

# Debt-free or Debt Fret: Survey on Public-school Teachers in the Philippines as Basis for Intervention

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## ABSTRACT

The decision of whether to be debt-free or in debt fret is crucial in developing interventions as it sets the tone for establishing policies by authorities regarding loans for public-school teachers in the Philippines. This study presents the propensity of public-school teachers to extinguish their debts, coupled with their proposed interventions, and the relationship between loan addiction and the ability to pay it out. Using descriptive-correlational research design and snowball sampling technique, 84 respondents composed of basic and tertiary level public-school teachers throughout the Philippines answered a Google survey form. This research found that public school teachers agree to pay off their debts though unsure if they have the willpower to do so ( $M= 3.7 \pm 0.47$ ). Moreover, some teachers are addicted to loans and in need of spiritual and emotional support. Generally, they did not acknowledge that they are addicted to loans ( $M=1.96 \pm 0.77$ ). Regardless, they proposed interventions of the government to reduce interest rates and provide legal and financial seminars. Further, the study reveals that there is no relationship between loan addiction and propensity to extinguish debts ( $p = 0.431$ ) which proves that those who are addicted to loans have less determination to pay their debts. The result of the study is useful in developing interventions for teachers who have the willpower and those who are identified as loan addicts. The next study will explore the mediating factors such as behavior and willpower linking loan addiction and propensity to extinguish debt.

**Keywords:** debt-free, debt fret, loan addiction, debt management, -

## INTRODUCTION

It is alarming that public school teachers (Department of Education) debts rose to P319 billion in two years reported in 2019 from government or private loans and the estimated debts might be higher now than what was estimated four years ago (Cruz, 2019). Public school teachers indeed received lower salaries compared to other professionals. However, based on the research conducted by Pabiona (2023) they are not underpaid though they tend to borrow more compared to other government employees. There are several reasons for their debt accumulation as cited by both Mencias-Tabernilla (2023) and Jordan (2022) such as immediate gratification from easy availment of loans from credit cards, loan sharks, and peddlers, education of the children, poor lifestyle choices, health issues, and lack of additional financial resources (only one parent works for the need of the entire family).

Borrowings may be unavoidable but can be minimized to a point where it will be manageable to extinguish in the long run. There are some solutions offered to minimize the debts of public-school teachers such as giving free financial and legal advice by Department of Education (DepEd) lawyers to protect them from too much exposure to interest in borrowing (Cervantes, 2023) and mostly conducting free seminars on financial literacy to help them manage their finances well (Casingal & Ancho, 2021; Jabar, 2021; Thang, 2012). The offered solutions to the existing problems of too much accumulation of debt may not be sufficient and beneficial if they are unwilling to forgo such. Most research does not ask the teachers if they are willing to be debt-free. Studying the reasons and solutions is good for understanding the situation faced by these teachers but it needs willpower to get out of a debt trap (Jordan, 2022). Thus, first and foremost, it is important to establish the willingness of these teachers to pay out their debt.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Stanley and Danko (2010) mentioned in their book, "The Millionaire Next Door: The Surprising Secrets of America's Wealthy," that,

“salary increases can equate to people increasing their spending: This can cause people with very high incomes to still live essentially paycheck-to-paycheck.”

Therefore, it might be possible to be immersed in debt even when teachers' salaries are increased. So then, it is good to examine the propensity of these teachers to extinguish their debt and the proposed intervention that they recommend. Additionally, delving into the relationship between loan addiction and public-school teachers' propensity to extinguish debt would shed more light on the possible interventions aiding them to be not in debt fret (Choi, 2022). The focus of this research is on public school teachers of basic and higher education in the Philippines who are currently in debt. Their decision to be debt-free or in debt fret is important in developing interventions.

Loan addiction does not happen to public school teachers only so, it is beneficial to use their experiences as an example of what intervention can be of use in this kind of situation. Like all other addictions, loan addiction needs some proper intervention and willpower to break the habit. Addiction is defined by Merriam-Webster (n.d.) as a condition of being dependent on a particular substance, thing, or activity. Similarly, being addicted to acquiring loans up to the point of losing income and properties and, at times, going into bankruptcy, is devastating to the whole family (Christensen, 2022). It is important therefore to determine how one's willpower can lead to successful intervention; thus, this study is beneficial.

## METHODS

A descriptive-correlational research design was used in this study. In correlational study, no variables are within the researcher's direct control or manipulation. The degree and/or direction of the association between two (or more) variables is reflected in a correlation. A correlation may go in either a positive or negative direction. The survey method was used to gather data and statistically analyze it to investigate relationships (Bhandari, 2021).

## Sampling

The population of this study was public school teachers in the Philippines of basic and tertiary levels who have experienced availing loans from different sources whether public or private. The snowball sampling technique is utilized to achieve the desired number of respondents who have availed of loans. Snowball sampling entails the recruitment of new units by existing units to make up the sample (Nikolopoulou, 2022). The researcher used several of the personal contacts who were public school teachers as primary respondents who then recruited their co-teachers to answer the survey. The desired sample of 80 respondents would be enough given the short timeframe of the study.

## Data Collection

The instrument used in this study is an online survey form utilizing Google Forms. The form consisted of four parts. The first part is the profile of the respondents according to teaching designation, educational attainment, years of employment in the government, current accumulated debt, and years of practicing debt accumulation. The second and third parts are a 5-point Likert scale used to measure the level of respondent's loan addiction and propensity to extinguish debt, respectively. The last part is the proposed interventions by the respondents.

The Google Form survey questionnaire does not collect the respondents' email addresses to preserve anonymity. Before the respondents proceeded to answer the questionnaire, they were asked about their willingness to participate as documented in the Google Form survey questionnaire. The information gathered was handled with utmost confidentiality.

## Variable Measurement

Table 1 shows the internal consistency of the questionnaire on 84 respondents using Cronbach's alpha which is interpreted as acceptable and usually measured against a baseline of 0.7 in which the items are sufficiently consistent at this level and above to suggest the measure is reliable (Frost, 2023).

**Table 1**  
*Reliability Statistics of the Scales Used*

	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Loan Addiction	.782	10
Propensity to extinguish debt	.703	10

## Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Excel and Jamovi 2.3.28.0-win 64. The profile of the respondents was presented using frequency and percentage distribution. The levels of loan

addiction and propensity to extinguish debts were evaluated using Mean and the respondents’ recommended interventions were arranged using frequency and percentage distribution. The relationship between loan addiction and public-school teachers' propensity to extinguish debt was tested using a chi-square correlation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Profile of the Respondents

There were 84 respondents who participated in the survey, which exceeded the desired target of 80. Their profile is categorized as shown in Table 2. There are five categories, and they are grouped according to types.

**Table 2**  
*Profile of the respondents*

Category	Type/Group	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Level of Teaching	Basic Education	64	76.2
	Tertiary	20	23.8
Highest degree earned	Bachelors	43	51.2
	Masters	32	38.1
	Doctorate	9	10.7
No. of years employed in the Government Educational Institution	1-10	49	58.3
	11-20	13	15.5
	21-30	18	21.4
	More than 30	4	4.8
Current accumulated debt	P1,000-P50,000	10	11.9
	P51,000-P100,000	9	10.7
	P101,000-P200,000	15	17.9
	P201,000-P400,000	19	22.6
	More than P400,000	28	33.3
	No current debt	3	3.6
No. of years practicing debt accumulation	1-5	58	69.1
	6-10	7	8.3
	11-15	4	4.8
	16-20	6	7.1
	More than 20	2	2.4
	Never into debt accumulation	7	8.3

Most of the respondents were from Basic education which comprised 76.2% (64 out of 84 respondents) and from Tertiary Education 23.8% (20 out of 84 respondents). As for the highest degree earned, most were bachelor’s degree holders of 51.2% (43 out of 84 respondents), followed

by Masters’ degree holders of 38.1% (32 out of 84 respondents), and Doctorate holders of 10.7% (9 out of 84 respondents). The majority of the respondents were employed in Government educational institutions for less than 10 years (58.3%), followed by 21-30 years of employment (21.4%), then 11-20 years of employment (15.5%), and lastly, more than 30 years (4.8%). Almost all of the respondents have current accumulated debt ranging from a thousand to more than P400,000 with a total of 96.4% or 81 respondents with only 3 claiming that they do not have current debt. It is noteworthy that 91.7% of the respondents were practicing debt accumulation or debt rolling ranging from a year to more than 20 years and only 8.3% claimed that they never accumulated debts.

### Loan Addiction

Table 3 presents the indication of loan addiction by public school teachers. It turned out that the respondents disagreed that they have loan addiction ( $M=1.96 \pm 0.77$ ) though they agreed that they like loans that are easily applied for (statement no. 7,  $M=3.5 \pm 1.36$ ).

**Table 3**  
*Mean of Loan Addiction*

	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. The thought of not having a credit card leaves me sleepless at night.	1.94	1.41	Disagree
2. I have the willpower to stop myself from applying for loans, but I intentionally decided to avail loans.	2.04	1.34	Disagree
3. I use credit for purchases knowing I have no available cash to pay it off.	1.65	1.06	Strongly Disagree
4. I keep my debt a secret from family and friends.	1.89	1.22	Disagree
5. I avoid looking at my banking and credit statements for fear of discovering how bad the situation has become.	1.76	1.13	Strongly Disagree
6. I am not interested in checking my financial statements issued by the school so I will not think much about how I earned for the month.	1.92	1.22	Disagree
7. I like it when loans are easily applied for.	3.51	1.36	Agree
8. I tend to buy things or properties on credit even if I do not need them.	1.48	0.87	Strongly Disagree
9. I am easily swayed to borrow more when others are doing the same thing.	1.65	.91	Strongly Disagree
10. I do not fear the consequences of borrowing since no one has been imprisoned yet.	1.62	1.07	Strongly Disagree
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>1.96</b>	<b>.77</b>	<b>Disagree</b>

*Legend:* Strongly Disagree = 1.0 -1.8; Disagree = 1.81-2.6; Neither/Nor Agree = 2.61-3.4; Agree = 3.41-4.20; Strongly Agree = 4.21-5.00

The denial of the respondents on their loan addiction does not coincide with their profile that most have loans and practiced debt accumulation for several years. In a study by the Philippine

Institute for Developmental Studies (PIDS), it was found that public school teachers have a 50 percent higher propensity to borrow than other government employees (Malipot, 2017) which is also proven in this study. The culture of borrowing as coined in the Filipino language as “loan dito, loan doon or Loandon,” has been in practice for several decades and Mama (2023) cited that it is common for public school teachers to take out loans from private lending companies, even when they don't need the money.

### Propensity to Extinguish Debt

Table 4 shows the propensity to extinguish debt by public school teachers and it turned out that they agreed to be debt-free ( $M= 3.7 \pm 0.47$ ). They have the desire to extinguish their debt though are unsure if they have the willpower to do so (statement no. 2,  $M=2.98 \pm 1.47$ ; statement no. 6,  $M=3.02 \pm 1.52$  and statement no. 10,  $M=3.0 \pm 1.38$ ). Willpower is an essential ingredient to get out of the debt cycle.

According to research, people who are losing their willpower are more likely to spend more money and buy more stuff than people who haven't used their willpower in a while. Research indicates that having low willpower may result in less control over expenditure (American Psychiatric Association, 2012). Thus, it affirmed the studies of Mencias-Tabernilla (2023) and Jordan (2022) where public school teachers were being exploited by loan sharks to borrow more knowing that they lacked the willpower to get out of the debt cycle. Despite this, their desire to extinguish their debt may spark the beginning of future interventions to strengthen their decision.

**Table 4**  
*Mean of Propensity to Extinguish Debt*

	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I do not intend to pay my loans as soon as possible.	1.45	0.95	Strongly Disagree
2. I have the willpower to stop myself from applying for loans, but I intentionally decided to avail loans.	2.98	1.47	Neither Agree/ Nor Disagree
3. I do not intend to pay my debts slowly until all of it is fully paid.	2.08	1.29	Disagree
4. Even with all the financial literacy seminars I attended it did not affect my decision to avail myself of more loans.	2.23	1.27	Disagree
5. I do not intend to do budgeting so that I can slowly pay my debt.	1.8	1.10	Strongly Disagree
6. At times, I cannot stop myself from applying for loans but deep inside me, I feel like I want to stop this debt accumulation.	3.02	1.52	Neither Agree/ Nor Disagree
7. In the future, I want to be debt-free.	4.86	0.64	Strongly Agree
8. I want to experience the freedom of not worrying about interest rates and principal payments.	4.8	0.71	Strongly Agree
9. I wish to have more take-home pay and be able to save more.	4.85	0.67	Strongly Agree
10. I seriously need emotional support since I do not have the willpower to stop this debt accumulation.	3.0	1.38	Neither Agree/ Nor Disagree



<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>0.47</b>	<b>Agree</b>
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Legend: Strongly Disagree = 1.0 -1.8; Disagree = 1.81-2.6; Neither/Nor Agree = 2.61-3.4; Agree = 3.41-4.20; Strongly Agree = 4.21-5.00

### Proposed Interventions

The respondents were asked what kind of interventions they needed to get out of their loan and Table 5 shows the arrangement of their answers from highest to lowest. The majority wanted the intervention of the government by creating policies to lower rates of their loans from the government and private lending institutions (statement no. 1, 65.5%), monitoring loan agencies, and raising their salaries (statement no. 6, 17.9%). Some need legal advice and seminars on protecting themselves from the damage of having loans (statement 2, 44% and statement 4, 23.8%).

Less than a third of the respondents need financial support services in handling their debts (statement no. 3, 30.9%) while some do not need legal advice and financial literacy seminars because they know how to get out of their loan cycle (statement no. 5, 17.9% and statement no. 7, 15.5%). It is noteworthy that few bold respondents acknowledged they are addicted to loans and need spiritual, emotional, financial, and legal support (statement no. 8, 11.9%, statement no. 9, 7.1%). As we compare this result with Table 3, we generally noted that the respondents disagreed they are addicted to loans, but it does not necessarily mean that there is no one among the respondents who are addicted to loans.

**Table 5**  
*Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Proposed Interventions*

	No. of Respondents	Percentage out of n-84 (%)
1. I hope that the government will help us control our debt accumulation such as creating policies on reducing the interest charge to us from government loans and coming from credit cards and loan sharks.	55	65.5
2. I need to be legally protected from my loans so I would like to attend some seminars regarding it.	37	44.0
3. I would like to enroll myself in financial support services such as loan coaching on how to slowly extinguish my debts.	26	30.9
4. I need some legal advice on how to get out of my debts.	20	23.8
5. I do not like to be assisted from getting out of my loans for I can handle it.	15	17.9
6. I like the government would raise my salary and monitor loan agencies.	15	17.9
7. I do not need to attend financial literacy seminars for I can handle my loans.	13	15.5
8. I would like to avail myself of spiritual and emotional support services since I feel like I need help much more than	10	11.9

my own for I have no willpower to break free from this loan addiction.		
9. I acknowledge that I am addicted to loans, so I need some spiritual, emotional, financial, and legal support.	6	7.1

A recent study sponsored by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) measuring the financial literacy of public-school teachers regarding their financial attitude, financial behavior, and financial knowledge it was found that they have higher financial literacy compared to the average population. Thus, there seems to be a discrepancy between teachers' indebtedness or savings behavior with the finding that they are more financially literate than the general public (Magante et al, 2023). Their being financially literate is the reason why only a few wanted to learn about financial literacy seminars.

Government agencies particularly the Department of Education endeavor to help teachers get out of their loans these include working with the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) on a debt buyout and lowering interest rates on loans through the growth of the Provident Fund (Mateo, 2017). Another is the free legal advice given by DepEd lawyers so that they can work out their loans together (Cervantes, 2023).

Regarding those respondents who acknowledge their loan addiction and have no willpower to get out of it, the government must assist and identify these teachers and properly refer them to financial and spiritual counselors. Without the necessary help, it might result in depression and even suicide since one of the indicators of loan addiction is not telling friends and family about the loans (Christensen, 2022). It would be heartbreaking if some teachers suffered from depression because of too many loans (Seide, 2021).

Among the comments of the respondents in the survey, one is worth mentioning about the plea to God to help the respondent be set free from all the addictions including loan addiction. To acknowledge support from a supreme being means this person badly needed comfort and strength coming from the Lord. In the book, “Mind, Character, and Personality,” authored by Ellen G. White it was mentioned that all unfounded fears would vanish if we could only truly believe this. Our lives would not be as disappointing as they are now if everything were in the hands of God, who is not perplexed by the myriad of worries or overwhelmed by their weight. Following that, many of us should have a spiritual rest we haven't had in a very long time.

### **Relationship between Loan Addiction and Public-school Teachers' Propensity to Extinguish Debt**

Table 6 presents the result of the chi-square test for independence to see if there is an association between loan addiction and the propensity to extinguish debt by public school teachers.

The result showed in Table 6 that the two independent variables, loan addiction and propensity to extinguish debt are not statistically significant ( $p = 0.431$ ). There is no association between the two categorical variables. Clearly stated, there is no relationship between loan addiction and public-school teachers' propensity to extinguish debt. Being addicted to loans does not relate to its capacity to pay off its debts. This is in support of the observation of Debtors Anonymous, an organization that helps loan addicts, that those who are addicted to loans generally



have less tendency to pay off the soonest possible time in which they may create a budget, but the execution is the issue that calls for a mental makeover for addicts (Fay, 2022).

**Table 6**  
*Result of Chi-square Test for Association*

	Value	df	p
x <sup>2</sup>	8.02	8	0.431
N	84		

## CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

The culture of borrowing in public schools cannot be easily reversed but those in authority can help reduce its effects. Several research has been conducted on this matter to understand the reason for accumulating debt and its relationship with mental and physical health but none on their willingness to pay their debts. Therefore, this research found that public school teachers agree to pay off their debts though unsure if they have the willpower to do so. Moreover, some teachers are addicted to loans and in need of spiritual and emotional support. Generally, though they did not acknowledge being addicted to loans. Regardless of their denial as loan addicts, they proposed interventions coming from the government by reducing interest rates and providing legal and financial seminars. Further, the study reveals that there is no relationship between loan addiction and propensity to extinguish debts which proves that those who are addicted to loans have less determination to pay their debts.

This study identifies two groups of public-school teachers which are: Group 1, those who have the willpower, and Group 2, those who acknowledge their loan addiction. The recommended interventions are based on the grouping mentioned. For group 1, it is recommended that the government assist them by hiring financial coaches to teach them how to prioritize repayment of their loans by selecting which one to extinguish first. For Group 2, the government should assist them in looking for spiritual, legal, and financial counselors until they fully recover from their addiction.

Generally, for all types of groups, the study recommends that the government create policies regarding controlling the interest rates of public and private financial institutions. Likewise, policies that loans will only be allowed to a teacher who has the financial capacity to repay it while, for those who are unable, free financial assistance may be extended depending on the immediate need. An endeavor through constant reminders from authority to maintain their dignity as a teacher by setting an example of a life of contentment that is, living within their means is also recommended. Government authorities will give the following: 1. seminars on the awareness of too much exposure to debt with its implications on mental and emotional health, 2. seminars on livelihood that do not contradict their work as an additional source of income, especially for those who are sole breadwinners. Lastly, for the next study, the mediating factors

such as behavior and willpower linking loan addiction and propensity to extinguish debt may be explored.

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