
Lived Experiences Of Secondary Mathematics Teachers On Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS)

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Abstract — The study explores the lived experiences of secondary mathematics teachers regarding the policy implementation of the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS) in the Schools Division Office of Urdaneta City. Guided by the Theories on Career Development, Human Capital, and Expectancy, the study addressed the gap in existing literature concerning the limited understanding of how teachers experience and interpret competency-based career progression policies in actual professional practice.

Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the study employed saturation sampling in the selection of the research participants, and data saturation was achieved after interviewing sixteen participants. Data were collected through validated semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method.

Findings revealed that teachers generally perceived ECPS as a structured and merit-based system that promotes professional growth and career advancement. However, participants also experienced challenges related to time constraints, financial limitations, unequal access to PD opportunities, excessive compliance-driven documentation, and concerns regarding fairness and consistency in evaluation processes. Teachers recognized PD as essential for competency enhancement and promotion eligibility, yet many perceived its implementation as uneven and heavily dependent on institutional support. Moreover, the study highlighted the dual nature of ECPS as both empowering and overwhelming.

Keywords: *expanded career progression system, career advancement, professional development, competency enhancement, policy implementation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Recent findings from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development through the 2024 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) highlight persistent challenges confronting the teaching profession worldwide, including increasing workload, declining retention intentions, and rising stress levels among teachers, particularly those in the early stages of their careers. These concerns point to a broader difficulty among education systems in sustaining a stable and motivated teaching workforce, often linked to limited opportunities for career progression and insufficient support for professional growth.

In the Philippine context, the Department of Education (DepEd) continues to strengthen the teaching profession in line with the 1987 Philippine Constitution, which emphasizes the need to attract and retain competent teachers through adequate compensation and opportunities for professional advancement. This commitment is further reinforced by Republic Act No. 4670, which guarantees teachers' rights to career progression and continuous professional development. Despite these policy efforts, career advancement remains a significant concern affecting teachers' job satisfaction and retention. Many Filipino teachers continue to experience career stagnation due to professional and personal constraints, prompting some to pursue employment abroad or leave the profession altogether (Cruz & Agpasa, 2024; Pagayanan, 2020). Supporting this trend, records from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration indicate the consistent annual deployment of approximately 1,500 Filipino teachers overseas.

In response to these global and national concerns, DepEd introduced the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS) through DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2025 and DepEd Order No. 34, s. 2025. Anchored on meritocracy and competency-based standards, the ECPS aligns career advancement with teachers' performance, competencies, and professional growth. Through its integration with the Results-Based Performance Management System (RPMS) and the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), the ECPS establishes structured pathways for advancement based on indicators such as education, training, experience, classroom and non-classroom observable indicators (COIs and NCOIs), and behavioral event interview (BEI).

However, despite the promise of the reform, studies continue to document implementation challenges. Teachers frequently report difficulties in interpreting competency indicators, aligning

requirements with instructional practice, accessing relevant training opportunities, managing documentation demands, and balancing professional growth requirements with existing workloads (Research Center for Teacher Quality, 2022; Dizon & Padilla, 2023; Bayod & Roque, 2021). Although teachers generally demonstrate high awareness of ECPS policies and promotion standards (Tabudlong & Alo, 2025; Santidad et al., 2025), research consistently reveals a gap between policy awareness and actual preparedness. Teachers continue to experience unclear guidelines, financial and workload constraints, limited access to professional development opportunities, and stress associated with evaluation and documentation processes (Navalta, 2024; Tabian, 2026). These findings suggest that while ECPS provides a structured framework for advancement, disparities in institutional support and resource accessibility continue to affect teachers' readiness and capacity to engage with the system effectively.

This gap is particularly evident in subject-specific contexts such as secondary mathematics education, where teachers face unique instructional and professional demands. Furthermore, the lived realities surrounding ECPS implementation—including workload pressures, documentation requirements, access to opportunities, and institutional support—remain underexplored from a phenomenological perspective. Understanding these experiences is essential because the effectiveness of educational reforms ultimately depends on how policies are experienced and enacted by teachers themselves.

Within the Schools Division Office of Urdaneta City (SDOUC), ECPS application records show a high qualification rate among Junior High School teachers, with 190 out of 195 applicants meeting the required standards, while disqualifications were primarily associated with unmet performance requirements. Among secondary mathematics teachers, 32 individuals have actively applied for ECPS positions, reflecting strong motivation for career advancement. However, the uneven distribution of applicants across career levels, particularly the concentration at the Teacher VI level, suggests variations in teachers' preparedness, qualifications, and capacity to meet advancement indicators. Preliminary observations within the division further indicate that many teachers feel only moderately prepared and continue to struggle with documentation demands, workload management, and competency requirements.

Given these conditions, there is a need to move beyond policy-oriented and descriptive analyses toward a deeper exploration of teachers' lived experiences within the ECPS. Thus, this study sought to explore the lived experiences of secondary mathematics teachers in the SDOUC as they navigate the Expanded Career Progression System through a phenomenological approach. By capturing the meanings teachers assign to their lived experiences with professional development, career advancement, and policy implementation, the study aims to identify critical gaps and generate evidence-based insights that can inform policy refinement and enhance the effectiveness of ECPS implementation within the Department of Education.

Literature Review

Career Development Theory explains career growth as a continuous and evolving process shaped by individuals' experiences, competencies, self-concept, and professional aspirations. Contemporary perspectives on career development emphasize that professional growth is not limited to promotion alone but also involves lifelong learning, adaptability, identity formation, and continuous improvement within one's profession (Rudolph et al., 2021). In education, teachers develop professionally through sustained learning experiences, instructional practice, reflection, and participation in opportunities that enhance their competencies and professional identity.

This perspective closely aligns with the goals of the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS). As outlined in DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2025, the ECPS is anchored on the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), which serves as the framework for teachers' professional growth and competency progression. The system promotes merit-based advancement by evaluating teachers based on demonstrated competencies, performance, professional learning, and instructional effectiveness. Through this framework, teachers are expected to continuously strengthen their professional capabilities as they progress across career stages.

The theory is particularly relevant to this study because phenomenological inquiry seeks to understand how individuals experience and assign meaning to a phenomenon. In this context, Career Development Theory helps explain how teachers perceive their own professional growth, preparedness, and advancement experiences under the ECPS. Rather than viewing promotion as a

purely procedural process, the study recognizes career progression as a lived and meaningful experience shaped by teachers' personal aspirations, challenges, and professional realities.

The study is also supported by Human Capital Theory, originally advanced by Becker, which views knowledge, skills, competencies, and experiences as forms of capital that increase professional productivity and value when strengthened through education, training, and continuous learning. In educational settings, teachers' competencies are considered valuable professional assets that contribute to both career advancement and instructional effectiveness (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2021).

Within the ECPS, this perspective is reflected in the way career progression is linked to measurable professional qualifications and competencies. The Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) and the Results-Based Performance Management System (RPMS) emphasize indicators such as educational attainment, professional development participation, instructional performance, leadership engagement, and teaching experience. Advancement from Teacher I to higher career stages is therefore viewed as a process of continuously developing and demonstrating professional competencies.

However, Human Capital Theory also acknowledges that opportunities for professional growth are influenced by institutional conditions and access to support systems. Teachers' ability to participate in training, pursue graduate studies, prepare promotion documents, and meet competency requirements may be affected by workload demands, limited resources, and unequal access to professional development opportunities (OECD, 2024). These conditions may shape how teachers experience preparedness and advancement within the ECPS.

From a phenomenological perspective, the theory supports the inquiry by allowing the study to explore how teachers personally experience professional development and competency-building efforts. Instead of viewing competencies merely as measurable indicators, the study examines how teachers interpret the value of their professional investments, the challenges they encounter, and the meaning they attach to their growth and advancement experiences.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the level of strategic leadership of school heads in the implementation of This phenomenological study aimed to explore the lived experiences of secondary mathematics teachers regarding the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS) in relation to professional development, career advancement opportunities, and policy implementation in the Department of Education.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers describe their lived experiences on the preparedness of current professional development (PD) programs in enhancing their competencies for higher-level roles under ECPS?
2. What meanings do teachers attach to participation in professional development activities as translated into concrete opportunities for career advancement?
3. In what ways do teachers perceive the clarity and accessibility of ECPS pathways linked to professional development within DepEd?
4. How do teachers describe the way PD-related career prospects shape teachers' motivation, job satisfaction, and intention to remain in the teaching profession?
5. What policy recommendations may be derived from the lived experiences of teachers regarding ECPS implementation?

II. METHODOLOGY

Research methods and techniques used in this study are detailed in this chapter. This includes the study's research design, demographics, and location, data gathering tools, data collection protocols, and treatment of data.

Research Design and Strategy

This study used a qualitative phenomenological research approach to investigate secondary teachers' experiences with the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS). Phenomenology is relevant because it aims to understand the substance of participants' experiences rather than to assess program effectiveness.

Specifically, this study employed descriptive phenomenological grounded in Husserlian Philosophy, analyzed using the 7-step Colaizzi (1978) method to understand the essence of teachers' lived experiences on the ECPS. The study depends on detailed descriptions of participants' experiences to reflect the importance they place on professional development, career advancement, and policy implementation within the Department of Education.

Moreover, the study used in-depth qualitative inquiry to understand better the common themes and essences of teachers' experiences as they navigated the ECPS. This technique is congruent with qualitative research traditions that prioritize depth, context, and interpretation over measurement and statistical generalization (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The researcher conducted a qualitative study in the form of interviews among the saturated sample of participants to explore their lived experiences from their participation in ECPS, in relation to professional development, career advancement opportunities, and policy implementation, including the challenges they met, actions they have taken to address the challenges, and the opportunities that emerged from their participation. The interview provided the researcher with an in-depth, clear understanding of secondary mathematics teachers' lived experiences on the ECPS.

Population and Locale of the Study

This study focused on Junior High School (JHS) secondary mathematics teachers employed by the Schools Division Office of Urdaneta City (SDOUC) in the school year 2025-2026 who applied for any higher teaching position during the reclassification.

The participants were chosen because they directly participated in ECPS implementation and were required to comply with its competency indicators, as outlined in DO No. 24, s. 2025. The researcher used purposive sampling in determining the qualified participants, with secondary mathematics teachers recording the highest number of applicants among secondary teachers in SDOUC.

This study first identified ECPS applicants to include as participants. Specifically, the study's participants are the 32 secondary mathematics teachers in the Urdaneta City Division who applied for the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS) and represent varying teaching career line positions at the junior high school level. By including the entire population of ECPS applicants in this specialization, the study ensured information-rich lived experiences of teachers with direct, relevant experience with the ECPS process.

In addition, the study utilized data saturation as the guiding principle for determining the sufficiency of interview data. All 32 teachers were identified as potential participants; however, interviews continued until the researcher reached data saturation, that is, when no new themes, insights, or meanings emerged from subsequent interviews. Data saturation allows the researcher to determine when sufficient depth and richness of data have been achieved, ensuring a thorough understanding of the lived experiences of secondary mathematics teachers in relation to the Expanded Career Progression System (Webster & Oliveros, 2024).

After conducting interviews with sixteen (16) participants, no new significant statements, meanings, or themes emerged, indicating that the interview had achieved data saturation. Thus, the researcher no longer pursued additional interviews, as further data collection is unlikely to yield new insights into the lived experiences under investigation. Hence, saturation was reached at 16 participants, comprising the total number of interviewees.

Data Gathering Tool

The researcher used a validated interview guide aligned with ECPS competency indicators, modified to fit the demographic and professional characteristics of the teacher-participants. The instrument includes additional personal questions to delve into participants' experiences, particularly the challenges they faced during their participation in the ECPS, the actions they took to address them, and the opportunities that emerged from their participation.

To ensure the validity and appropriateness of the interview guide, the instrument underwent a content and face validation process conducted by five experts with backgrounds in educational management, qualitative research, and educational policy implementation. The validators examined the interview guide using the adopted Research Instrument Validation Tool developed by San Jose (2020), found in Appendix F.

The validation process focused on three major areas: Ethical Consideration, Construction of Questions, and Accuracy/Thoroughness of Questions to guarantee that the interview guide is ethically sound, well-constructed, comprehensive, and appropriate for gathering rich qualitative data regarding the participants' lived experiences on ECPS.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before implementing the study, the researcher first secured permission from the Schools Division Superintendent to conduct the study among selected secondary mathematics teachers within the Schools Division Office of Urdaneta City. After obtaining approval, the researcher coordinated with school heads and prospective participants to explain the objectives, nature, and significance of the study.

Participation in the study was strictly voluntary. To avoid any form of coercion or perceived pressure, recruitment was conducted directly by the researcher without the involvement of school heads, supervisors, or other administrators in participant selection. Participants were informed that their decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from the study would not affect their employment status, performance evaluation, or professional standing in any way.

Prior to the conduct of the interviews, the participants were provided with an Informed Consent Form containing the purpose of the study, interview procedures, duration of participation, confidentiality measures, possible risks, benefits, and data privacy provisions. The researcher carefully explained the contents of the consent form and allowed participants to ask clarificatory questions before signing the document. Participants were likewise informed that the interviews would be audio-recorded with their permission to ensure accuracy of data collection and transcription.

The researcher utilized a validated semi-structured interview guide composed of opening/background questions and twenty-two (22) main interview questions aligned with the study's research objectives and ECPS competency indicators. The interview guide covered participants' lived experiences regarding educational attainment, relevant training, teaching experience, RPMS performance, classroom observable indicators (COIs), non-classroom observable indicators (NCOIs), career advancement, motivation, retention, and policy recommendations related to ECPS implementation.

The interviews were conducted individually through face-to-face meetings in private and safe locations convenient for the participants, while some interviews were conducted through discreet online platforms when necessary. The interview setting was intentionally arranged to ensure privacy, minimize interruptions, and encourage participants to speak openly and honestly regarding their experiences and perceptions of ECPS implementation. Supervisors, school heads, and coworkers were not present during the interviews to protect participants from fear of judgment or professional discomfort.

Each interview lasted up to sixty (60) minutes, as indicated in the informed consent form and validated interview instrument. During the interview proper, the researcher established rapport and maintained a conversational and non-threatening atmosphere to encourage participants to narrate their experiences freely and comfortably. Follow-up and probing questions were used to reinforce responses, clarify meanings, deepen reflections, and elicit richer descriptions of participants' lived experiences. Reinforcement techniques such as paraphrasing, reflective listening, acknowledgment cues, and clarification prompts were likewise employed to ensure the

accuracy and completeness of participants' narratives while maintaining the phenomenological nature of the inquiry.

Throughout the interview sessions, the researcher audio-recorded the conversations with participants' consent and simultaneously documented important observations, non-verbal cues, and significant statements through note-taking. These operational procedures helped preserve the authenticity and richness of the gathered data for subsequent analysis.

After each interview, the researcher transcribed the recorded responses verbatim to ensure accuracy and completeness of the participants' statements. The transcription process involved careful listening and repeated review of audio recordings to capture participants' exact words, pauses, emphases, and meanings. The researcher reviewed the transcripts multiple times to become immersed in the data and to verify consistency between the audio recordings and written transcripts.

To further strengthen the credibility of the study, member checking was conducted when necessary by contacting selected participants for clarification and confirmation of interpreted responses and meanings.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results and discussions of data based on the phenomenological study employed through an interview of the participants that includes an in-depth discussion on the lived experiences of secondary mathematics teachers on the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS).

TABLE 1
EMERGED THEMES ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY MATHEMATICS TEACHERS ON PREPAREDNESS OF CURRENT PD PROGRAMS IN ENHANCING HIGHER COMPETENCIES UNDER ECPS

Themes	Codes	Sample Verbatim Response (with Participant Reference)
Financial, Time, and Workload Constraints	Cost of graduate studies; Lack of financial assistance; Limited scholarships	<i>"... but financial and time constraints limit many teachers. ...though challenging, especially for teachers with heavy workloads."</i> (Participant E)
Limited Institutional Support and Opportunities	Lack of awareness of programs; Insufficient DepEd support	<i>"... the support provided is really low since we are not aware of any program or support from the DepEd."</i> (Participant A)
Unequal Access to PD-Related Activities	Same participants selected; Restricted opportunities; Unequal distribution of support; Selective access	<i>"Support is provided... however, only a few are able to benefit from it."</i> (Participant C) <i>"Opportunities such as seminars and advanced studies are valuable; however, access can be uneven."</i> (Participant K)
Overemphasized and Compliance-Driven Documentation	Difficulty retrieving documents; Portfolio issues; Documentation burden; Superficial reporting; Tick-box compliance; Lack of authenticity	<i>"...it has been difficult to retrieve the documents we need as MOVs..."</i> (Participant A) <i>"...teachers end up submitting compliance-drive, superficial or 'tick-the-box' accomplishment reports..."</i> (Participant C)
Concerns on Fairness, Validity, and Reliability	Self-assessment bias; Lack of validation; Inequity and inconsistency in ratings	<i>"The RPMS performance ratings alone... are not enough... ratings are not being properly validated..."</i> (Participant A)
Experience as the Greatest Source of Readiness	Accumulated teaching experience; Foundation for higher roles; Professional maturity	<i>"My years of teaching Mathematics helped me develop classroom management skills, leadership abilities, and deeper content mastery..."</i> (Participant I)

Financial, Time, and Workload Constraints

Financial, time, and workload constraints emerged as major realities shaping teachers' lived experiences in pursuing professional development and career progression under the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS). Although participants acknowledged the value of ECPS in promoting advancement and professional growth, many described difficulties in sustaining graduate studies, trainings, and professional development activities while fulfilling their teaching responsibilities. Their experiences reflected a continuous effort to balance career aspirations with the practical limitations of the teaching profession.

Several participants identified financial limitations as a major barrier to pursuing graduate education and upgrading qualifications. Participants shared that many teachers are unable to continue their studies because of limited finances, insufficient support mechanisms, and lack of time. One participant even narrated stopping graduate studies temporarily due to financial and workload pressures before eventually reenrolling. These narratives suggest that while ECPS provides opportunities for advancement, teachers' access to these opportunities largely depends on personal resources, resilience, and institutional support.

Workload demands also strongly influenced teachers' professional development experiences. Participants commonly described the challenge of balancing classroom instruction, administrative tasks, graduate studies, and ECPS requirements simultaneously. Although school leaders and the Department of Education encourage professional growth, teachers still perceived the process as mentally and physically demanding. The pressure of meeting multiple expectations often required significant time management, sacrifice, and endurance.

The findings indicate that career progression under ECPS is not solely determined by competence and motivation, but also by structural and contextual conditions affecting teachers' professional lives. Participants viewed professional development as necessary and meaningful; however, they also experienced the process as difficult when institutional expectations intersected with limited financial capacity, lack of time, and heavy workload responsibilities. Consequently, access to career advancement opportunities may not be equally attainable for all teachers.

This finding supports the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023), which identified workload and insufficient time as major barriers to teacher participation in professional learning. Similarly, Tabudlong and Alo (2025) found that financial

limitations, overlapping school responsibilities, and time constraints hinder teachers' compliance with ECPS requirements. The findings may also be explained through Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964), which states that motivation decreases when individuals perceive that obstacles make desired outcomes difficult to achieve.

TABLE 2
EMERGENT THEMES ON CONTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPATION IN PD
ACTIVITIES AS CONCRETE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Themes	Codes	Sample Verbatim Response (with Participant Reference)
Direct Contribution of PD to ECPS Eligibility	Points system; Required training hours; Credential support	<i>"...completing the required number of hours in training gave me 10 points."</i> (Participant A) <i>"...Continuous learning equips teachers with updated competencies aligned with DepEd standards."</i> (Participant D)
PD as Enhancement of Competencies for Advancement	Skill development; Knowledge enhancement; Leadership competencies	<i>"PD enhances competencies aligned with higher career stages..."</i> (Participant B) <i>"Most trainings I attended developed professional growth beyond promotion points and enhanced everyday work experiences."</i> (Participant N)
Issues on PD Recognition and Standardization	Unequal recognition; Accreditation concerns; Diploma mills	<i>"...not all trainings are equally recognized..."</i> (Participant C) <i>"...PD comprises only a small percentage of the total points (around 10%),..."</i> (Participant M)
Limited Impact of Generic or Misaligned PD	Minimal applicability; Low relevance; Weak contribution to advancement	<i>"...general seminars... impact on my advancement was minimal..."</i> (Participant H)
PD as Strengthening Promotion Credentials	Portfolio enhancement; Competency indicators; Documentation support	<i>"...strengthened my portfolio and competency indicators during promotion."</i> (Participant B) <i>"PD participation strengthens our competencies and adds to our credentials."</i> (Participant I)

Direct Contribution of PD to ECPS Eligibility

Eligibility, as experienced by the participants, is not merely a technical label referring to compliance with qualification standards under ECPS (DO 24 s. 2025), but a lived state of becoming ready—of slowly and deliberately building oneself toward advancement. It reflects the feeling of being prepared, recognized, and worthy of stepping into a higher professional role.

Across the participants' narratives, professional development emerged as more than a procedural requirement; it is deeply felt as a turning point in their professional journey. It carries a sense of investment, effort, and hope—where every training attended is not just an obligation fulfilled, but a meaningful step closer to career growth. For them, PD becomes a lived pathway toward recognition and mobility, rather than a detached checklist of compliance.

Participant A expressed this experience with a sense of affirmation, noting that PD participation directly shaped his eligibility for ECPS progression. He associated training not only with acquired points but with the quiet satisfaction of seeing his efforts translated into tangible movement forward in his career. Similarly, Participant B spoke of PD as something that validates his professional journey, emphasizing how it provides both the credentials and the documentary proof that his growth is real and acknowledged. Participant D echoed this conviction, reflecting a strong belief that eligibility is inseparable from continuous professional learning, as if advancement itself is rooted in one's willingness to grow.

By implication, the participants' lived experiences reveal that professional development is felt as both empowering and demanding—it carries the weight of responsibility, yet also the promise of advancement. In essence, PD is experienced not simply as a requirement for ECPS eligibility, but as the very lifeline of professional movement, shaping how teachers see themselves: not as stagnant in position, but as continually evolving toward something higher, more competent, and more recognized within the profession.

TABLE 3
EMERGENT THEMES ON CLARITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF ECPS PATHWAYS LINKED TO PD

Themes	Codes	Sample Verbatim Response (with Participant Reference)
General Clarity and Structured Framework	Organized system; Clear standards; Defined career stages	<i>“The ECPS guidelines are generally clear, especially regarding career stages and competency requirements. ECPS pathways are more structured and transparent compared to previous systems”</i> (Participant B)
Need for Orientation and Capacity Building	Lack of formal orientation; Need for clarification sessions; Guidance support	<i>“The guideline was confusing to me how to earn points based on the trainings and education I earned. It would be better if there was an orientation .”</i> (Participant G)
Complexity and Overwhelming Nature of Guidelines	Too detailed; Information overload; Difficult to process	<i>“The ECPS guidelines are comprehensive but can be overwhelming.”</i> (Participant D)
Need for Simplification and Better Dissemination	Simplified guidelines; Clearer communication; Standardized implementation	<i>“...need for simplified orientation sessions and clearer dissemination”</i> (Participant D) <i>“...DepEd should streamline documentation by simplifying requirements.”</i> (Participant E)
Merit-Based and Growth-Oriented System	Self-improvement focus; Reduced competition; Performance-based progression	<i>“The system allows teachers to progress based on demonstrated competencies, performance, professional development, and leadership contributions.”</i> (Participant I)
Need for Strategic Planning and Effort	Goal setting; Deliberate preparation; Continuous improvement	<i>“Teachers must deliberately invest in graduate studies, research, and leadership roles.”</i> (Participant D)

General Clarity and Structured Framework

Clarity refers to the quality of the ECPS framework being easily understood among the teachers, and the guidelines are coherent and transparent. Meanwhile, a structured framework implies a systematic, orderly, and methodical approach of the ECPS.

Participant B cited that there is general clarity regarding each career stage and competency requirements. Meanwhile, Participant H elaborated on how the ECPS becomes generally clear and structured. He expressed his great understanding by explaining that this ECPS systematically outlines the criteria for eligibility, performance expectations, and evidence needed for promotion. After a thorough reading of the guidelines, Participant I assured the general accessibility and realism of the ECPS, mainly because of the meaningful, structured, and merit-based framework that allows teachers to progress and demonstrate competencies based on certain components, but still with certain considerations.

In general, participants experience the ECPS as a system that gives form and direction to their professional journey, where career progression becomes something they can gradually understand, anticipate, and work toward. In their lived accounts, the presence of clearly defined stages and competency expectations provides a sense of orientation, allowing them to situate their efforts within a broader professional pathway rather than viewing advancement as uncertain or arbitrary. This structure is felt as a kind of grounding framework that helps make sense of what is required of them as teachers and how their growth is being recognized over time.

At the same time, the clarity of eligibility criteria, performance expectations, and required evidence is experienced as something that organizes their professional efforts into identifiable and measurable directions. Teachers come to understand that their development is not separate from the system, but is continuously being shaped and assessed through these defined standards. This creates a lived sense of guided progression, where professional growth is not only pursued individually but is also framed and supported by a system that maps out what advancement looks like in practice.

TABLE 4
EMERGENT THEMES ON HOW PD-RELATED CAREER PROSPECTS SHAPE
MOTIVATION, JOB SATISFACTION, AND RETENTION

Themes	Codes	Sample Verbatim Response (with Participant Reference)
PD as a Strong Motivator for Professional Growth	Lifelong learning; Self-improvement drive; Continuous development	<i>“Opportunities for career progression through PD significantly increase my motivation.”</i> (Participant B)
Recognition and Reward as Motivational Factors	Validation of effort; Professional recognition; Achievement	<i>“PD opportunities make me feel supported and recognized by DepEd...”</i> (Participant H)
PD and ECPS Enhance Job Satisfaction	Professional fulfillment; Recognition; Satisfaction through growth	<i>“Yes, PD and ECPS opportunities positively influence my job satisfaction.”</i> (Participant B) <i>They give a sense of direction and professional growth. When teachers see a clear future within the system, they are more likely to remain in the profession.</i> (Participant D)
Professional Growth Leads to Retention	Staying in profession; Career sustainability; Commitment	<i>“...strengthen my intention to stay in the teaching profession.”</i> (Participant B) <i>“Promotion through ECPS validates the skills developed through professional development, positively influencing job satisfaction and retention.”</i> (Participant N)
PD and ECPS as Value-Enhancing Systems	Feeling valued; Professional dignity; Institutional support	<i>“...make the teacher feel valued in the chosen career.”</i> (Participant O)

From the participants' narratives, five themes emerged, which are: a) PD as a strong motivator for professional growth; b) recognition and reward as motivational factors. c) PD and ECPS enhance job satisfaction; d) professional growth leads to retention; and e) PD and ECPS are value-enhancing systems, which describe how professional development-related career progression opportunities influence teachers' motivation, job satisfaction and retention.

PD as a Strong Motivator for Professional Growth

A strong motivator for professional growth refers to an intense, internal or external driving force that compels teachers to continuously improve their competencies in the form of professional development, with the major goal to advance in their career.

A central finding from the study is that PD-linked career progression acts as a strong motivator for continuous professional growth. Teachers reported that the alignment of PD activities with promotion requirements encourages them to pursue higher education, engage in training, and refine their competencies.

“Opportunities for career progression through PD affect my motivation as a teacher through personal and professional growth. This reminds me that I can improve and move forward in my career. This inspires me to continue learning and accepting new challenges in my profession. It also strengthens my commitment to my work as a teacher.” (Participant G)

Participant A emphasized that ECPS strengthened their motivation to pursue advanced studies, engage in trainings, develop instructional interventions, and assume leadership roles, as these are essential for promotion and reclassification. Participant B similarly highlighted that the possibility of merit-based promotion fosters continuous improvement and lifelong learning, reinforcing a strong commitment to professional growth.

Aside from the positive affirmations mentioned by the participants on the motivation derived from the opportunities of the career progression through professional development, other participants brought up their motivation to push harder. Participants in general that a structured career progression system motivates them to enhance competencies and pursue higher

qualifications because PD-based progression provides them sense of growth, recognition, and encouragement that sustains their motivation to continuously improve their skills and maintain dedication to quality

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Participants' overall responses indicate that their lived experiences on the ECPS are both positive and challenging. Many participants consider ECPS as a reform program that professionalizes the process. Nevertheless, the experiences of the participants revealed that it could also be equally challenging and demanding, emphasizing the pressures that come from juggling teaching and documentation.

Despite these struggles, some participants noted positive changes compared to the old system, with one noting that ECPS was already much better than the previous system. All in all, based on the results presented in this chapter, the data reveal that, although ECPS is perceived as a revolutionary and promising policy, it requires attention to other factors to ensure its effective implementation.

In other words, while ECPS helps teachers develop a sense of motivation, job satisfaction, and remain in their profession due to the standards-based and merit-based framework of the new system, their commitment remains at stake if the challenges raised from the participants' narratives remain unaddressed.

It is for these reasons that the researcher contemplated developing a strategic policy brief for the DepEd Division Office, School Leaders, and Teachers that addresses the gaps mentioned in the current study. The output derived from the results of the study titled: Bridging Equity, Support, and Efficiency (ESE) Gaps in the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS) is presented on the succeeding pages.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations based on the analysis and interpretation of data.

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn: Professional development (PD) contributes to teachers' competency enhancement; however, teachers' preparedness for higher-level roles is largely shaped by experience rather than formal PD programs. While PD provides foundational knowledge and exposure to new strategies, it is often insufficient in isolation due to personal constraints, limited relevance, inconsistent access, and a lack of sustained institutional support. As a result, competency development occurs unevenly, with teachers relying heavily on hands-on teaching experience to meet ECPS expectations. Professional development is affirmed as both a requirement and a strategic mechanism for career advancement, particularly in strengthening promotion credentials through documented evidence such as training hours, competencies, and portfolio outputs. However, its actual impact is conditional rather than absolute, as its numerical weight in the ECPS remains limited and its effectiveness depends heavily on alignment, relevance, and recognition. Furthermore, PD serves as a dual-function mechanism—enhancing promotion credentials and developing practical and research skills—but its value is diminished when training is generic, compliance-driven, or inconsistently recognized. This creates a disconnect between effort and reward, leading to perceptions that PD is procedural rather than transformational.

The ECPS is generally perceived as structured, competency-based, and theoretically clear, providing a defined pathway for career progression. However, clarity is not uniformly experienced, as understanding of the system depends on individual effort and exposure to orientation programs. Meanwhile, accessibility remains conditional and inequitable, as participation in PD and other requirements is influenced by time, financial capacity, workload, and institutional support. Consequently, the ECPS pathways, while clear in design, are not fully inclusive in practice. The ECPS positively influences teacher motivation by providing clear career direction, professional recognition, and opportunities for advancement. However, this motivation is balanced by stress and pressure arising from documentation demands, workload constraints, and unequal access to opportunities. Thus, teacher motivation under ECPS reflects a duality of empowerment and strain, where engagement is sustained when teachers perceive fairness and attainability, but weakened when barriers limit access to advancement opportunities. While the ECPS is a promising and

progressive reform, its effectiveness is constrained by systemic gaps in implementation, including unequal access to PD opportunities (equity gap), limited institutional support mechanisms (support gap), and overemphasized and compliance-driven documentation (efficiency gap) processes. These gaps result in a system that is structurally sound but operationally uneven, highlighting the need for policies that are not only well-designed but also responsive to teachers' lived realities. Based on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Institutionalize Equitable Support Systems for Career Advancement To address the gap between policy expectations and the actual accessibility of career advancement opportunities, DepEd needs to institute sustainable support mechanisms, such as scholarships, financial aid, and study leave programs. These will be provided equally and effectively disseminated to ensure that all teachers have access to them.

Reform Professional Development towards Competency and Equity In light of the current situation in which PD opportunities are accessed differently by different teachers, and where some PDs focus more on mere compliance than on developing teaching competencies, it is suggested that DepEd reconsider its professional development programs by making them competency-based, relevant to specific subjects, and reflective of ECPS indicators.

Align Evaluation Systems with Professional Development Goals Because of the clear distinction between the professional value and the numerical value derived from PD activities, DepEd should rethink its current evaluation systems to reflect the significance of PD programs.

Streamline Documentation and Reduce Administrative Burden To address documentation problems, especially for non-classroom-observable indicators, DepEd must standardize MOV requirements, design simplified forms, and provide ongoing technical assistance. This will allow the process to focus more on true performances than unnecessary compliance.

Strengthen Policy Communication and Implementation Support Given the discrepancy between policy communication and actual understanding of policy, DepEd must conduct well-planned, regular orientation sessions. This will be complemented by simplified guides and examples to ease the implementation of ECPS policies. Furthermore, mentoring and technical assistance must be institutionalized to facilitate teachers' efforts in handling ECPS.

Establish Monitoring and Evaluation Tools for ECPS Implementation It is highly recommended that DepEd develop tools to evaluate the effectiveness of ECPS implementation, with attention to accessibility, effectiveness, and equity.

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