

# Cracking Professional Stagnation: Lived Experiences of Teachers on Professional Advancement

Erwin S. Opog, Omar A. Tantoy

Department of Education, Division of Bukidnon, Bukidnon State University, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines

Email address: opogerwin4@gmail.com, omartantoy@buksu.edu.ph

**Abstract**—This study explored the lived experiences of public school teachers who have remained professionally stagnant and those who have achieved advancement within the East District in , Division of Bukidnon. Despite numerous policies intended to support teacher development, many seasoned educators continue to feel “stuck” in the same position for years, facing emotional strain, heavy workloads, and unclear promotion pathways. Using a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological design, the researcher gathered rich narratives from ten teachers, five unpromoted and five recently promoted to understand their daily struggles, motivations, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of professional growth. Findings revealed that unpromoted teachers often experience frustration, discouragement, and inequitable access to training, yet continue to demonstrate strong intrinsic motivation and commitment to their students. Promoted teachers, meanwhile, described increased responsibilities, renewed confidence, and greater motivation to perform, though they likewise faced challenges in balancing workloads, personal life, and continuing professional development. The themes that emerged include the lived realities of stagnant and promoted teachers, systemic barriers to advancement, the emotional and financial challenges tied to promotion requirements, and the vital role of peer support and school leadership. The results underscore that professional growth is not solely determined by promotion, but by teachers’ ongoing learning, resilience, and inner dedication to their vocation. These findings provide insight for school leaders, divisions, and DepEd in designing more equitable, supportive, and context-sensitive systems for teacher career progression.

**Keywords**— Professional Stagnation, Professional Development, Professional Growth, Career Progression.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Teacher professional development has become an essential pathway for ensuring both personal growth and improved learning outcomes for students. In today’s altering educational world, teachers are pushed to update their abilities, adjust their teaching approaches, and remain attentive to diverse student requirements. Through ongoing, continuous professional development, all teachers have the chance to enhance their skillsets while also developing an increased response to the needs of a variety of student populations. Continuous professional development is no longer a choice. It is an obligation for all teachers who wish to continue to provide quality instruction and remain satisfied, effective and secure in their chosen profession.

Through structured learning opportunities such as training, seminars, mentoring, and collaborative learning, teachers are given information and resources to assist them in strengthening their abilities and adapting to changes in

curriculum. These learning opportunities also provide teachers with the chance to create opportunities for professional advancement. Professional advancement gives teachers the opportunity to revive their sense of purpose, develop resiliency, and take active control of their lives and career paths rather than remain complacent in their current positions. Encouraging teachers to embrace continuous learning ultimately leads to a more competent teaching workforce and a school environment where educators feel supported, valued, and motivated to grow. By addressing these needs, schools can help teachers grow professionally, leading to a more dynamic and engaged educational environment. Supporting teachers in their advancement not only benefits them but also enhances the quality of education for students.

Several DepEd Orders support studies related to teacher professional development and aim to combat professional stagnation. Executive Order No. 174 (series of 2022) introduces an Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS) for public school teachers, creating new positions such as Teacher IV to Teacher VII and Master Teacher V (RITQ, 2024). This aims to address stagnation by providing opportunities for advancement based on merit and performance, aligning with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) (DepEd, 2017). Furthermore, DepEd Order No. 001, s. 2020 provides guidelines for the recognition of professional development programs and courses for teachers and school leaders, supporting continuous upskilling and reskilling (DepEd, 2020).

This study aims to provide crucial insights that school leaders can use to develop programs specifically designed to address the challenges faced by experienced teachers experiencing career stagnation. Furthermore, its findings can serve as a valuable reference for crafting or revising policies related to teachers’ professional development and career advancement. The research may also empower individual teachers by offering practical interventions for areas they can personally address. Moreover, the results will lay a foundation for future researchers investigating career stagnation and seasoned teachers. The findings of this paper are also intended for wide dissemination through presentations at various forums and online publications.

## II. FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This study is anchored on four main theories: Vroom’s Expectancy Theory (2015), Lazarus and Folkman’s Coping Theory (1993), McClelland’s Acquired Needs Theory (1961), and Fullan’s Professional Development Theory (1991).

Together, these explain why teachers may feel stuck in their careers, how they respond to that feeling, and what can be done to help them grow. This theory provides a strong basis to evaluate lived experiences of teachers as they enter professional advancement because not only does it provide a basis for understanding individual motivation, but it signals how, in the absence of meeting these psychological needs, stagnation can increase the stress associated with career progression., leadership, culture, and partnerships converge to either strengthen or hinder environmental management practices in public high schools.

### III. OBJECTIVES

This study explored the lived experiences of teachers on professional advancement and on cracking professional stagnation. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions; What are the lived experiences of teachers on their professional advancement? What illustrative essence can be developed based on the lived experiences of teachers on professional advancement.

### IV. METHODOLOGY

This study will employ a qualitative approach using the hermeneutic phenomenological research design to explore and interpret the lived experiences of teachers who have remained in the same teaching position, for a decade, as well as the voices of those who have achieved professional advancement. This approach is suited for uncovering not only the descriptions of their experiences but also the deeper meanings behind them, as understood by the participants and interpreted through the lens of the researcher. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, review of school documents, and observations. Colaizzi's (1978) method was used in analyzing the data to extract significant statements, formulate meanings, cluster themes, and arrive at an exhaustive description of the phenomenon.

### V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the results of the study on Cracking Professional Stagnation: Voices of Teachers on Professional Advancement. Data were organized into 4 major themes: (1) The first theme, Challenges of Teachers on Professional Advancement, (2) The second theme, Opportunities of teachers on professional advancement (3) The third theme, Coping Mechanisms of teachers on professional advancement, and (4) Foresights of teachers on professional advancement. The findings were derived from participants' narratives and analyzed thematically. The teachers were individually interviewed using a guided protocol, allowing them to share their experiences in professional advancement in East District. Theme 1: Challenges of teachers on professional advancement

Professional growth is not only about getting promoted, but also about learning, improving and staying committed to teaching. Stagnant teachers face emotional and professional difficulties as they strive to improve themselves without promotion. The participants' persistence despite limited rewards shows their dedication to their vocation and desire to serve their students effectively. OECD (2021) highlights, that

teachers are mostly committed to their profession. This finding implies that professional growth is not only driven by promotion but also by a teacher's inner motivation and passion for teaching.

Teachers sometimes simply accept what happens inside the school, even if it hurts them deeply. We cannot blame them, as there are indeed situations that do not work in their favor. Despite this, teachers remain positive and take these experiences as opportunities for personal growth. They continue to do everything they can to help their students learn, even if they themselves are not promoted. That is the mark of a teacher who is truly dedicated to their work. However, it is hoped that they will also be given proper attention and not face unnecessary difficulties in future promotions. We should find ways to support them.

As a teacher there are a lot that we go through every day. One of the key challenges was work beyond your role as a teacher and Disappointments. There are indeed situations in the field of our profession that are beyond our control. For instance, even when a teacher has done everything they can, it still seems lacking or insufficient. We also cannot blame those who handle the criteria and evaluate the documents, as they are simply doing their jobs. However, it is evident that there are teachers whose efforts are not given enough attention, even though we know they are equally deserving of the position they aspire to.

The standards set for teachers are often too high, especially for those who dedicate their time to teaching effectively and focusing on their students, yet fall short in meeting documentary requirements for promotion due to time constraints. This situation creates a domino effect; teachers become frustrated, disappointed, and discouraged. As a result, when another opportunity for promotion arises, many of them no longer attempt to submit their documents because they do not want to experience the same feelings of rejection that they once went through after giving their all but seeing no positive outcome. This experience is consistent with the findings of Jaminal (2025), who reported that teachers "did not have enough ideas on what documents are needed and how to gather them," leading many to feel overwhelmed and discouraged in pursuing promotion. The respondent's sentiments reveal how rigid systems and high standards can unintentionally demotivate competent educators.

It might be that the qualifications and standards required were simply too high, which made it difficult for teachers to meet the expected score. Nevertheless, this should not be a reason for teachers to become discouraged. Instead, it becomes a way for them to learn, improve, and better prepare themselves for the next time they apply for promotion. This experience strengthens them, helping them develop their own version of motivation and self-realization. Teachers who hold higher resilience are better able to persist in the profession despite setbacks and view challenges as opportunities for development. (Li et al., 2023)

Narratives reflect a positive and resilient mindset among teachers despite the challenges and setbacks they face in the promotion process. Consistent with the study by Baatz (2025), which highlighted resilience supports teachers' health by

consistently showing a positive impact on the different aspects. This response embodies a growth-oriented attitude, where failure is not seen as defeat but as a stepping stone toward self-development.

Theme 2: Opportunities of teachers on professional advancement.

For those who have been promoted, it is inevitable that their workload will increase since their duties and responsibilities have also expanded. However, despite these additional tasks, they have become more eager to teach and strive harder in their work. Although it is not right that all the workload should be given to them, they still feel happy and grateful for the new opportunities entrusted to them. Geronimo (2020) stated that, despite the workload, teachers still demonstrate a strong sense of motivation and commitment to their profession. Furthermore, they feel more motivated to teach their students. The experience may be challenging for them, but at the same time, it is also exciting and fulfilling.

In other words, the responses of the promoted teachers reveal a positive outlook toward the challenges that come with promotion. While the increase in workload is acknowledged as a difficulty, it is also seen as a form of growth and professional fulfillment. SEAMEO Innotech (2020) confirms that, even with heavy demands in their work, teachers continue because they find meaning and purpose in teaching. Their enthusiasm and motivation indicate that promotion does not only bring additional responsibilities but also a renewed sense of purpose and commitment to their teaching profession. This shows that professional advancement can lead to greater job satisfaction and self-fulfillment when teachers view challenges as opportunities for improvement and service. This finding indicates that when promotions are accompanied by continuous learning opportunities such as seminars and workshops, they can effectively strengthen teachers' professional capacities. It also suggests that structured post-promotion support systems play an important role in sustaining teachers' motivation and ensuring that career advancement translates into improved teaching performance and educational quality. (Tournier et al., 2019) teachers must take part in training programmes in order to apply for a promotion. Teachers reported that they appreciate how the new career structure provides incentives for professional development.

In every challenge we face, there will always be something good that comes out of our hard work. And when we finally achieve it, the outcome feels very rewarding and boosts our confidence. Especially when something you have worked for over many years is given to you, knowing that you are truly worthy of it. In this theme, we can see the happiness brought by promotion to the teachers who were promoted. The respondent's highlights the emotional satisfaction and sense of fulfillment that comes with achieving a long-awaited promotion. It also shows the teacher's readiness to embrace new responsibilities and her reliance on spiritual guidance as a source of strength. Meaningful work under workplace spirituality and family involvement, job gratification, work management, time management established a significant relationship under work-life balance. (Patriarca, 2023). You

really cannot control yourself when unexpected things suddenly come into your life—especially when you are not expecting them. It is a good thing when a new opportunity arrives, but you also begin to think about the responsibilities that come with it. Fortunately, there are people who believe in our abilities; even when we have doubts about ourselves, we are still able to accomplish things because of their trust. This promotion opens the way for us to grow in life and to look back on our previous efforts showing that even the small things we did can still produce meaningful outcomes.

Participant's narrative reflects the emotional complexity of receiving unexpected opportunities. While excitement is present, it is accompanied by uncertainty about new responsibilities. The mention of supportive individuals highlights the importance of social encouragement in boosting one's confidence and overcoming self-doubt. Furthermore, the respondent views the promotion as both a reward and a pathway for continuous growth. Their appreciation for past efforts, no matter how small, shows a developing sense of self-worth and recognition of personal progress—critical aspects of professional and personal development. In the study of Jia-jun & Hua-ming (2022) provides evidence for promotion/career growth, recognition of ability, professional growth, and organisational support as motivators. Individuals will reciprocate with a high level of engagement when organizations provide employees with opportunities to improve their professional ability.

Throughout a teacher's career, it is inevitable to encounter challenges in their work. Some of these come from pressure, while others arise from the difficulty of adjusting to new opportunities. It only takes the right time before balance between work, family and life can be achieved. The selflessness of teachers who often put their families first, yet still manage to pursue professional growth. The statement also conveys optimism and the importance of social support showing that despite life's difficulties, encouragement from others can motivate teachers to keep striving for improvement and success. Diab et. al (2024) emphasizes that the emergence of family members, particularly those with professional expertise in education, as a vital source of emotional encouragement and pedagogical guidance, contributing to novice teachers' resilience and success. Overall, it portrays a balance between personal sacrifice, professional achievement, and the value of a strong support system. There are teachers who are immediately given major roles, especially after being promoted.

As a result, they are quickly assigned many responsibilities, which makes it difficult for them to adjust since they are not yet accustomed to the additional workload. During busy days, teachers often struggle and find it hard to adapt to the demands of their new position. Fortunately, administrators are always there to provide guidance, having also experienced the same stage in their professional journey. They are the ones who offer advice to newly promoted teachers on what to do and how to manage their tasks effectively, helping them avoid excessive stress as they take on their new responsibilities. Zhang et. al (2015) also support this by describing the competence of teachers in content

knowledge and pedagogy was ascribed from teachers' development and professional training. They said that improving teachers' content knowledge through professional development is necessary.

Moreover, there is the crucial role of administrators as mentors. Their empathy comes from personal experience will serve as a key source of support and guidance for newly promoted. This mentorship dynamic reflects a culture of shared learning and professional care within the school environment. Furthermore, this research supports of Zaidi et. al (2018) who found that continuous professional development plays significant role in increasing teachers teaching practices and varied teaching strategies.

### Theme 3: Coping Mechanisms of Teachers on Professional Advancement,

In navigating the challenges of the teaching profession, educators employ various coping mechanisms and strategies to maintain their well-being and effectiveness. Participants shared various strategies they employ to cope with challenges in professional advancement. These are communication with colleagues, nature trips or "gala-gala", seeking advice from experienced colleagues (peer coaching), maintaining a positive mindset, engaging in weekly devotion, and family motivation.

The first coping mechanism is communication with colleagues. All participants emphasized the importance of maintaining open communication with their colleagues. They expressed that talking to their co-teachers helps them release stress, share experiences, and find emotional support. "Whenever I feel stressed, I talk to my co-teachers. It helps lighten my mood and I realize I'm not alone" (P5). Another participant shared, "Communication is very important for me. It keeps me connected and supported by my peers" (P6). Social interaction and collaboration serve as key coping mechanisms among teachers. Consistent with social support theory, communication provides emotional relief and fosters a sense of belonging within the workplace. It shows that interpersonal relationships play a vital role in maintaining teachers' well-being and work adjustment.

The second coping mechanism of teachers is nature trips or "gala-gala." Some participants shared that they relieve stress through leisure activities such as going out with friends, family or visiting nature spots. "Instead of dwelling with the challenges. I am going out (P2, P10). Meanwhile, P5, P7, and P9 shared, "being me with nature. Binge eating and binge watching". Although not all participants engage in this activity, it reflects a self-care strategy aimed at reducing burnout. Spending time outdoors provides teachers with an opportunity to recharge physically and mentally. This aligns with studies suggesting that exposure to natural environments enhances mood and reduces job-related stress.

The third coping mechanism that came up is seeking advice from experienced colleagues (peer coaching). All participants also mentioned seeking guidance from more experienced teachers or mentors. They acknowledged that consulting senior colleagues helps them handle new responsibilities more effectively. "I always seek/talk to more matured colleagues. Asking them for advice and opinions on the challenges" (P6). "Ask guidance of colleagues who are

experts in the field" (P7). "I seek advice and share experiences with colleagues" (P10). Peer coaching emerges as an important professional and emotional support mechanism. It fosters collaborative learning and strengthens teacher competence. This finding aligns with Vygotsky's concept of social learning, emphasizing that individuals learn best through interaction with more knowledgeable peers. Evens et al. (2015) stated that sharing ideas and expertise with colleagues could develop teachers' competence.

The fourth coping mechanism shared by the participants is maintaining a positive mindset. Four out of 10 participants emphasized the need to have positive mindset in meeting challenges in professional development as their coping mechanism. "Just having a positive mindset, maintaining optimism and viewing challenges as opportunities for growth" (P1). According to P4: "I manage challenges by maintaining a positive mindset, practicing self-awareness in order to choose my battles carefully". "To overcome the obstacles in my professional development, I use coping strategies like ongoing learning, seeking mentorship from coworkers, and maintaining a positive attitude" (P8). "The coping mechanisms do I employ to address the challenges I face in my professional development is stress-relief activities, time management and positive mindset" (P10). Developing a positive mindset allows teachers to adapt constructively to stressful situations. Teachers can respond positively to stressful situations by cultivating a positive mindset. This demonstrates optimism and resilience, which are crucial for adjusting to changes in the workplace. In addition to encouraging drive, an optimistic viewpoint lowers worry and self-doubt.

The strategies and coping mechanisms shared by these educators highlights the importance of structure, support, and self-care in the teaching profession. In conclusion, teachers experience different kinds of challenges, which is why they seek ways to ease their exhaustion. It is not only physical tiredness they also look for ways to release their stress. The coping strategies these educators use help them manage the pressures of the teaching profession effectively. Communication with colleagues, nature trips, peer coaching, maintaining a positive mindset, weekly devotions, and motivation from family all contribute to their long-term success and well-being. Teachers who adopt these strategies are better equipped to navigate their profession while sustaining their passion for education.

### Theme 4: Foresights of teachers on professional advancement.

The Teachers reflected deeply on their professional advancement, highlighting the lesson learned through years of dedication, challenges and accomplishments. They acknowledged the value of resilience, continuous learning, and staying grounded in their purpose as educators. Looking ahead, they aspire further for future professional advancement, pursuing graduate studies, and advocating meaningful reforms in education. Their insights reflect a strong commitment to shaping the future of the teaching profession. The lack of trainings and professional development provided by administrators truly affects the hopes of teachers. These opportunities are essential for improving teachers' knowledge and skills, especially in teaching. In addition, these trainings

are also necessary for promotion, since the number of training hours and professional development activities are counted. Arrieta & Ancho (2021) discusses the importance of seminars and trainings. For teachers, Teachers Professional Development is a route to enhance and upgrade their knowledge and skills and professional growth, with teaching as a life-long learning process. This is why teachers genuinely need them. Another important need is salary increase. Teachers often compare their profession to others, and they still feel that they remain at the lower end. There is a hope that teachers will be given proper attention, as they continually do their best, especially when teaching their learners.

Furthermore, because teachers have so many tasks, it is unavoidable for them to wish that the system could be like in other countries where there is support in doing the workload. In those systems, others handle the paperwork while teachers focus solely on teaching. It cannot be denied that teachers are truly skilled in teaching. However, it is very difficult to balance teaching and completing all the required documents. There is checking of papers, recordings, and teaching. This highlights Teachers' workloads directly influence teaching-learning effectiveness experiences. When too many duties and activities are designated to a teacher that cannot be complied with anymore which mostly results in attenuation in time which could use instead to teach her learners (Tarraya, 2023).

Teachers are hoping that situations like these can finally be adjusted, because this is what repeatedly happens in the field. When an order is given, it must be completed immediately, even though teachers in the field already have many tasks and are still teaching. Teachers do everything to help learners, yet suddenly a memo arrives requiring immediate submission. Some say that teachers should always be ready, but the problem is that even when they are prepared, their papers become insufficient because the new guidelines are different from the previous ones. The "excessive" documentation and procedures that public school teachers were required to complete have been criticized by them on several occasions. The number of additional tasks took time away from each professional advancement itself (Tarraya, 2023).

Teachers are always preparing; they have documents ready so that when a memo arrives, they can submit them right away. However, every year the guidelines keep changing. As a result, teachers end up searching for or rewriting documents that they thought were already complete, causing them to approach deadlines under pressure. This is truly one of the teachers' hopes—that guidelines could be given at least a month before the submission deadline, and that if there were guidelines from previous years, the same should be followed in the succeeding years. The constant changes and rush create unnecessary stress. Overall, the findings highlight a clear need for better planning, timely dissemination of guidelines, and consistency in administrative processes to support teachers' efficiency and well-being

Teachers truly have different strengths. Some are skilled in paperwork, some are excellent speakers, some are strong in teaching, some are resourceful, others are good at creating strategies, and some are proficient in technology. This is what others lack, because these skills are not acquired instantly—

especially for experienced teachers. These technologies and approaches did not exist before, and they are not used to them. They try to find ways to learn, but the problem is that the rush and pressure of deadlines add to their stress, especially when a memo is given at the last minute. There is hope that experienced teachers will receive proper assistance in matters like these because they should be the ones given more opportunities, especially in terms of promotion. This aligns with the research that emphasizes the need for support and opportunities to develop professionally is not restricted to the early-career stage, but may be experienced as well by mid- and late-career teachers. It would be beneficial if seminars and trainings could be provided specifically for them (Brouhier et al. 2023).

There should be clear and fair criteria for promotion. There should also be interviews with students, colleagues, and the principal—without personal bias, purely based on work. Classroom observations should not be done only once; they suggest that three observations would be better. They also added that coaching should not be the sole basis for promotion. Although coaching is still teaching, some teachers have no assigned students yet still create significant impact in their teaching and in the school. All in all, promotion should have strong and fair criteria because there are teachers who are often unnoticed but are exceptionally skilled and make a great impact on their students and the school.

Two tracks are being suggested, meaning teachers can choose the track they prefer for promotion. If they want to use length of service, they may do so; but they can also use performance, especially if they are new yet have already contributed significantly to the school. The previous memo on reclassification should not have been removed because, under that system, the submitted documents were simply verified, and once the budget was available, the teacher would be promoted. That type of system is what teachers hope to see again.

In the current situation, teachers are experiencing many concerns because they can feel the pressure and the sense of being stagnant. When compared to other departments, their promotion process seems much easier—some only need to study, and when they return, they are automatically promoted whether they want it or not. Others get promoted after completing a mission or project for the country. For teachers, however, there are numerous requirements to fulfill. Research by Cruz (2024) points out that Teachers commonly perceive rigid requirements, limited opportunities, and intense competition in their career development experiences. According to them, the issue is not the budget, as funds can be allocated; what is truly needed is a better and more efficient system.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings presented in this study. It can be generally concluded that the professional experiences of teachers is a multifaceted and deeply personal process shaped by emotional resilience, institutional expectations, and the realities of everyday teaching. Teachers in experience significant challenges such as working for others, vague

promotion standard, financial instability, and limited access to professional development opportunities. Yet, despite these challenges, they continue to be committed in the profession, perseverance and the desire to grow more. Promoted teachers show that advancement brings both fulfillment and added pressure for responsibilities, while unpromoted teachers express the emotional burden and systematic barriers that contribute to lacking of professional development. Overall, this study emphasizes the importance of supportive environments, the need to follow promotion procedures, experience teachers mentoring new ones, and accessible opportunities for training and career progression. These findings indicate a need for systematic policies, practices and programs that acknowledge teacher contribution to the students and school, address systemic barriers, and support fair career path.

## VII. RECOMMENDATION

Drawing from the findings and general statement of the study, the researcher presents the following recommendations. These points are for the various groups, which can contribute toward changes that are hoped for, based on the results of the study:

Teachers may prioritize ongoing professional development by taking advantage of free trainings, webinars, and National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP) recognized programs. Mentorship and collaborative professional relationships are also valuable. Maintain resilience, positive thinking and weekly devotions to avoid mental exhaustion. Lastly, manage teaching duties with professional advancement related requirements.

School leaders and administrators may provide equal access to trainings, seminars and when available, professional advancement workshops. Additionally, they may implement a mentoring program that supports teachers. Furthermore, recognized teachers' contributions beyond those listed on the documents, particularly their involvement with school programs and community engagement. Last, equally distribute school tasks so that no one teacher is left to carry an unrecognized load or mental stress.

The officials of the Department of Education may assess and refine their scoring mechanism for the professional advancement process, as well as guaranteed equity in the allocation of training slots, scholarships and personnel professional growth. Protect, promote and improve policies that support the Expanded Career Progression System, in order to clarify and make career pathways more straightforward. They should develop specific interventions that focus on the underlying reasons for professional stagnation example heavy workloads, documentation absence, changing memorandum yearly and provide wider financial support or incentives for educators completing graduate studies.

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