training that align with educators' needs and aspirations (Brannon et al., 2009; Danielson, 2002; Simmonds & Dicks, 2018). By fostering an environment of continuous learning, BTEC can help educators feel supported and valued, thereby reducing turnover rates. Creating a supportive institutional environment is also crucial (Su et al., 2023). Institutions that promote a culture of collaboration and innovation tend to retain quality educators (Corbo et al., 2016; Donofrio et al., 2010). BTEC should prioritize building solid collegial relationships and ensuring that administrative support is readily available (Earle, 2003; Owan et al., 2024; Pinto, 2014). Bolliger and Wasilik (2009) and McLaughlin (1984) revealed that regular feedback mechanisms can be implemented to gauge educator satisfaction and identify areas for improvement, ensuring that faculty voices are heard and valued.

Additionally, BTEC should focus on enhancing resource availability, including teaching materials and technology. Research shows that adequate resources significantly impact educators' effectiveness and job satisfaction (Budhathoki, 2021; Iwu et al., 2013; Ololube, 2006). BTEC can create a more conducive teaching and learning environment by investing in these areas.

3. Methodology

This study used a qualitative method using semi-structured interviews to collect data. Through purposive sampling, we selected participants including two deputy directors, three vice deans of each

faculty, and heads and deputies of various departments and offices. Interviews were conducted separately at different times to accommodate participants' schedules. To ensure clarity and accuracy, the interview questions were developed based on research objectives, with a focus on factors that influence teacher educators' decisions to work at BTEC. The validity of these questions was verified by the Back Translation Method (Brislin & Freimanis, 2001; Klotz et al., 2023), which translates between English and Khmer language and was further validated by specialists with over 10 years of experience in their respective fields. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework: becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and preparing the report. This analysis was facilitated using the Taguette Tool, ensuring a systematic and thorough examination of the data collected.

4. Finding

4.1. Factors influencing teacher educators' decisions to work at BTEC

Several key factors emerge when examining the themes influencing trainers' decisions to work at the Battambang Teacher Education College. Firstly, the frequent mention, with seven mentions, accounting for 29.17% of the total responses of professional opportunities throughout the discussions indicates their high value. Trainers frequently expressed, *"If a position opens at the Battambang Teacher Education College, it's my opportunity to work in higher education,"* underscoring the importance of job security and career progression. Additionally, personal motivation plays a crucial role, with five participants (20.83%) citing a passion for education and the influence of previous experiences as driving factors. Teacher educators stated, *"I want to change my place of work,"* demonstrating how personal aspirations influence career decisions.

Environmental factors, such as the benefits of the institute's location and its institutional reputation, are also significant. There were four mentions, making up 16.67%. Trainers pointed out that *"Battambang is an area with naturally rich rice fields,"* indicating that the local context enhances the institution's appeal. Teacher educators emphasize the importance of financial incentives, stating that an increase in monthly income is necessary for those who love their hobbies and highlighting the importance of competitive salaries and benefits.

Despite acknowledging the necessity of administrative support from leadership, there were three participants (13.33%) mentioned that a less supportive and transparent work culture fosters job satisfaction, trainers expressed, *"Support from leadership is also difficult,"* suggesting that there may be room for improvement. Collectively, these themes illustrate the multifaceted considerations that

trainers weigh when deciding to join the Battambang Teacher Education College, highlighting the interplay of professional aspirations, personal motivations, environmental contexts, economic factors, and institutional support.

4.2. To identify the challenges teacher educators face at BTEC

The themes identified in the document reveal significant challenges teacher educators face, particularly in resource availability, training and development, administrative obstacles, student engagement, and the workplace environment. Firstly, the lack of resources is prominent, with nine participants (38.46%) indicating that teacher educators cite insufficient teaching materials and limited access to technology as significant impediments to effective instruction. As noted, *"There are many challenges when working at BTEC... there is no material for the five-year training process,"* highlighting the scarcity that hinders their ability to provide quality education.

Additionally, the theme of training and development, noted by four respondents (23.08%), emphasizes the limited professional development opportunities available. Teacher educators express a need for more structured training programs, stating, *"The number of training opportunities for trainers in professional development is limited,"* reflecting a desire for enhanced skills.

People frequently mention bureaucratic obstacles and poor communication, which further complicate the educational landscape. For instance, seven participants (30.77%) remarked, *"Leadership is also difficult because leaders lack the motivation to do so,"* illustrating the frustrations that arise from ineffective administration.

Furthermore, educators report difficulties in student engagement, with twelve participants (38.40%) to challenges in motivating students and addressing diverse learning needs. As indicated by the quote, *"Managing diverse learning needs is challenging for teachers."* Lastly, the workplace environment is characterized by high levels of concern regarding a lack of support from the administration and overwhelming workloads. Four participants (23.33%) noted, *"High workload and stress levels are common among staff,"* underscoring the detrimental impact on job satisfaction. These themes underscore the urgent need for systemic improvements to foster a more supportive and effective educational environment.

4.3. To explore BTEC's strategies to attract and retain qualified teacher educators

Effective attraction strategies are crucial for attracting qualified educators, as evidenced by the strong emphasis on this theme in our discussions. These strategies may encompass targeted marketing

campaigns and outreach efforts highlighting BTEC's unique job opportunities. There were six participants (20.00%) who emphasized this: *"We need to actively promote BTEC as a leading institution for educators through workshops and career fairs."* This proactive approach raises awareness and positions BTEC as a desirable workplace among potential candidates.

Financial and professional incentives, reflected in moderately frequent mentions, play a significant role in both attracting and retaining educators. The competitive nature of the education sector means that financial packages must be appealing. There were eight participants (26.67%) remarked, *"Offering attractive salary packages and bonuses can significantly influence an educator's decision to join us."* This sentiment underscores the necessity of aligning compensation with industry standards to entice skilled professionals. Moreover, continuous professional development opportunities are essential for retention, highlighting the need for ongoing training and support. Six participants (20.00%) stated, *"We provide regular professional development workshops, which enhance skills and demonstrate our investment in our educators."* Such initiatives boost educators' capabilities and foster a culture of growth and commitment.

Adequate support systems are vital for educators' success and professional development. Seven participants (23.33%) poignantly expressed this: *"Having a mentor can make all the difference in adapting to the new teaching environment."* Mentorship programs can help new educators navigate challenges, increasing their confidence and effectiveness in the classroom. The workplace culture also significantly impacts educator satisfaction. A supportive environment is essential for fostering loyalty and motivation among staff. A participant emphasized that a supportive work environment fosters educators' growth and sense of worth. Creating a culture where educators feel appreciated and heard can lead to higher retention rates. Clear hiring standards are another fundamental aspect of attracting skilled professionals. Five participants (16.67%) remarked, *"We have strict hiring criteria to ensure we attract the best-qualified educators."* This commitment to quality enhances the institution's reputation and ensures that students receive the highest standard of education.

Lastly, feedback mechanisms are vital for continuous improvement. two participants (8.38%) emphasized, *"Feedback from educators is crucial; it helps us refine our strategies and address any concerns."* Actively seeking and addressing feedback can lead to better practices and a more responsive organizational culture.

Collaboration with other educational institutions also enhances BTEC's reputation, providing additional resources and opportunities for educators. three participants (13.08%) succinctly stated, *"Collaborating with universities allows us to offer our educators unique training opportunities."* These partnerships can broaden the professional development landscape for educators, making BTEC an even more

attractive institution. These elements create a comprehensive framework for attracting and retaining high-quality educators at BTEC. By prioritizing effective attraction strategies, monetary rewards, professional development, robust support systems, a positive workplace culture, clear hiring standards, feedback mechanisms, and collaborative partnerships, BTEC can continue to build a strong and capable faculty dedicated to educational excellence.

5. Discussion

The findings regarding the factors influencing teacher educators' decisions to work at the Battambang Teacher Education College (BTEC) reveal a complex interplay of motivations and challenges. Trainers highly value professional opportunities, often seeing positions at BTEC as significant for career advancement and job security. One participant remarked, "If a position opens at the BTEC, it's my opportunity to work in higher education," underscoring the significance of such roles in professional growth (Finding 4.1). This underscores the crucial role that BTEC plays in educators' career paths. Personal motivations, including a passion for education, also play a critical role, as indicated by trainers expressing desires to change their work environments (Finding 4.1).

Furthermore, environmental factors, such as Battambang's appealing local context, enhance the institution's attractiveness, with references to its natural resources suggesting a conducive living and working environment (Finding 4.1). However, challenges persist, particularly regarding resource availability and administrative support. Insufficient materials and technology are frequently cited by educators, who state, "There are many challenges when working at BTEC... there is no material for the five-year training process," highlighting significant barriers to effective teaching (Finding 4.2).

Additionally, the need for structured training programs is evident, with educators advocating for more professional development opportunities (Finding 4.2). This underscores the importance of continuous learning and growth in education. Effective attraction strategies are crucial for retaining qualified educators, as evidenced by solid calls for targeted marketing and competitive financial packages. One participant emphasized the need to promote BTEC actively through various channels, stating, "We need to actively promote BTEC as a leading institution for educators through workshops and career fairs" (Finding 4.3). This proactive marketing and robust professional development and support systems can significantly enhance educator satisfaction and retention. A supportive workplace culture, characterized by mentorship opportunities, is fundamental; as one educator noted, "Having a mentor can make all the difference in adapting to the new teaching environment" (Finding 4.3). These findings suggest that BTEC must continue to prioritize comprehensive strategies that attract and retain high-quality educators by addressing the multifaceted nature of their needs and challenges.

6. Conclusions

The findings from this study illuminate the multifaceted factors influencing teacher educators' decisions to work at BTEC and the challenges they face within this environment. The emphasis on professional opportunities, personal motivation, and economic benefits underscores BTEC's need to create an appealing work environment that fosters career advancement and job satisfaction. Additionally, the identified challenges—such as resource availability, limited training opportunities, and administrative obstacles—highlight critical areas for systemic improvement. Effective attraction strategies, including targeted outreach and competitive compensation, are essential for recruiting and retaining qualified educators. Furthermore, we cannot overstate the importance of mentorship and supportive workplace culture in enhancing educator effectiveness and retention. By addressing these challenges and implementing comprehensive strategies, BTEC can strengthen its position as a leading institution for educator development, ultimately contributing to educational excellence in the region.

Acknowledgments

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all who contributed to this study. We extend our special thanks to our BTEC administrators and colleagues, whose invaluable interviews laid the foundation for our analysis. We appreciate the collaborative support from our peers and the resources provided by our institution's library and electronic trustful resources. Finally, we acknowledge the broader academic community for ongoing research efforts on Factors Influencing Teacher Educators' Decision to Work at Battambang Teacher Education College: Challenges and Strategies for Recruitment and Retention, which inspired this study.

Author Contributions: All the authors contributed to this research.

Funding: Not applicable.

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Ethics approval and Informed Consent Statement: This study received ethical approval from the BTEC's administrative on January 09th, 2024.

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