



TEACHER PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT: A REVIEW OF OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS IN THE PROVINCE OF ALBAY

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ABSTRACT

Teacher professional advancement is a critical component of educational quality and system sustainability; however, career progression among teachers remains uneven, particularly in provincial contexts. This study investigates teacher professional advancement among public Junior High School educators in the Division of Albay, Philippines, with particular emphasis on the opportunities and systemic constraints shaping career progression. Grounded in Social Cognitive Career Theory and Human Capital Theory, it examines the dynamic interplay of personal, environmental, and institutional factors in influencing teachers' professional growth, self-efficacy, and advancement outcomes. Employing a mixed-methods design, data were gathered from 220 teachers across 32 public secondary schools through validated survey instruments and supplemented by semi-structured interviews, enabling both statistical analysis and in-depth thematic exploration of lived experiences. Findings indicate that while teachers exhibit strong intrinsic motivation and acknowledge structured pathways under the Expanded Career Progression (ECP) system, advancement remains impeded by persistent barriers, including excessive workload, limited access to sustained and relevant professional development, financial constraints, inadequate institutional support, unclear

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promotion mechanisms, and geographic inequities in resource distribution. The study underscores that professional advancement is not merely an individual endeavor but is contingent upon the coherence, accessibility, and efficacy of institutional frameworks and policy implementation. Consequently, it advances an evidence-based professional advancement plan centered on strengthening mentoring systems, expanding equitable access to capacity-building initiatives, enhancing policy clarity and execution, and mitigating workload-related constraints. Ultimately, the study contributes a localized, empirically grounded perspective that informs strategic interventions aimed at fostering teacher competence, facilitating career mobility, and improving educational quality.

Keywords: *Teacher Professional Advancement; Career Progression; Social Cognitive Career Theory; Human Capital Theory; Professional Development; Mixed-methods Research; Systemic Barriers; Public School Teachers; Albay Division*

INTRODUCTION

Teacher professional advancement has emerged as a critical global priority as education systems navigate rapid technological, economic, and sociocultural transformations. International bodies such as UNESCO consistently underscore the centrality of teachers in achieving quality education and advancing sustainable development. Within this context, continuous professional development is indispensable in equipping educators with the competencies required for 21st-century learning, including digital pedagogy, inclusive

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instructional practices, and the promotion of lifelong learning. The global education agenda affirms that strengthening teacher capacity is fundamental to enhancing student learning outcomes and ensuring equitable access to quality education.

Across international contexts, education reforms emphasize the necessity of structured and coherent career progression frameworks that support teachers' development from entry-level positions to highly accomplished and distinguished stages of practice. The Global Report on Teachers (2023) highlights the urgent need to reinforce teacher education systems, improve working conditions, and expand access to sustained professional learning opportunities. Furthermore, UNESCO projects a significant global shortage of qualified teachers by 2030, in line with the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), thereby reinforcing the imperative to elevate the teaching profession and invest in lifelong professional growth.

Professional advancement opportunities including graduate education, research engagement, specialized training, and leadership roles—are widely recognized as vital mechanisms for enhancing teacher competence and institutional effectiveness. However, existing literature also reveals persistent and systemic challenges, such as excessive workload, limited institutional support, financial constraints, inequitable access to professional development programs, and insufficient opportunities for career mobility. These barriers significantly impede teachers' ability to progress professionally and fully realize their potential within the educational system.

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In the Philippine context, teacher professional advancement is guided by national standards and policy frameworks designed to align local practices with global benchmarks. The Department of Education has institutionalized the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) through DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, which delineates competency expectations across four career stages: Beginning, Proficient, Highly Proficient, and Distinguished teachers. The PPST serves as a comprehensive framework for teacher evaluation, promotion, and development, ensuring continuous enhancement of educators' content knowledge, pedagogical skills, assessment practices, and professional engagement.

Complementing this framework are continuing professional education programs and training initiatives that support teachers in meeting evolving educational demands. Empirical studies suggest that the PPST fosters a culture of lifelong learning, encouraging participation in graduate studies, research activities, and relevant training programs that contribute to improved teaching effectiveness and learner achievement. The adoption of competency-based standards further strengthens the development of globally competitive educators capable of responding to the complexities of contemporary education systems.

Despite these policy mechanisms, Filipino teachers continue to encounter substantial challenges in pursuing professional advancement. These include limited access to graduate education, financial limitations, heavy teaching workloads, insufficient scholarship opportunities, and varying levels of institutional support. Within localized contexts such as the Division of Albay, geographic and structural factors further influence access to professional development opportunities, thereby shaping the trajectory of teachers' career progression.

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Given the pivotal role of teachers in nation-building and human capital development, a critical examination of both the opportunities and constraints associated with professional advancement is essential. Such an inquiry provides an empirical basis for refining institutional policies, strengthening support systems, and enhancing professional development programs to ensure that teachers are adequately equipped to advance in their careers. Recognizing this, the Philippine government enacted Executive Order No. 174, s. 2022, which established the Expanded Career Progression (ECP) System for public school teachers. This system provides clearly defined pathways for career advancement, including qualification standards, competency requirements, assessment mechanisms, and the creation of higher-level teaching positions (e.g., Teacher IV to VII and Master Teacher V). The ECP system is designed to enhance teacher motivation, professional competence, and overall contribution to the education sector.

In recent years, the Division of Albay has demonstrated progress in improving educational outcomes, teacher qualifications, and school resources. It actively promotes professional development through in-service training, workshops, and career advancement initiatives, thereby enabling teachers to pursue higher positions and specialized roles. These efforts contribute to the development of professional learning communities and support continuous instructional improvement. However, despite these initiatives, teachers within the Division of Albay continue to face challenges that may hinder their professional growth. These include geographic constraints, limited access to training opportunities, heavy workloads, and other contextual factors that affect their ability to engage in sustained professional

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development. Such challenges underscore the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to ensure equitable access to advancement opportunities.

This study examines the teacher professional advancement within the Division of Albay, with particular emphasis on the opportunities afforded by the Expanded Career Progression system and the barriers that may impede career growth. By providing a comprehensive analysis of these dynamics, the study aims to generate evidence-based insights that can inform policy implementation, strengthen teacher development initiatives, and ultimately enhance the quality of education in the region.

FRAMEWORK

The study is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework combining Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and Human Capital Theory to explain teacher professional advancement in the Division of Albay. SCCT emphasizes that career development is shaped by the interaction of personal factors (e.g., self-efficacy, motivation, and career stage), environmental conditions (e.g., workload, school location, access to training, and institutional support), and learning experiences (e.g., training participation, instructional support, and leadership exposure). These elements influence teachers' outcome expectations, such as promotion, recognition, and career growth, which in turn affect their motivation to pursue advancement. Human Capital Theory complements this by framing professional development as an investment, where teachers weigh the costs of time, effort, and financial resources

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against anticipated returns like salary progression, leadership roles, and professional recognition.

Anchored in these theories, the conceptual framework examines how structural and institutional factors—such as training availability (INSET, LAC, and school-based programs), workload, geographical location, and administrative support—interact with individual mediators including motivation, self-efficacy, and access to resources (e.g., internet and instructional materials) to influence teacher professional advancement. This advancement is reflected in skill enhancement, career progression, promotions, and participation in development programs. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates quantitative survey data (via printed and QR-based instruments) and qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews to capture both the breadth and depth of teachers’ experiences, providing a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and constraints shaping professional growth in the Division of Albay.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study determined the comprehensive profile of public Junior High School teachers as a foundational basis for understanding variations in professional advancement trajectories. Specifically, it examined the key demographic and professional characteristics, including sex, civil status, position title, field of specialization, educational attainment, and length of service, as well as the extent and nature of relevant trainings attended. The inclusion of training exposure as a critical variable recognizes its integral role in shaping teachers’ competencies,

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instructional effectiveness, and readiness for career progression. Participation in seminars, workshops, in-service trainings, and continuing education programs reflects not only the accumulation of professional capital but also the degree of access to institutional development opportunities. Variations in the frequency, quality, and alignment of these trainings with teachers' specialization and career goals significantly influenced their capacity to meet professional standards, such as those outlined in national frameworks, and qualification for promotion. Consequently, the objectives provided a nuanced understanding of how both personal and professional attributes intersect with opportunities for growth, thereby informing subsequent analyses of advancement opportunities, experienced constraints, and the development of an evidence-based intervention plan.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a convergent mixed-methods research design to comprehensively examine the factors influencing teacher professional advancement in the Division of Albay. Quantitative data were collected through a structured survey instrument administered to public secondary school teachers using both printed questionnaires and QR code-based forms to ensure accessibility and a broader response rate. The survey measured key variables including training availability and accessibility (e.g., INSET, LAC, and school-based programs), workload and teaching demands, geographical location, institutional support, motivation, self-efficacy, and perceived opportunities and threats to professional advancement. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were utilized to analyze the quantitative data.

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Complementarily, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with selected teacher-participants to elicit in-depth insights into their experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding career progression. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled triangulation, providing a more nuanced and holistic understanding of the complex interplay of factors shaping teacher professional growth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Public Junior High Schools

The profile of respondents reveals a workforce that is demographically stable, professionally motivated, and actively engaged in career development, yet operating within structural and systemic constraints. The predominance of female and married teachers points to a profession shaped by socio-cultural norms and the need for employment stability, while the clustering in mid-level positions reflects a hierarchical system where advancement is incremental and often prolonged. At the same time, teachers demonstrate a strong commitment to professional growth, as evidenced by their enrollment in graduate studies and participation in trainings; however, the prevalence of incomplete advanced degrees and reliance on school-level development activities suggest limitations in time, financial capacity, and access to more advanced opportunities. These patterns directly relate to the study's objectives, as they provide critical context for understanding both the opportunities and threats (e.g., structural barriers, limited advancement pathways) that shape teacher professional advancement in the Division of Albay. The findings imply that while teachers are actively investing in their professional advancement, there is a pressing need for stronger

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institutional support systems to translate these efforts into tangible career progression. First, policies should focus on accelerating career mobility by reviewing promotion systems, increasing available plantilla positions, and ensuring merit-based advancement aligned with competence rather than tenure alone. Second, there is a need to support graduate education completion through financial assistance, flexible study arrangements, and workload adjustments to reduce attrition in advanced degree programs. Third, professional development should be enhanced by expanding access to higher-level, division and national trainings, ensuring that teachers acquire specialized skills beyond immediate classroom application. Finally, given the demographic realities of the workforce, interventions must also consider work-life balance and well-being, particularly for mid-career and married teachers who manage dual responsibilities. Collectively, these measures will help address the identified threats and strengthen the alignment between teachers' professional aspirations and the opportunities available within the education system.

Professional Advancement Opportunities

The evaluation of teacher professional advancement opportunities reveals a generally favorable yet progressively constrained landscape across career stages and advancement mechanisms within the Division of Albay. Across all four career stages—Beginning, Proficient, Highly Proficient, and Distinguished—respondents consistently expressed agreement that professional standards and opportunities are present and operational. However, a closer examination of the weighted means indicates a gradual decline in perceived support and opportunity as teachers move upward along the career continuum. The findings imply that

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while the Division of Albay has established a coherent framework for teacher professional advancement, there is a critical need to strengthen vertical coherence across career stages, particularly at the higher levels. Support systems that are strong at the beginning and proficient stages must be sustained and expanded into leadership development pathways, ensuring that highly proficient and distinguished teachers are given structured opportunities for mentoring, research, and system-level contributions. Additionally, there is a need to institutionalize advanced professional roles, such as instructional coaching, research leadership, and policy engagement, to prevent stagnation at higher career stages. Addressing resource-related constraints, particularly funding for professional development and research, is essential to enable equitable access to advancement opportunities. Collectively, these underscores the importance of aligning career stage expectations with concrete, accessible, and well-supported opportunities, thereby reinforcing a professional advancement system that is both developmental and sustainable.

Threats in Professional Advancement

The assessment of threats experienced by teachers in their professional advancement reveals a pattern of systemic, financial, and psychosocial constraints that collectively impede sustained career growth within the Division of Albay. The data indicate that while multiple challenges are present, the most critical threats are those that directly affect teachers' capacity, motivation, and access to development opportunities. The findings also underscore the demanding nature of the teaching profession, where increasing instructional, administrative, and co-curricular responsibilities erode teachers' physical and emotional

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resources. Such conditions not only diminish engagement in professional development but also weaken long-term career commitment and productivity. Also, despite the recognized importance of continuous professional learning, limited financial capacity restricts participation, thereby creating inequities in access to advancement opportunities.

The findings imply that addressing teacher professional advancement requires a multi-dimensional and systemic approach that goes beyond simply providing opportunities. First, there is a critical need to reduce workload-related stress through policy interventions such as workload redistribution, administrative support, and protected time for professional development. Without addressing burnout, participation in advancement activities will remain limited regardless of availability. Overall, the threats identified in this study highlight that teacher professional advancement is significantly shaped by the interplay of personal capacity, institutional support, and systemic design. Addressing these challenges holistically is essential to building a more equitable, responsive, and sustainable professional advancement framework in the Division of Albay.

CONCLUSION

The study provides a comprehensive examination of the conditions shaping the career progression of public Junior High School teachers through a convergent mixed-methods approach. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence reveals a teaching workforce that is demographically stable, professionally committed, and actively engaged in self-improvement, yet constrained by systemic, financial, and workload-related challenges. The general findings indicate that teachers demonstrate strong motivation toward professional

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advancement, as reflected in their participation in graduate studies and continuous professional development activities. Notably, school-based trainings such as Learning Action Cells (LAC) and In-Service Trainings (INSET) emerged as the most dominant and accessible forms of training and seminars. These modalities provide immediate, context-responsive support to classroom instruction and foster collaborative learning among teachers. However, their predominance also suggests a limitation in exposure to higher-level, specialized, and externally benchmarked training opportunities necessary for advanced career progression and leadership development. The study also highlights that advancement opportunities are positively perceived in relation to career benefits and long-term professional growth. Teachers recognize the value of promotions, advanced studies, and professional development in enhancing competence and achieving career aspirations. Nevertheless, these opportunities are moderated by persistent barriers, particularly limited funding support, uneven access to advanced training, and structural constraints within the promotion system. The assessment of threats underscores that burnout, excessive workload, and financial limitations are the most critical impediments to professional advancement. These findings affirm that professional advancement is not solely determined by the availability of opportunities but is deeply influenced by the broader institutional and socio-economic context in which teachers operate.

Overall, the study concludes that while the Division of Albay has established a functional framework for teacher professional advancement, it remains unevenly realized across career stages and constrained by systemic limitations. The interplay of strong individual motivation and insufficient structural support creates a gap between aspiration and

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attainment. Therefore, it is imperative to adopt a holistic and responsive approach to teacher development—one that sustains early-career support, strengthens advanced career pathways, expands access to diverse and high-impact professional development beyond LAC and INSET, and addresses workload and financial barriers. Enhancing institutional support mechanisms, promoting equitable access to opportunities, and fostering a culture of continuous, well-supported professional growth are essential to ensuring that teacher advancement becomes not only attainable but also sustainable and transformative within the Division of Albay.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Institutionalize LAC and INSET as CPD-Accredited Programs.** Learning Action Cells (LAC) and In-Service Trainings (INSET), being the most accessible and widely attended forms of professional development, should be formally recognized and accredited as Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs. Their content must be systematically aligned with teachers' career stages, subject specializations, and competency standards to ensure relevance and direct contribution to promotion and licensure requirements.
2. **Expand PRC-Accredited Trainings and Seminars.** The Division should increase the provision and accessibility of Professional Regulation Commission (PRC)-accredited trainings and seminars to ensure that teachers can earn CPD units through diverse, high-quality learning opportunities. Partnerships with higher education institutions and professional organizations may be strengthened to deliver specialized, research-based, and competency-aligned programs.

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3. Sustain and Reinforce the Expanded Career Progression (ECP) System.

Despite current budgetary constraints, it is recommended that efforts be made to resume and fully implement the Expanded Career Progression (ECP) system, recognizing its critical role in providing clear, merit-based pathways for teacher advancement. The continuation of ECP will support long-term professional growth and enhance motivation among teachers.

4. Promote Subject-Specialization Alignment in Teaching Assignments.

Policies should be reinforced to ensure that teachers are assigned to teach within their areas of specialization, thereby maximizing instructional effectiveness and professional competence. Aligning teaching assignments with expertise also supports career progression by allowing teachers to deepen mastery in their respective fields.

5. Diversify Professional Development Opportunities.

Beyond school-based programs, the Division should expand access to advanced trainings, leadership development programs, action research initiatives, and participation in division, regional, and national-level seminars. This will provide teachers with broader exposure and opportunities for specialization and leadership.

6. Adopt Flexible and Inclusive Delivery Modalities.

To address workload and time constraints, professional development programs should incorporate flexible delivery modes, including online, blended, and modular formats, ensuring equitable access and sustained participation among teachers.

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7. **Strengthen Institutional Support Mechanisms.** The Division should provide financial assistance, workload adjustments, and administrative support to enable teachers to actively engage in CPD activities, complete graduate studies, and pursue advancement opportunities without undue burden.



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