Beyond Burnout: A Thematic Analysis of Teacher Attrition Narratives in a Private Online Community

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Abstract — Teacher attrition may reflect interacting occupational pressures rather than a single cause. This qualitative descriptive study examined narratives about leaving or considering leaving teaching in a private Facebook community focused on career options beyond the classroom. The source was a post dated September 26, 2026; the data cutoff was September 28, 2026, at 2:30 p.m. The working dataset contained 138 raw comments, of which 130 were retained as substantive, analyzable comments. Individual comments—not unique people—were the unit of analysis. Using multiple coding and descriptive comment-level frequencies, 15 codes were grouped into five themes: erosion of the classroom environment; organizational and professional strain; unsustainable conditions of teaching; personal consequences of occupational strain; and reaching the exit point. The working coding summary identified student behavior and accountability (72 comments; 55.4%), leadership and administrative support (48; 36.9%), workload and working conditions (40; 30.8%), burnout, stress, and well-being (37; 28.5%), and parent and family factors (34; 26.2%) as prominent codes. Comments often described co-occurring concerns. Cumulative occupational strain is proposed as an interpretive description of this pattern, not a validated causal construct. Because the discussion was self-selected and the post suggested possible reasons for leaving, the results do not estimate the prevalence of attrition factors among teachers generally. The frequency table remains subject to a reproducible row-by-row coding audit before submission.

Keywords: teacher attrition; teacher turnover; teacher burnout; teacher retention; working conditions; administrative support; occupational strain; online communities; thematic analysis.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Teacher attrition affects staffing continuity and the professional conditions experienced by educators who remain in schools. Teacher turnover encompasses movement between schools as well as departure from teaching; these outcomes should not be conflated. Similarly, an expressed intention to leave is not equivalent to a verified departure. The present study addresses how leaving or considering leaving is described in an online discussion, rather than estimating actual turnover.

Research on teacher turnover identifies individual, occupational, and organizational correlates. Gundlach et al. (2024) synthesized a large research literature on antecedents of teacher turnover and retention, while Li and Yao (2022) examined correlates of turnover intention. Their work provides a rationale for examining multiple factors together instead of assuming that one concern explains an educator's decision.

The purpose of the study was to identify factors emerging from comments about leaving or considering leaving teaching and examine their co-occurrence. The primary question was: What factors emerge from online comments regarding decisions to leave or consider leaving the teaching profession? The secondary question was: How do classroom, organizational, occupational, financial, and personal factors appear together within those narratives?

Literature Review

Leadership, administrative support, and professional autonomy

Leadership influences teachers' access to assistance, responses to classroom incidents, professional decision-making, and school climate. Administrative support and professional autonomy are related but distinct: support concerns practical and organizational assistance, while autonomy concerns professional trust and discretion. Narratives may identify both, and the analysis treats them as separate codes where the comment supports that distinction.

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Student behavior, family relationships, and safety

Behavior and accountability may affect the daily demands of teaching, especially when teachers perceive inconsistent consequences or insufficient institutional support. Parent conflict and family-school relationships constitute a related but analytically separate concern. Threats, assaults, and injuries are distinguished from routine behavior concerns because they raise explicit occupational safety issues. These are commenters' accounts of workplace conditions, not evidence that students or families alone cause teacher attrition.

Workload, compensation, and work-life balance

Teaching responsibilities include instruction and preparation as well as assessment, documentation, communication, supervision, and meetings. Workload refers to the volume and organization of these demands; work-life balance refers to their intrusion into family or personal time. Compensation and alternative career opportunities may further influence whether teachers regard the occupation as sustainable. The present study allows these concerns to co-occur within one comment.

Burnout and the accumulation of occupational pressures

Madigan and Kim (2021) examined associations between burnout, job satisfaction, and intentions to quit. Burnout is an important construct, but a narrative describing exhaustion may also identify workload, behavior, leadership, or family-life pressures. This study uses "cumulative occupational strain" as an interpretive label for comments in which several occupational difficulties appear together. It does not infer a causal sequence from short online comments.

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Online narratives and the research gap

Surveys, administrative records, and interviews offer important evidence about turnover, but naturally occurring online discussion provides a complementary record of how people describe and discuss occupational exit with peers. This study does not claim that social-media research on teacher attrition is new. Its narrower contribution is a transparent comment-level analysis of a direct attrition question within a private Facebook community oriented toward careers beyond classroom teaching. The group's purpose makes it a useful setting for studying exit narratives but also creates substantial selection bias.

II. METHODOLOGY

Design and data source

A qualitative descriptive design was used with thematic coding of naturally occurring online comments and supplementary descriptive frequencies. The source was a discussion posted September 26, 2026, in the private Facebook group "Life After Teaching: Educator Options Beyond the Classroom." The original post asked why those leaving the profession were doing so and suggested student discipline, administration, pay, schedule or extra duties, other factors, and "all of the above." The frozen collection window ended September 28, 2026, at 2:30 p.m. These prompt options are important because they may have influenced what commenters chose to mention.

Sampling and unit of analysis

The source transcript contained 138 raw comments. Eight were excluded from the attrition-reason analysis as minimal agreement, ambiguous responses, platform placeholders, meta-comments, context-only replies, or a positive counterexample without an attrition reason. The working analytic sample was therefore 130 substantive comments. The unit of analysis was the comment. Repeated commenters were not merged into unique participants, and commenters'

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professional status or demographics could not be independently verified. The positive counterexample was retained in the audit trail as a deviant case rather than counted as an attrition reason.

Coding and analysis

Comments were screened and assigned anonymized identifiers. A working operational codebook contained 15 codes: leadership and administrative support (ADM); student behavior and accountability (STU); parent/family factors (PAR); workload and working conditions (WRK); compensation and financial sustainability (PAY); work-life balance (WLB); burnout, stress, and well-being (BURN); professional autonomy and respect (AUT); safety and occupational risk (SAFE); systemic/bureaucratic pressures (SYS); career transition and growth (CAREER); retirement/career stage (RET); special education-specific pressures (SPED); technology/AI-related challenges (TECH); and multiple or unspecified factors (ALL). Multiple codes could be assigned to a single comment when explicitly supported by its content. Standalone “all of the above” statements received ALL only; the prompt’s suggested reasons were not automatically imputed. “All of the above” accompanied by an explicit reason could receive ALL and the stated reason. The 15 codes were grouped into five interpretive themes. Counts and percentages used 130 analyzed comments as the denominator, so totals exceed 100%.

Trustworthiness and ethical considerations

The codebook, inclusion rules, exclusion decisions, and special ALL coding rule provide an audit trail. Before publication, the full anonymized comment-by-code matrix should be independently checked against the source transcript; the current frequency table is a working summary, not a completed independently verified reliability result. No intercoder agreement is claimed. The source group was private, and access to its posts does not itself establish consent for research dissemination. Formal institutional research-ethics review or determination is needed

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before submission. Commenter names, profile details, and highly searchable verbatim quotations should not be published without appropriate authorization and ethics guidance.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1 PRESENTS THE WORKING COMMENT-LEVEL CODE FREQUENCIES. A COMMENT COULD RECEIVE MULTIPLE CODES. THESE FREQUENCIES DESCRIBE THIS THREAD ONLY; THEY DO NOT MEASURE HOW MANY TEACHERS LEAVE FOR EACH REASON.

Factor	Code	n	%
Student behavior and accountability	STU	72	55.4
Leadership and administrative support	ADM	48	36.9
Workload and working conditions	WRK	40	30.8
Burnout, stress, and well-being	BURN	37	28.5
Parent/family factors	PAR	34	26.2
Compensation/financial sustainability	PAY	26	20.0
Retirement/career stage	RET	22	16.9
Multiple/unspecified factors	ALL	18	13.8

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Systemic/bureaucratic pressures	SYS	15	11.5
Work-life balance	WLB	15	11.5
Professional autonomy/respect	AUT	12	9.2
Safety/occupational risk	SAFE	11	8.5
Career transition/growth	CAREER	11	8.5
Special education-specific pressures	SPED	6	4.6
Technology/AI-related challenges	TECH	5	3.8

Note. Working frequencies pending verification against an anonymized row-level coding matrix. Percentages use 130 analyzed comments and do not total 100% because multiple coding was permitted.

Theme 1: Erosion of the classroom environment

Comments described disruptive behavior, limited accountability, parent-related conflict, and, in a smaller set, threats or assaults. Student behavior was the most frequently assigned code in the working summary. These accounts often situated classroom difficulties alongside perceived gaps in school-level responses rather than describing behavior as an isolated problem.

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Theme 2: Organizational and professional strain

Administrative support, professional autonomy, bureaucracy, and special education-specific concerns formed a second cluster. Comments described perceived lack of backing, micromanagement, professional disrespect, and institutional requirements. Explicit special education accounts included concerns about support, placement, and safety; their smaller frequency does not establish that they are unimportant.

Theme 3: Unsustainable conditions of teaching

Workload, work-life balance, compensation, and technology-related challenges appeared as conditions affecting the sustainability of teaching. Commenters described paperwork, additional duties, limited planning time, after-hours work, and financial concerns. A small number specifically mentioned phones, devices, or AI.

Theme 4: Personal consequences of occupational strain

Burnout, stress, exhaustion, health concerns, and loss of enthusiasm appeared in comments that often also identified organizational or classroom pressures. This co-occurrence supports an interpretive reading of burnout as part of a broader occupational narrative, although the short comments cannot establish what caused an individual's symptoms.

Theme 5: Reaching the exit point

Retirement, alternative career opportunities, and general "all of the above" responses captured different ways commenters framed an exit. The discussion included people who had left, intended to leave, were considering departure, or had reached retirement. These statuses were not verified and were not treated as equivalent outcomes.

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Overarching pattern: Cumulative occupational strain

Across the themes, many comments identified several pressures together. The interpretive contribution of the study is the pattern of co-occurrence: exit narratives in this discussion were often framed as accumulated difficulties rather than a single trigger. A contrasting comment from an educator who continued to enjoy teaching after a long career cautions against assuming that all educators share the same experience.

IV. DISCUSSION

The working results align conceptually with a multifactorial view of teacher turnover and turnover intention (Gundlach et al., 2024; Li & Yao, 2022). Student behavior was the most frequently coded factor in this thread, but its prominence must be interpreted in light of the original prompt, which specifically mentioned discipline, and the group's career-transition orientation. It is not a population ranking of attrition causes.

Administrative support may connect otherwise distinct pressures: teachers may seek leadership help with classroom incidents, parent disputes, workload allocation, and professional decisions. The co-occurrence of these concerns is consistent with the need to analyze organizational context rather than attributing attrition to individual resilience alone. Workload and compensation also appeared together with schedule and family-life concerns, suggesting that sustainability can involve both economic and non-economic considerations.

Burnout was a prominent code, but the analysis does not support treating it as the only or necessarily primary reason for leaving. Its appearance alongside other pressures is compatible with prior research linking burnout and turnover intention (Madigan & Kim, 2021). "Cumulative occupational strain" is offered as a descriptive synthesis of the narratives, not as proof that one factor temporally caused another or as a validated scale.

The findings complement broader turnover research by illustrating how respondents combine factors in their own accounts. They do not independently establish the prevalence, causal

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importance, or relative severity of those factors outside the analyzed discussion. Nor can the study infer whether any stated intention led to actual departure.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings suggest that retention initiatives may warrant coordinated attention to leadership support, consistent behavioral procedures, parent-school collaboration, manageable workloads, protected preparation time, professional autonomy, compensation, and responses to safety incidents. Wellness supports should accompany, rather than replace, examination of organizational conditions. Special education staffing and support may warrant focused consideration where placement, evaluation, or safety demands arise. These are practice implications from a qualitative discussion, not interventions tested by this study.

Future research could use consented interviews, prospective designs, and mixed methods to examine how occupational pressures interact over time. Studies could compare educators who remain, consider leaving, retire, or actually exit; examine differences by teaching assignment and career stage; and compare responses to prompted versus unprompted discussions. Independent coding and an explicit audit of comment-level co-occurrence would strengthen reproducibility.

Limitations

The study used one thread from a private Facebook community centered on leaving teaching. Commenting was voluntary and likely self-selected. The original prompt listed several potential causes, creating a risk of response priming. The collection window was short, and later comments were excluded. The sample included comments rather than unique verified teachers, and professional status, geography, demographic characteristics, and employment outcomes could not be established. Comments were often brief and could not be clarified through follow-up interviews. Code frequency does not indicate importance, causal effect, or population prevalence. The working code frequencies require row-level verification, and no independent intercoder

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reliability is claimed. The research-ethics determination for analysis and publication of private-group material remains outstanding.

V. CONCLUSION

Within this private online discussion, leaving or considering leaving teaching was commonly narrated in relation to multiple occupational pressures. Student behavior and accountability, administrative support, workload, burnout, and parent-related concerns were prominent in the working coding summary, but the interpretive finding was their frequent co-occurrence. The term cumulative occupational strain captures how respondents described classroom, organizational, financial, professional, and personal pressures together. This thread-specific interpretation supports examining the conditions surrounding burnout rather than treating burnout as a complete stand-alone explanation for teacher attrition.

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