



Addressing Salary Stagnation and Systemic Challenges in Samoa's Primary Teaching Profession

Raphael Semel ^{1*}, Felila Saufoi Amituanai ², Pulou Wright ³, Sekolasitika Emmafaithful Vitale ⁴

¹⁻⁴ National University of Samoa, PO Box 1622, Papailagalaga Campus, Samoa

* Corresponding Author: **Raphael Semel**

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Abstract

This study examines the critical crisis of salary stagnation and systemic challenges within Samoa's primary teaching profession, which threaten educational quality and national development. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach (survey of 48 primary school teachers; thematic analysis of open-ended responses). The research reveals severe financial strain: 74.5 percent of teachers report that their salaries lag behind living costs, 46.8 percent have received no raise in five years, and 72.3 percent perceive their pay as inequitable compared to other professions. These pressures are exacerbated by Samoa's unique cultural obligations (falavelave) and systemic failures. Over seventy-six percent cite low political prioritization of education, and 74.5 percent identify insufficient government funding. Consequences include high attrition intentions (31 percent consider leaving), burnout, and collapsed recruitment (only 8.3 percent of teachers under age 25). Nearly half (47.9 percent) report that salary stagnation directly impairs job performance due to stress and demotivation. Securing Samoa's educational future demands recognizing teachers as indispensable national assets and enacting these evidence-based reforms to ensure retention, recruitment, and sustainable quality education.

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Introduction

Teachers stand as the indispensable architects of a nation's future, nurturing human capital and shaping societal progress (UNESCO, 2021). Yet, globally, the teaching profession grapples with chronic challenges related to compensation, recognition, and retention, particularly in developing countries reliant on public funding. Samoa, a Pacific Island nation with a unique cultural fabric, exemplifies a critical case where the convergence of stagnant salaries, rising living costs, and profound cultural obligations threatens to destabilize the educational foundation essential for sustainable development.

This research examines the multifaceted crisis affecting teacher retention and educational quality in Samoa, investigating the tangible and perceivable consequences of wage stagnation against a backdrop of systemic underfunding and deeply ingrained socio-cultural responsibilities. Evidence from international literature underscores a persistent global trend: salaries in public education sectors, often uncoupled from inflation, erode purchasing power and deepen financial precarity (Smith, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). This financial strain forces teachers into secondary employment, diluting pedagogical focus and accelerating burnout (Johnson & Lee, 2019). Compounding this is the widespread perception of pay inequity compared to other professions, particularly prevalent in female-dominated sectors like education, leading to diminished morale and heightened attrition risks (OECD, 2021; Blau & Kahn, 2017; Han *et al.*, 2019) ^[4, 9].

In small island developing states like Samoa, these challenges are amplified by economic vulnerability to external shocks and unique socio-cultural pressures, such as the traditional system of falavelave, demanding familial financial contributions for cultural events (TuiSamoa, 2018; World Bank, 2020). Systemic drivers, including political deprioritization of education funding and perceived weaknesses in collective bargaining, further entrench these issues (Grindle, 2017; UNESCO, 2022; ILO, 2019) ^[8].

To comprehensively investigate this complex interplay within the Samoan context, this study employed a rigorous mixed-methods research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). A purposive sample of 48 primary school teachers from diverse settings (government, private, mission; urban, rural Upolu) participated. Quantitative data, collected via a structured questionnaire (demographics, Likert-scale perceptions on salary adequacy, workload, retention), provided statistical insights into salary trends, financial strain levels, and attrition intentions. Qualitative data, gathered through open-ended questions exploring lived experiences with stagnant wages and *falavelave*, underwent thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to capture nuanced narratives of systemic challenges and cultural pressures. This triangulation ensured robust findings, validated through cross-verification. Ethical protocols prioritized informed consent, anonymity, and cultural sensitivity, particularly regarding *falavelave* inquiries.

The introduction sets the stage for a detailed presentation of the methodology, findings, and discussion. The subsequent sections delved deeper into the lived realities of Samoan teachers, the systemic structures perpetuating their financial precarity, and the urgent, multi-faceted policy interventions. The evidence compels a fundamental re-evaluation of how Samoa values and supports its teachers, the very pillars of its national development.

Literature Review

Introduction

Facing critical teacher retention risks and workforce sustainability challenges, Samoa's education system is strained by persistent salary stagnation and widespread perceptions of pay inequity. This literature review explores the systemic roots of these issues, their impact on teacher well-being and performance, and the culturally-informed, evidence-based policy interventions necessary to secure the nation's educational future.

Salary stagnation and financial hardship

Salary stagnation, a persistent global challenge, disproportionately impacts professions reliant on public funding, such as education. Research consistently highlights how stagnant wages, when uncoupled from inflation, erode purchasing power and deepen financial precarity, particularly in developing economies (Machin, 2024; Smith, 2020)^[12]. In Samoa, 74.5 percent of teachers report salaries lagging behind living costs, mirroring trends observed in other Pacific nations where public sector wages fail to align with rising expenses (UNESCO, 2021). This misalignment forces teachers into secondary employment, diluting their focus on pedagogy and exacerbating burnout, a phenomenon documented in studies linking financial strain to reduced job performance (Craig, Hill-Jackson & Kwok, 2023; Johnson & Lee, 2019)^[5].

Globally, income disparities within professions further compound these challenges. For instance, while senior staff may marginally offset stagnation through tenure-based increments, early-career workers, such as the 10.6 percent of Samoan teachers earning under \$500 fortnightly, face acute vulnerability, risking attrition and destabilizing workforce sustainability (OECD, 2022; Ahmed, 2024)^[11]. Cultural obligations like *falavelave* (traditional familial financial duties) add complexity and amplify strain and pressure on family economic and sociocultural and are critical to localize

policy design (Schoeffel and Meleisea, 2025; Kelley and LeBaron, 2021)^[23, 11]. Addressing these intertwined issues requires holistic reforms, integrating inflation-indexed pay structures and culturally informed support systems to mitigate systemic inequities and preserve educational quality.

Views on salary disparity

Perceptions of pay inequity, defined as the subjective belief that one's compensation is unjust relative to peers or comparable professions, have profound implications for workforce morale and retention. Globally, studies reveal that such perceptions are widespread in female-dominated sectors like education, where societal undervaluation of care-oriented roles perpetuates wage gaps (Dhiman, 2023; OECD, 2021)^[6]. In Samoa, 72.3 percent of teachers perceive their salaries as inferior to those in comparable professions, aligning with research from Pacific nations where public-sector roles are often deemed less lucrative than private-sector equivalents (ILO, 2020). More than sixty-two percent of Samoa's teaching workforce are females and they are disproportionately affected by occupational segregation and systemic wage disparities, mirroring global trends in pay inequity (Blau and Kahn, 2017; Obloj and Zenger, 2022)^[4, 18]. These perceptions correlate strongly with attrition risks, as evidenced by Samoa's 31.3 percent of teachers contemplating career exits, a pattern consistent with studies linking pay dissatisfaction to turnover in education (Han *et al.*, 2019)^[9]. The recruitment challenges, such as the scarcity of teachers under 25 (8.3 percent), reflect broader generational shifts toward professions perceived as more financially viable. While objective pay gaps are often scrutinized (Obloj and Zenger, 2022)^[18], subjective inequity perceptions rooted in cultural norms and comparative benchmarks underscore the need for transparent salary frameworks and advocacy to realign societal valuation of teaching (Persson, Zampoukos and Ljunggren, 2021)^[20]. Addressing these perceptions is critical to sustain educational systems amid global teacher shortages.

Systemic levers of influence

Systemic and structural drivers of salary stagnation in education are often rooted in political prioritization, funding allocation, and labour market dynamics. Globally, underfunding of public education persists as a critical issue, particularly in developing nations where austerity measures divert resources from teacher compensation (UNESCO, 2022). In Samoa, 76.6 percent of teachers cite low prioritization of education as a key driver of wage stagnation, aligning with studies highlighting how political decisions disproportionately deprioritize education in favour of short-term economic goals (OECD, 2021). Structural inequities are further compounded by macroeconomic vulnerabilities: Sixty-eight percent of Samoan teachers attribute stagnant wages to economic downturns, reflecting the nation's exposure to global market fluctuations and natural disasters, (Tagataese, Fa'avae and Esera, 2021)^[24], a challenge well-documented in small island economies (World Bank, 2020). Labor market explanations, such as teacher oversupply, are less salient in Samoa (31.9 percent attribution), contrasting with regions like the U.S., where oversupply is frequently cited (Ingersoll, 2020). Instead, systemic neglect, such as insufficient government funding (74.5 percent) emerges as the dominant narrative (Persson, Zampoukos and Ljunggren, 2021)^[20]. Union, though endorsed by 60.4 percent of

respondents as a solution, faces skepticism, with only 25 percent rating it as highly effective. This mirrors global critiques of union efficacy in contexts with weak collective bargaining frameworks (ILO, 2019; Tagataese, Fa'avae and Esera, 2021)^[24]. Addressing these drivers requires structural reforms, including transparent funding mechanisms, inflation-indexed salaries, and empowered labour advocacy interventions critical to breaking cycles of neglect and fostering equitable compensation systems (Martinez-Bravo and Wantchekon, 2023)^[15].

Workplace performance and morality

Financial strain and stagnant wages significantly influence teacher job performance and morale, with global studies linking economic precarity to diminished workplace engagement (ILO, 2019; Persson, Zampoukos and Ljunggren, 2021)^[20]. Research indicates that teachers facing stagnant salaries often experience heightened stress and burnout, as financial insecurity diverts cognitive resources from pedagogical tasks (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). In Samoa, 47.9 percent of teachers report stagnant wages harm performance, citing stress (27 percent), reduced motivation (21 percent), and reliance on secondary jobs (25 percent), a pattern consistent with findings from low- and middle-income countries where moonlighting undermines instructional quality (ILO, 2021). Fifty percent of Samoan teachers claim no performance impact, driven by intrinsic motivations like passion for teaching (Han and Yin, 2016; Tagataese, Fa'avae and Esera, 2021)^[9, 24].

Mid-career teachers, constituting 75 percent of Samoa's workforce, face heightened vulnerability to burnout due to compounding stressors, stagnant pay, workload demands, and cultural obligations (e.g., *falavelave*). This aligns with theories of occupational fatigue, where prolonged financial strain erodes resilience (Alawi and Chowdhury, 2021)^[2]. Emotional exhaustion, reflected in responses like stressed and depressed, mirrors global trends in education sectors with underfunded compensation systems (OECD, 2020). However, Samoa's unique cultural-economic interplay underscores the need for localized interventions, such as mental health support and workload reforms, to mitigate attrition risks and preserve educational integrity (Tagataese, Fa'avae and Esera, 2021)^[24]. Addressing these dynamics is critical to sustain both teacher well-being and student outcomes in resource-constrained environments.

Workforce retention and sustainability

Teacher retention and workforce sustainability are critical challenges in education systems globally, particularly in developing nations facing aging workforces and recruitment shortfalls (Nguyen, Brown, and Kokotsaki, 2024)^[17]. Research highlights that financial dissatisfaction, driven by stagnant wages, is a primary driver of attrition, with up to 40 percent of educators in low-income countries considering career exits (OECD, 2022). In Samoa, 31.3 percent of teachers contemplate leaving the profession, a trend exacerbated by scarce early-career recruits (8.3 percent under 25) and mid-career burnout (75 percent aged 11–20 years in service). These patterns align with studies linking salary stagnation to generational shifts toward higher-paying sectors, particularly in small island economies with limited career alternatives (World Bank, 2021).

Sustainability risks are compounded by early attrition among senior teachers (only 11.1 percent over 20 years of

experience), reflecting global concerns about institutional knowledge loss (UNESCO, 2021). Mid-career dominance, while stabilizing in the short term, signals long-term vulnerabilities without interventions to rejuvenate recruitment. Mentorship programs, shown to improve early-career retention in Pacific contexts (ILO, 2019), and phased retirement policies, which extend senior teachers' contributions while transferring expertise (Ingersoll, 2020), emerge as viable solutions. However, Samoa's unique cultural-economic pressures, such as migration for better wages ("brain drain"), demand localized strategies (Macpherson and Macpherson, 2025)^[13]. Addressing retention and sustainability thus requires holistic reforms: competitive salaries, intergenerational support frameworks, and systemic recognition of teaching's societal value to counteract undervaluation and attrition (Macpherson and Macpherson, 2025)^[13].

Critical interventions and policy measures

Proposed solutions to address teacher salary stagnation and workforce challenges often emphasize structural, systemic, and culturally informed reforms (Persson, Zampoukos and Ljunggren, 2021)^[20]. Inflation-linked salary adjustments, advocated by 72.9 percent of Samoan teachers, align with global recommendations to tether wages to cost-of-living indices, safeguarding purchasing power amid inflationary pressures (World Bank, 2021). Similarly, performance-based pay, supported by 70.8 percent of respondents, remains contentious; while proponents argue it incentivizes excellence (OECD, 2020), critics caution against reliance on standardized metrics that ignore contextual factors like student socioeconomic diversity (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Union empowerment, endorsed by 60.4 percent of Samoan teachers, is widely recognized as vital for collective bargaining, yet its efficacy hinges on legislative support and transparency, factors often lacking in regions with weak labour frameworks (ILO, 2019). Culturally sensitive policies, such as stipends for *falavelave* obligations, reflect growing scholarly emphasis on tailoring interventions to local sociocultural realities (Schoeffel and Meleisea, 2025; Mafile'o, Vaka., *et al*, 2024)^[23]. Systemic equity measures standardized pay scales, anti-nepotism hiring, and equitable resource allocation, echoing public administration research advocating meritocracy and transparency to combat institutional biases (Grindle, 2017; Sachs-Cobbe, 2023)^[8, 22]. However, fragmented approaches risk perpetuating inequities. Samoa's findings underscore the need for integrated strategies, blending economic reforms (e.g., inflation indexing) with psychosocial supports (e.g., mental health resources) and cultural accountability. Such multi-pronged frameworks, as advocated in holistic education policy models (UNESCO, 2022), are critical to addressing both material and symbolic undervaluation of teachers, ensuring sustainable workforce retention and educational quality.

Narrative understanding and sociocultural aspects

Qualitative insights into economic challenges reveal how cultural norms and localized experiences shape workforce dynamics, particularly in education (Berríos, 2024)^[3]. In Samoa, open-ended responses from teachers, such as not enough money to pay bills and high cost of living, underscore the visceral impact of wage stagnation, echoing global findings that subjective financial stress often eclipses

objective income metrics (Talamonti, Schneider, *et al.*, 2023)^[25]. Cultural obligations like *falavelave*, which demand financial contributions to familial events, amplify this strain, merging fiscal realities with communal expectations (Persson, Zampoukos and Ljunggren, 2021)^[20]. Such practices, prevalent in Pacific collectivist societies, are underexplored in teacher well-being literature but align with studies on how cultural duties exacerbate economic precarity in low-income settings (Schoeffel and Meleisea, 2025; Persson, Zampoukos and Ljunggren, 2021)^[20, 23].

Systemic critiques, including claims that government favours government schools, highlight structural inequities in resource allocation, a pattern observed in post-colonial nations where centralized policies often neglect peripheral institutions (Egede, Walker and Williams, 2023)^[7]. These narratives align with broader critiques of nepotism and funding biases in public sectors (Transparency International, 2020; Ragauskas and Valeškaitė, 2020)^[21]. Qualitative data thus bridges macro-level analyses and lived experiences, exposing how cultural and structural factors interact to perpetuate disadvantage. UNESCO (2021) emphasizes culturally responsive policymaking to address such intersections, advocating reforms that honour local traditions while dismantling systemic inequities. Integrating these insights into Samoa's education strategy is vital to crafting solutions that resonate with teachers' realities, ensuring sustainability and equity in workforce support systems (Tagataese, Fa'avae and Esera, 2021)^[24].

Conclusion

Evidence confirms that addressing Samoa's teacher attrition and educational quality demands urgent, multifaceted action. Combating salary stagnation and pay inequity perceptions requires systemic reforms: inflation-linked wages, transparent pay frameworks, and culturally informed policies (e.g., supporting *falavelave* obligations). With such holistic, evidence-based interventions can ensure a sustainable and high-quality teaching workforce.

Research Methodology

Research design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively explore the impacts of stagnant salaries on teacher retention and educational quality in Samoa. The quantitative component utilized structured surveys to collect numerical data on salary trends, job satisfaction, and retention intentions. The qualitative component analyzed open-ended responses to capture nuanced perceptions of systemic challenges and cultural pressures. This triangulation approach strengthened the validity of findings by cross-verifying data sources (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Participants

A purposive sample of 48 primary school teachers across Samoa participated in the study. The participants were from 27 government, 16 private, and five mission schools from the urban and rural areas of Upolu. Thirty-one females, sixteen males, and one participant preferred not to disclose their gender, all within the age of 25 to over 45, participated in the survey. Seventy-five percent of teachers had 11-20 years of teaching experience, reflecting Samoa's mid-career-dominated workforce in the teaching profession.

Data collection

The data were collected over one week using a questionnaire survey, distributed to the primary school teachers to answer. After a week, the questionnaires were collected from the research participants.

Section A of the questionnaire is based on demographic details (age, gender, experience, and income). While section B is of Likert-scale questions assessing perceptions of salary adequacy, workload, and retention intentions and section C is an open-ended question exploring challenges (e.g., how have stagnant salaries affected your teaching?) and cultural pressures (e.g., Describe how *falavelave* impacts your finances).

Data analysis

Quantitative data: Interpreted and analysed into descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages), summarized salary trends and satisfaction levels. Cross-tabulations explored relationships between variables (e.g., income brackets vs. retention intentions). Results were visualized in graphs.

Qualitative data: Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) applied to open-ended responses. Initial coding identified recurring themes like financial strain, *falavelave* and systemic neglect, which were refined through iterative review. The principal researcher facilitated pattern recognition and asked other researchers to cross-check and validate the interpretations.

Ethical considerations

Participants received written consent forms detailing the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw. Data were anonymized, with identifiers removed during analysis. Cultural sensitivity was prioritized: questions about *falavelave* were framed respectfully, avoiding confusion or stigmatization.

Limitations

Sampling bias: Convenience sampling may limit generalizability, though demographic diversity mitigates this. Responses may reflect social desirability bias, particularly in critiques of government policies. The scope of research focuses on primary schools, excluding secondary and tertiary teachers, warranting future research.

Conclusion

This methodology balanced rigor and cultural relevance, offering a replicable framework for studying teacher welfare in Samoan contexts. By integrating quantitative trends with qualitative depth, the study illuminates actionable pathways for addressing salary stagnation and its repercussions on education quality.

Findings

Introduction

Samoan teachers face severe salary stagnation, with 74.5 percent reporting that their incomes lag behind the cost of living and 46.8 percent receiving no raises in the past five years, exacerbating disparities between early-career teachers and senior staff. Over 72 percent perceive their pay as inequitable compared to other professions, driven by systemic underfunding and low prioritization of education. These challenges fuel attrition, with 31.3 percent considering leaving the profession, while recruitment struggles persist among younger generations. Urgent reforms, such as

inflation-linked salaries, equitable performance metrics, and culturally sensitive policies, are important to retain the talent teaching workforce and safeguard Samoa's educational future.

Salary stagnation and financial strain

The financial precarity of Samoan teachers is a critical issue,

with 74.5 percent reporting that their salaries fail to keep pace with the rising cost of living. While 51.1 percent earn above \$1,000 fortnightly, a stark disparity exists: 10.6 percent survive on less than \$500, underscoring inequities between early-career teachers and senior staff. Over five years, 46.8 percent received no salary increase, and those who did saw raises below five percent, far outpaced by inflation.

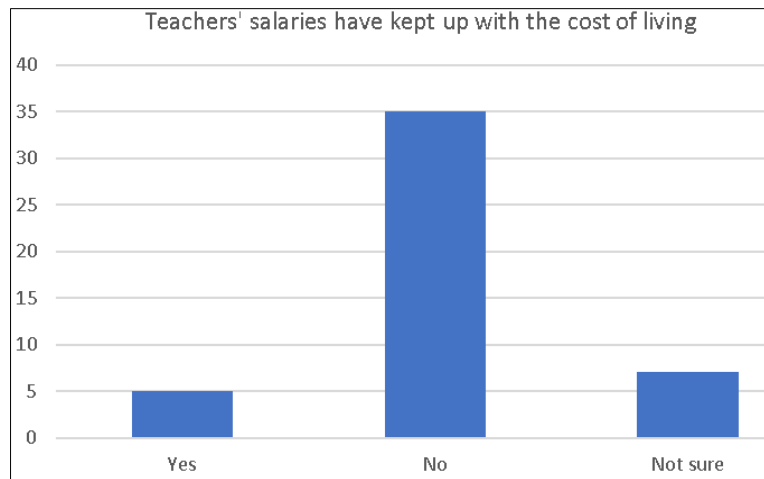


Fig 1: Primary teachers' salaries compared with the cost of living

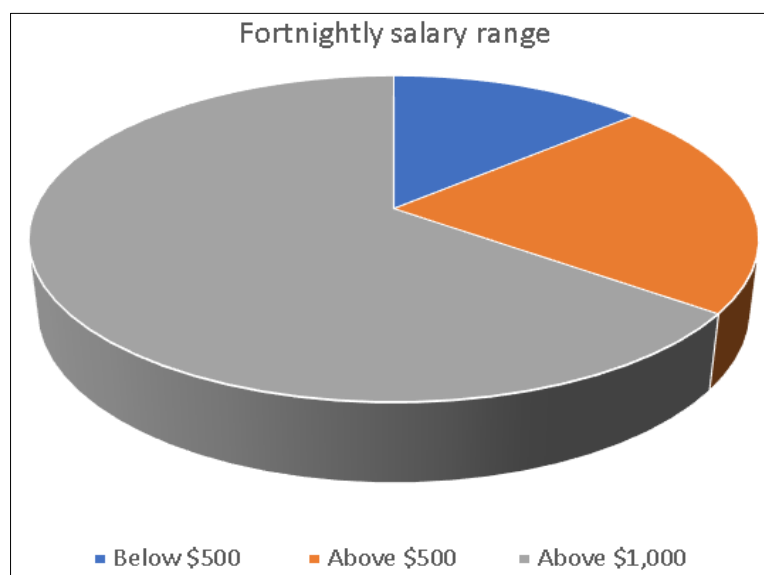


Fig 2: Primary teachers' fortnight salaries

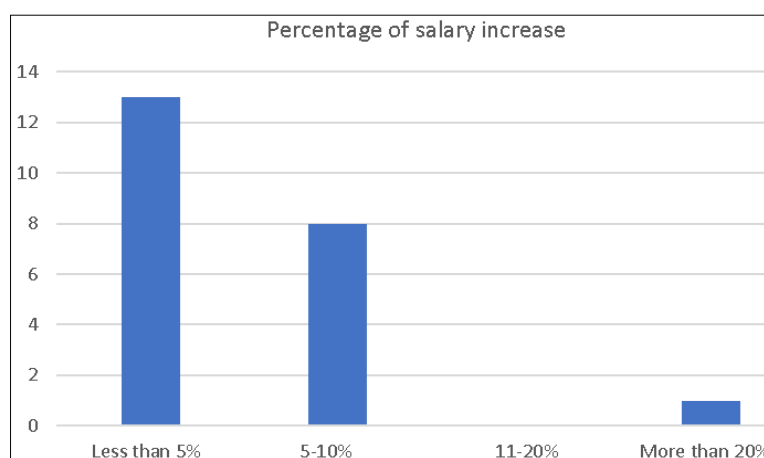


Fig 3: Percentage of teachers' salaries increase

Samoa's high living costs, particularly for essentials like food, housing, and utilities, exacerbate this strain. Teachers frequently cited an inability to meet basic needs, with many resorting to secondary jobs (e.g., tutoring, part-time work) to supplement income. This diversion of energy risks diluting classroom focus and pedagogical quality.

Cultural obligations, such as *falavelave* traditional familial duties requiring financial contributions to events like weddings or funerals, compound economic pressures. These dual burdens create a unique socio-economic challenge, merging fiscal realities with cultural expectations.

The stagnant of salaries erodes purchasing power, pushing teachers into financial survival mode, and the pay disparities demoralize early-career educators, who face the same living

costs as senior colleagues but lack equivalent compensation. The systemic neglect of salary adjustments threatens long-term retention and educational quality.

Perceptions of pay inequity

A striking 72.3 percent of teachers perceive their salaries as inferior to those in comparable professions, with only four percent viewing their pay as competitive. This sentiment reflects a broader societal undervaluation of teaching, particularly when contrasted with sectors like finance or technology. Gender dynamics further complicate this issue: women, who comprise 62.5 percent of the workforce in Samoa, face compounded inequities due to occupational segregation and wage gaps prevalent in workplaces.



Fig 4: Primary teachers' salaries compared to other professions

Perceived inequity fuels attrition, with 31 percent of teachers considering leaving the profession. Recruitment struggles are

evident, as only over eight percent of teachers are under the age of 25, signaling a lack of appeal to younger generations.

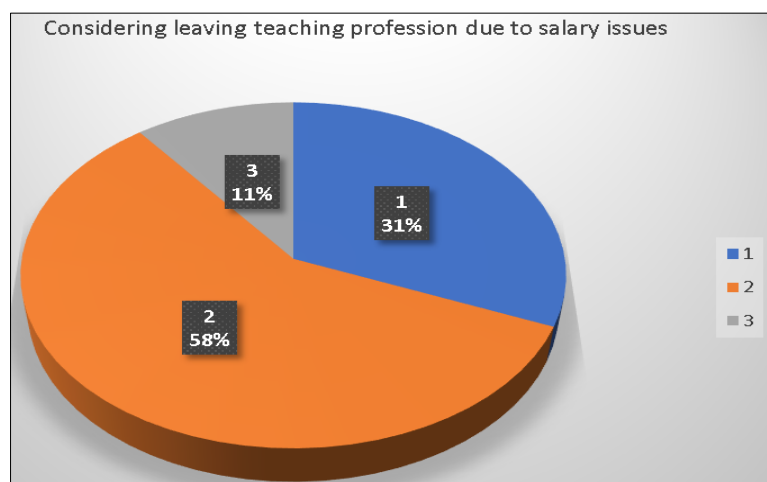


Fig 5: Primary teachers thinking of leaving teaching due to salary issues

Systemic and structural drivers

Teachers overwhelmingly attribute stagnant salaries to systemic failures: 76.6 percent cite low prioritization of education, and 74.5 percent blame insufficient government funding. Only 31.9 percent attribute stagnation to an

oversupply of teachers, rejecting labour-market explanations. Economic downturns, cited by 68.1 percent, exacerbate these issues, reflecting Samoa's vulnerability to global and regional economic shifts.

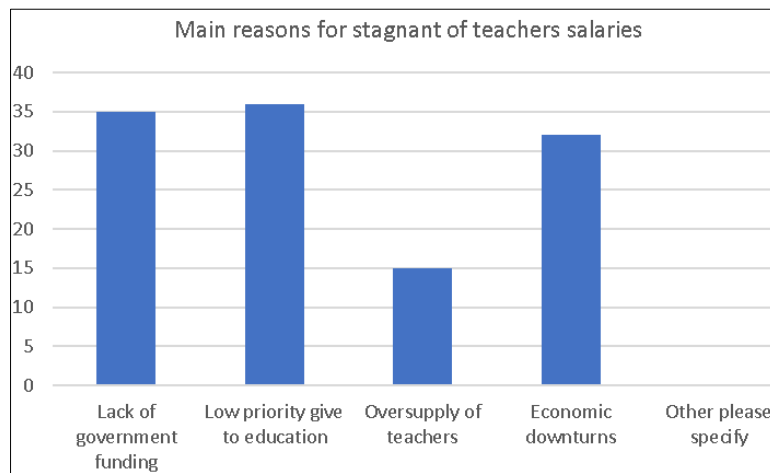


Fig 6: Reasons for teachers' salaries being stagnant

Teachers' union, while endorsed by 60.4 percent as part of the solution, is perceived as ineffective by many - only 25 percent rate them as very effective. This disconnect highlights gaps in union advocacy, transparency, and strategic influence. Policymakers must prioritize education

budgets and ensure funding reaches teacher salaries. Strengthening the union through legislative support and capacity-building could enhance its role in wage negotiations.

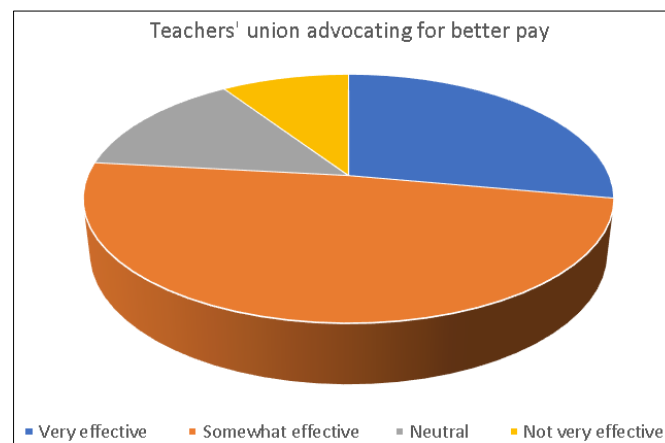


Fig 7: Teachers' union advocacy

Impact on job performance and morale

Nearly half of respondents (47.9 percent) report that stagnant salaries harm their job performance, citing stress (27 mentions), reduced motivation (21), and side jobs (25). Fifty

percent claim no performance impact, driven by non-monetary motivations like passion for teaching or student success.

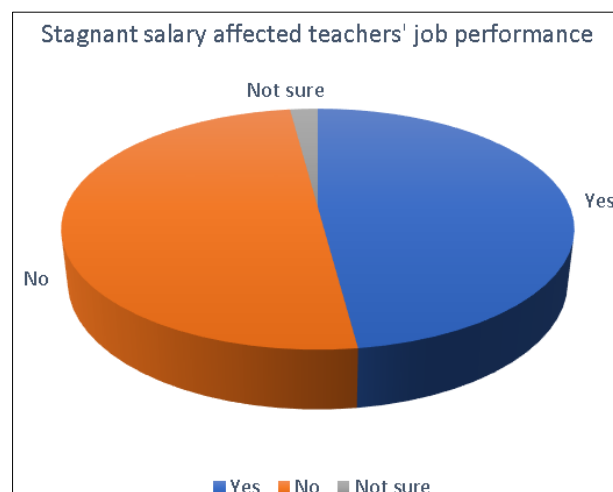


Fig 8: Stagnant of teachers' salaries affected their job performance

Mid-career teachers (75 percent of the workforce) are particularly vulnerable to burnout, balancing financial stress with heavy workloads. Emotional strain, captured in responses like stress and depression, merges with cultural obligations, creating a uniquely Samoan form of occupational fatigue. Targeted mental health resources and workload reductions are critical for at-risk teachers. Non-monetary incentives, such as professional development opportunities, could sustain morale among intrinsically motivated teachers.

Retention and workforce sustainability

Retention risks loom large: 31 percent of teachers have considered leaving the profession, while 10.4 percent remain ambivalent. The workforce skews heavily mid-career (75 percent aged 11–20 years in service), with only 11.1 percent over 20 years of experience, a sign of early attrition. Younger teachers are scarce (over eight percent under 25), raising concerns about future sustainability.

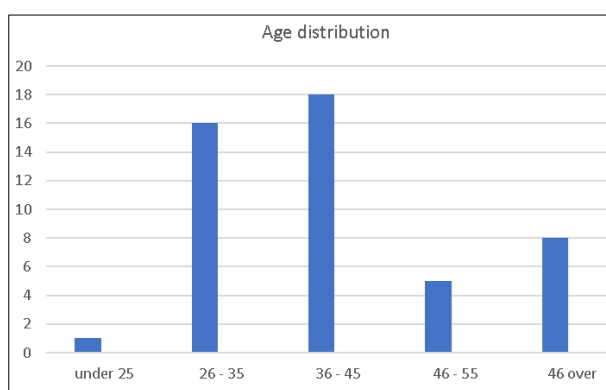


Fig 9: Primary teachers' age distribution in teaching

Mentorship programs and financial incentives for early-career teachers could rejuvenate recruitment. Phased retirement policies might retain senior educators' expertise while fostering intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Proposed solutions and policy recommendations

Teachers prioritize structural reforms: 72.9 percent advocate inflation-linked salary adjustments, and 70.8 percent support performance-based pay, albeit with reservations about equitable metrics. Over sixty percent of respondents endorse stronger union, yet skepticism about their efficacy and advocacy.

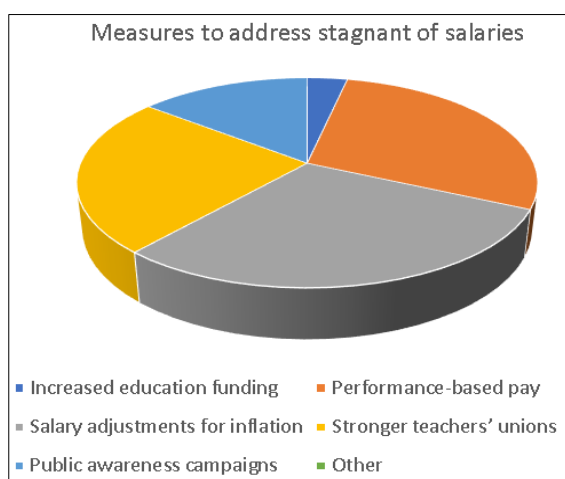


Fig 10: Measures to address salary issues

Legislate inflation adjustments to link salaries to cost-of-living indices to safeguard purchasing power. Equitable performance metrics to use holistic indicators (e.g., peer reviews, student engagement) rather than standardized test scores. Union empowerment to enhance collective bargaining rights and transparency in union activities. Culturally sensitive policies to provide stipends or financial planning support for family obligations. Systemic equity to standardize pay scales, reduce nepotism in hiring, and ensure equitable resource distribution across school types.

Qualitative insights and cultural context

Open-ended responses reveal profound struggles: not enough money to pay bills" and high cost of living" dominate narratives. Cultural obligations like *falavelave* strain limited incomes, while critiques such as government favouring government schools highlight systemic biases.

Reforms must integrate cultural awareness, addressing *falavelave* through community-driven solutions. Advocacy campaigns should amplify teacher voices in policymaking, ensuring reforms reflect grassroots realities.

Conclusion

Samoan teachers navigate a complex web of financial strain, systemic neglect, and cultural pressures. While inflation-linked pay adjustments and union reforms are urgent, holistic strategies addressing mental health, equity, and cultural context are equally vital. Without systemic accountability, Samoa risks a collapse of its education infrastructure. By valuing teachers as pillars of national development, through fair compensation, recognition, and support, the nation can secure a sustainable future for both teachers and students.

Discussion

Teachers form the cornerstone of any thriving society, shaping future generations through their dedication and expertise (UNESCO, 2021). Yet, in Samoa, this vital profession faces a crisis that threatens both teacher well-being and national development. Recent research reveals a stark reality: 74.5 percent of Samoan teachers report salaries lagging behind the cost of living, with nearly half (46.8 percent) experiencing no pay increase in five years (World Bank, 2022). This stagnation persists amid rising living costs and cultural obligations, such as *falavelave* traditional familial duties that strain already limited incomes (TuiSamoa, 2018). Compounded by systemic underfunding and political neglect, these challenges have created a workforce grappling with financial precarity, burnout, and attrition (OECD, 2021).

The data underscores profound disparities: while 51.1 percent of teachers earn above \$1,000 fortnightly, 10.6 percent survive on less than \$500, exacerbating inequities between early-career teachers and their senior counterparts (ILO, 2020). Such financial strain has forced many into secondary jobs, diverting focus from classrooms and eroding morale (Johnson & Lee, 2019). Alarming, 72.3 percent perceive their pay as inferior to comparable professions, fueling a retention crisis where 31.3 percent contemplate leaving teaching altogether (Han *et al.*, 2019)^[9]. This exodus risks a "brain drain," further destabilizing an education system already strained by a scarcity of young recruits -only eight percent of teachers are under the age of 25 (UNESCO, 2022). Structural failures lie at the heart of these issues. Over 75 percent of respondents attribute stagnant wages to systemic

neglect, including insufficient government funding and low prioritization of education (Grindle, 2017)^[8]. Despite 60.4 percent advocating for stronger unions, only 25 percent view them as highly effective, highlighting gaps in advocacy and transparency (ILO, 2019). Meanwhile, the emotional toll is undeniable: nearly half (47.9 percent) report stagnant salaries harm job performance, citing stress, reduced motivation, and side hustles (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Yet, the resilience of 50 percent, driven by passion for teaching, reveals a workforce divided between financial despair and unwavering commitment (Han & Yin, 2016)^[9].

Cultural and economic pressures unique to Samoa intensify these challenges. Open-ended responses paint a vivid picture of teachers struggling to balance *fa'avelave* obligations with soaring costs (TuiSamoa, 2018), while critiques of nepotism and resource bias (government favors government schools) underscore systemic inequities (Transparency International, 2020). Proposed solutions, such as inflation-linked salaries (72.9 percent support) and equitable performance metrics (OECD, 2020), must therefore be paired with culturally sensitive policies to address both economic and societal demands.

This study not only illuminates the urgent need for reforms, such as union empowerment, standardized pay scales, and mental health support (ILO, 2019), but also calls for a reimagining of teacher valorization in Samoa. Without systemic accountability and cultural awareness (UNESCO, 2021), the nation risks undermining its educational backbone, jeopardizing both current educators and future generations. The study prioritizes teacher perspectives via surveys and open-ended responses; future research should triangulate data with policymakers and econometric analysis. Sampling focused on active teachers' attrition trends may be understated. Cultural nuances like *fa'avelave* warrant deeper ethnographic inquiry.

The following findings and recommendations aim to chart a path toward sustainability, ensuring teachers are compensated and fairly treated. Implement inflation-indexed salaries (supported by 72.9 percent of research respondents) and equitable pay scales to close early and senior-career gaps; legislate transparent education funding and anti-nepotism hiring, empowering unions (endorsed by 60.4 percent of research respondents) with enforceable bargaining rights; introduce mental health resources and workload reforms to address burnout teachers; and scale mentorship for early-career teachers and phased-retirement policies to retain senior expertise.

Failure to act decisively and holistically jeopardizes Samoa's educational trajectory. Elevating teachers by introducing policies to embed equitable compensation, cultural dignity, and structural fairness. This foundation would enable teachers to flourish as true architects of Samoa's progress.

Conclusion

The evidence is unequivocal: Samoa's teaching profession stands on the brink of a crisis that threatens the very foundation of the nation's future. The stark realities revealed by this research – 74.5 percent of teachers drowning under living costs, 46.8 percent frozen without a raise for five years, and 72.3 percent feeling profoundly undervalued – are not mere statistics; they are an alarm bell.

This severe salary stagnation, coupled with crippling financial strain exacerbated by unique cultural obligations like *fa'avelave*, is actively dismantling the education system.

The consequences are already unfolding: demoralization, burnout, and a devastating attrition rate of 31.3 percent contemplating exit, while recruitment collapses as teaching loses all appeal for the younger generation (only 8 percent under 25).

Empower teachers' union through legislative backing and transparency to enable effective bargaining. Critically, policies must integrate cultural sensitivity, providing tangible support for *fa'avelave* obligations and combating systemic biases like nepotism in hiring and resource allocation. Valuing teachers requires more than rhetoric; it demands concrete action: fair compensation, robust mental health and workload support, and revitalized recruitment and retention strategies.

Samoa's educational future demands accountability: Recognize teachers as indispensable architects of progress and act decisively to address their needs to secure the educational quality standard.

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