

Early Implementation and Policy Impact of Deped's Career Progression System for Public School Teachers

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Abstract: This study investigated the implementation and impact of the Department of Education's (DepEd) Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS) among public school teachers. Utilizing a descriptive exploratory-qualitative research design, the study gathered insights through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) from teachers with at least two years of service at Sta. Cruz Elementary School and Del Carmen Memorial High School. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis using NVivo 15 software to identify emerging patterns in teacher perceptions, experiences, and challenges.

The findings reveal a dualistic perception of the ECPS: while teachers support the system's conceptual focus on fairness and professional growth, they are significantly hindered by a complicated procedure. Participants reported mixed emotions, ranging from hope for advancement to apprehension regarding unclear requirements. Key challenges identified include an overwhelming documentation burden, inconsistent interpretations of guidelines, and systemic delays that lead to stress, burnout, and a perceived conflict between administrative compliance and actual teaching duties. Despite these hurdles, teachers remain resilient, driven by a blend of intrinsic dedication to the profession and extrinsic motivations such as salary and prestige.

The study concludes that while the ECPS has the potential to professionalize the ranks, its current execution is flawed by administrative weight. To bridge the gap between policy intent and classroom reality, the study recommends that DepEd prioritize teaching impact over paperwork, simplify documentation requirements, and provide localized workshops and alternative pathways for progression. An action plan addressed to the District Office is proposed to foster a more inclusive and equitable career advancement framework.

Keywords: Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS), Public School Teachers, Thematic Analysis, NVivo 15, Professional Growth Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Teacher Motivation.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The quality of education worldwide is fundamentally dependent on the quality and professional development of its teaching workforce. Global reports consistently emphasize that effective schooling requires competent, motivated, and well-supported teachers (UNESCO, 2016). In response, many nations have implemented structured career pathways to

attract, retain, and incentivize high-performing educators. These systems typically aim to decouple professional advancement from the rigid administrative track, offering teachers the chance to advance in stature and compensation while remaining in the classroom (UNESCO, 2016). However, the success of these international models often hinges on managing persistent challenges related to equity, bureaucratic burden, and ensuring that promotion is based on

actual classroom impact rather than mere compliance and paperwork (Philstar.com, 2025).

Countries in Southeast Asia, such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, have started to combine career-stage frameworks with national teaching standards. These systems aim to professionalize teaching by linking career progression to competencies, classroom performance, and continuous professional development. Research by Goh & Lee (2019) and UNESCO Bangkok (2021) highlighted how such models foster a culture of excellence and accountability, while also addressing disparities in access to advancement opportunities. These trends indifferent country underscore the importance of designing career systems that are responsive to both national goals and local realities.

In addition, education systems are shifting toward competency-based career progression frameworks that promote teacher agency, professional growth, and equitable recognition. Scholars such as Darling-Hammond (2017) and the OECD (2020) emphasized that structured, standards-based advancement systems enhance teacher motivation, retention, and instructional quality. These international models often incorporate flexible pathways, portfolio-based assessments, and distributed leadership, reflecting a broader movement toward teacher empowerment and systemic reform.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has responded to long-standing concerns about limited promotion opportunities by launching the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS) through DepEd Orders No. 024 and 034, series of 2025. Anchored in the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), the ECPS introduces a multi-stage framework that allows teachers and school heads to advance based on competencies, performance, and professional development, rather than waiting for vacant Plantilla items. This reform aligns with the principles of professional learning communities and career-stage differentiation, as advocated by Fullan (2014) and Hargreaves & O'Connor (2018), that emphasized collaboration, contextual adaptation, and continuous improvement. This system's stated goals are to:

- Promote professional development anchored on competencies.
- Boost morale and motivation by offering clearer advancement prospects.
- Retain the best talent by providing commensurate pay for increased qualifications.
- Value classroom effectiveness over simple length of service (DepEd, 2025).

The Expanded Career Progression (ECP) System for public school teachers was first established through Executive Order No. 174, series of 2022, creating structured career pathways to promote professional growth and clearer advancement opportunities. Republic Act (R.A.) No. 12288, signed by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. in September 2025, institutionalized the system for public school teachers and school leaders, establishing a merit-based and competency-driven path for promotion and advancement.

Moreover, the critical role of public school teachers is codified in Republic Act No. 4670, or the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers, which mandates the State to promote the social and economic status of teachers and strengthen their right to professional advancement. Despite this foundational policy, the reality for many long-serving teachers has been characterized by career stagnation (Puissant, 2025). Historical career structures often featured rigid requirements, limited Master Teacher positions, and promotion guidelines that intensified competition, leading to widespread dissatisfaction and decreased motivation among seasoned educators (Puissant, 2025). The limited advancement opportunities led to a critical disconnect: highly qualified teachers often had to pursue purely administrative roles to secure higher pay and rank, thus drawing effective pedagogues away from the classroom.

Furthermore, the ECPS aims to address inequities in promotion, improve teacher morale, and support lifelong learning. However, as Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) argue, policy enactment is always mediated by local contexts—shaped by infrastructure, leadership capacity, and stakeholder engagement. In the Philippines, early implementation of the ECPS has revealed varied experiences across regions, with challenges in awareness, documentation, and support systems.

The Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS) addresses systemic challenges in teacher career mobility by creating a structured pathway that rewards merit and professional growth. Historically, promotion within the Department of Education has been constrained by the availability of Plantilla positions, often leaving highly competent educators stagnant in their roles. By shifting the focus toward demonstrated competencies and continuous learning, ECPS aims to foster a culture of excellence and innovation in teaching practice. This approach not only motivates educators but also ensures that leadership roles are occupied by individuals who have proven their capacity to drive student achievement and school improvement.

Under the ECPS framework, career progression is delineated into multiple stages, each aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). These stages recognize varying levels of expertise, from beginning teachers to distinguished practitioners, and provide clear benchmarks for advancement. Professional development activities, classroom performance, and contributions to school-wide initiatives are integral components of the evaluation process. This competency-based system ensures that promotions are equitable and transparent, reducing reliance on tenure or political considerations and reinforcing the principle that leadership is earned through merit.

The implementation of ECPS strengthens the role of professional learning communities (PLCs) within schools. By encouraging collaboration and shared responsibility for student outcomes, the system aligns with Fullan's (2014) emphasis on collective efficacy and Hargreaves and O'Connor's (2018) advocacy for collaborative

professionalism. Teachers are incentivized to engage in peer mentoring, action research, and knowledge-sharing activities that contribute to both individual growth and institutional improvement. This collaborative culture not only enhances instructional quality but also builds resilience and adaptability among educators in response to evolving educational demands.

Despite its promise, the ECPS faces potential challenges in implementation, including resource constraints, capacity-building needs, and resistance to change. Ensuring that evaluators are adequately trained to apply competency-based assessments fairly is critical to maintaining trust in the system. Furthermore, sustained investment in professional development programs and digital platforms for tracking progress will be essential for scalability. As DepEd moves forward, continuous monitoring and stakeholder feedback should inform refinements to the policy, ensuring that it remains responsive to the diverse contexts of Philippine schools and contributes meaningfully to teacher empowerment and student success.

In this light, the municipality of Casiguran, Sorsogon, presents a compelling local context for examining the implementation of the ECPS. As a geographically isolated and resource-constrained area, Casiguran's public school teachers face unique challenges in accessing professional development opportunities and navigating new policy requirements. These contextual realities may influence how teachers perceive, experience, and respond to the career progression system. Understanding their perspectives and lived experiences is crucial to ensuring that national reforms translate into meaningful, equitable outcomes at the grassroots level.

In Casiguran, Sorsogon, the interplay between geographic isolation and limited resources amplifies the importance of teacher agency in implementing ECPS. Teachers often assume multiple roles beyond classroom instruction, including community engagement and administrative tasks, which can either enrich or constrain their professional growth. Recognizing these realities, ECPS must be contextualized to empower educators as active agents rather than passive recipients of reform. This requires flexible guidelines that accommodate local conditions while maintaining the integrity of national standards.

School heads in Casiguran, Sorsogon play a pivotal role in translating ECPS policies into actionable strategies. Their capacity to provide instructional leadership, allocate resources, and foster a supportive environment significantly influences teacher participation in career progression activities. Leadership practices grounded in transformational principles—such as shared vision, individualized support, and collaborative decision-making—can mitigate systemic barriers and enhance teacher motivation. Thus, leadership development programs should be integrated into ECPS implementation plans to ensure coherence and sustainability.

The success of ECPS in resource-constrained municipalities hinges on strong partnerships with local

stakeholders, including parents, local government units, and non-government organizations. These partnerships can mobilize resources for professional development, technology integration, and infrastructure improvement, which are critical for meeting competency standards. Moreover, community involvement reinforces the social value of teaching as a profession, fostering respect and support for educators' career advancement. Collaborative governance models can therefore serve as catalysts for equitable implementation.

Examining ECPS implementation in Casiguran, Sorsogon offers valuable insights for policymakers and researchers. It underscores the need for differentiated strategies that address disparities between urban and rural contexts. Future studies could explore the longitudinal impact of ECPS on teacher retention, instructional quality, and student outcomes in geographically isolated areas. These findings can inform evidence-based refinements to the policy, ensuring that career progression systems contribute not only to teacher development but also to broader educational equity goals.

During the recent implementation of ECPS in Casiguran, Sorsogon, teachers expressed mixed reactions regarding the competency-based evaluation system. Many welcomed the clarity of career pathways, noting that it provided a sense of direction and motivation. However, some educators in remote barangays reported difficulties in accessing professional development opportunities due to limited internet connectivity and logistical constraints. These firsthand experiences highlight the need for adaptive strategies that consider the realities of rural contexts.

Personal accounts from school heads reveal that ECPS has positively influenced teacher engagement. For instance, teachers who previously felt stagnant in their roles now actively participate in learning action cells and mentoring programs to meet competency requirements. This renewed enthusiasm demonstrates the potential of ECPS to foster a growth-oriented culture. Nevertheless, challenges such as balancing additional requirements with heavy workloads remain a concern, underscoring the importance of workload management policies.

School leaders in Casiguran, Sorsogon shared that implementing ECPS required significant effort in capacity-building and communication. Some principals organized orientation sessions and peer coaching to help teachers understand the new system. These initiatives were crucial in reducing anxiety and resistance to change. However, leaders also noted that the absence of localized guidelines created uncertainty, suggesting that future iterations of ECPS should include context-specific implementation manuals.

Recent experiences also reveal the role of community support in ECPS implementation. In some schools, local government units provided funding for training and digital tools, enabling teachers to meet competency standards. Conversely, schools without such support struggled to sustain professional development activities. These contrasting

experiences emphasize the need for multi-sectoral collaboration to ensure equitable implementation across diverse settings.

Therefore, this study is necessary to bridge the critical gap between policy intent and practical reality. By exploring the implementation and impact of DepEd's Expanded Career Progression System, particularly through the lived experiences of public school teachers, this research seeks to uncover the system's effectiveness, identify specific challenges in its execution, and ultimately generate data-driven recommendations to ensure that the ECPS truly serves as a mechanism for teacher empowerment and quality education enhancement in the Philippines.

➤ *Problem Statement*

The Department of Education (DepEd) has introduced the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS) to provide public school teachers with a more equitable, competency-based pathway for professional advancement. While the system aims to enhance motivation, recognition, and retention, its implementation has surfaced varied perceptions, experiences, and challenges across different school contexts. In geographically isolated areas such as Casiguran, Sorsogon, teachers may face unique barriers in accessing and complying with the system's requirements. Understanding their perspectives and lived experiences is essential to evaluating the effectiveness of the ECPS and identifying areas for improvement.

- This study is guided by the following research questions:
- What are the perceptions of public school teachers regarding DepEd's Expanded Career Progression System?
- What are the experiences of teachers in navigating the career progression process?
- What challenges do teachers face in complying with the system's requirements?
- How do teachers' experiences influence their motivation for career progression?
- What recommendations can be made to improve the implementation and effectiveness of the system?

II. METHODOLOGY

➤ *Research Design*

This study employed a descriptive exploratory-qualitative research designed to explore public school teachers' perceptions, experiences, and recommendations regarding the Department of Education's (DepEd) Expanded Career Progression System. A qualitative approach is most appropriate for this inquiry as it allowed for an in-depth understanding of teachers' lived experiences, contextual challenges, and nuanced insights that cannot be captured through quantitative measures alone. Specifically, the study utilized Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as the primary data collection method. FGDs provided a dynamic space for participants to share, reflect, and build upon each other's responses, fostering richer and more layered narratives.

The research was guided by five core questions: (1) What are the perceptions of public school teachers regarding DepEd's expanded career progression system? (2) What are the experiences of teachers in navigating the expanded career progression process? (3) What challenges do teachers face in complying with the system's requirements? (4) How do teachers' experiences influence their motivation for Career Progression? and (5) What recommendations can be made to improve the implementation and effectiveness of the system? For each of these questions, three open-ended FGD prompts were developed to elicit detailed responses. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and insights across the data, allowing the researcher to generate grounded, actionable findings that reflected the voices of educators. This design aligned with the study's goal of informing policy and practice through participatory, context-sensitive research.

This study adopted an exploratory and interpretive approach, which is well-suited for examining complex, context-dependent phenomena such as teachers' engagement with DepEd's career progression system. An exploratory approach allowed the researcher to investigate areas where limited prior research exists, uncovering patterns, meanings, and relationships that may not be immediately evident. It is particularly valuable in understanding how policies are experienced on the ground, especially in diverse educational settings across the Philippines.

The interpretive dimension emphasized the subjective meanings that teachers assign to their experiences. Rather than seeking objective truths or quantifiable outcomes, this approach prioritized the lived realities, values, and perspectives of participants. It recognized that individuals interpret systems like career progression through personal, cultural, and institutional lenses, and that these interpretations shape their actions and attitudes.

➤ *The Participants*

The study involved public school teachers in selected school of Casiguran II District, selected using purposive sampling. This non-probability technique allowed the researcher to select participants based on specific criteria that make them knowledgeable and experienced in the phenomenon under study. The criteria for selection included: (a) teachers who have been in the teaching profession for at least two years and participated in the ECPS process and (b) those who have been in teaching profession for at least two years but failed/did not experience the ECPS process. The researcher identified the total number of teachers, both elementary and secondary, to get the sample size and respondents of this study. The target sample size for the quantitative survey was determined based on population statistics and feasibility, while a smaller, focused group was selected for interviews to ensure depth of understanding. Seven to Nine Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted. Each group consist of approximately six to 10 participants to encourage open interaction while ensuring all voices can be heard. This iterative process continued until data saturation was achieved, meaning no new themes or insights emerge from subsequent discussions.

By including participants from a wide range of backgrounds, the study made sure to fully examine how to evaluate the impact and improve the implementation of DepEd's Career Progression System, considering different perspectives, especially those who experienced the process of the Career Progression System by the implementor in the Philippines.

➤ *Research Instruments*

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) served as the primary method for data collection, enabling participants to articulate their views in a collaborative, dialogic setting. FGDs are especially effective in surfacing shared concerns, contrasting experiences, and collective insights. This is a semi-structured protocol containing open-ended, probing questions aligned with the study's problem statement (Perceptions, Experiences, Challenges, Motivation, and Recommendations). They allowed for spontaneous interaction, clarification, and elaboration, which enriched the data and revealed deeper layers of meaning. In this study, FGDs were guided by semi-structured questions aligned with the research objectives, while remaining flexible enough to accommodate emergent themes and participant-led directions. This approach ensured that the findings were grounded in authentic teacher voices and responsive to the complexities of educational practice. The guide allowed the researcher flexibility to explore emerging issues and delve deeper into participants' narratives, ensuring a rich collection of qualitative data. The questions were designed to encourage interaction and collective meaning-making among the participants.

➤ *Data Collection Procedures*

The study employed semi-structured Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as its primary data collection method, strategically designed to align with the five core research questions. This format balanced structure with flexibility, ensuring that key topics were consistently explored across groups while allowing participants to introduce new ideas, elaborate on shared experiences, and surface emergent themes.

The researcher secured formal approval, a letter of Permission to conduct study from the appropriate academic and DepEd authorities before the conduct of FGD from selected schools in Casiguran II District. On November 29, 2025, the researcher formally submitted a letter to the Dean of the Graduate school requesting approval to conduct the study. Upon approval, the researcher sent a letter on December 1, 2025, to the office of the District Supervisor of Casiguran District asking permission to conduct FGD in selected schools of Casiguran II District with the selected participants.

On December 4-5, 2025, the researcher led the FGD in Del Carmen Memorial High School and on December 9 and 10, 2025 FGD was conducted in Sta. Cruz Elementary School. Potential participants were identified and invited based on the purposive sampling criteria. Informed consent was obtained, clearly explaining the study's purpose, the

voluntary nature of participation, and the strict adherence to confidentiality and anonymity.

The sessions conducted in a neutral, comfortable setting. The researcher conducted the FGDs during recess time and lunch time to avoid disruption of classes, composed of seven -10 participants that last one to one and half hour of informative and lively sharing of thought. A moderator (the researcher) facilitated the discussion using the FGD guide, ensuring all participants contributed. Each session was audio-recorded (with participant permission) and supplemented by detailed field notes to capture non-verbal cues and context. Each FGD is guided by a set of open-ended prompts that encouraged reflection, storytelling, and dialogue, fostering a collaborative environment where participants can build on each other's insights. During the transcription, the audio-recorded discussions were verbatim transcribed into text format. The transcripts were treated as the primary data source for analysis.

➤ *Data Analysis Method*

To analyze the implementation and impact of the DepEd career progression system, this study employed a systematic thematic analysis utilizing NVivo 15 software from the focus group discussion. The process began with the Data familiarization, where FGD recordings were transcribed verbatim and imported into NVivo. During this stage, the researcher engaged in multiple readings of the transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the participant's experiences, using the Annotations feature to capture preliminary thoughts and label key phrases, words, and sentences on how teachers navigated the transition between career tiers.

Following familiarization, the researcher proceeded to Initial Coding and Categorization, where the researcher identified significant segments of text related to the procedural aspects of the policy and its resulting effects on the workforce. Using Open coding in NVivo 15, raw data transformed into Nodes representing specific concepts such as application bottlenecks, documentary requirements, or shifted in professional motivation. To ensure the analysis remains grounded in the teacher's actual lived experiences, NVivo coding was utilized to preserve the participant's unique terminology and sentiments regarding the progression system.

The third and fourth phases involved searching and reviewing themes. Here, the Mind Map and Project Map tools in NVivo were used to visualize the relationships between codes, clustering them into broader themes such as Structural Barriers to Advancement or Socio-economic Implications of Reclassification. The researcher then refined these themes by utilizing Coding Stripes and Matrix Coding Queries to ensure that the themes were consistently supported across all focus groups. This cross-tabulation allowed for a nuanced comparison on how different demographics- such as Teacher III vs. Master Teacher candidates- perceived the fairness and efficiency of the implementation.

In the final phase, Thematic Definition and Integration, each theme was clearly defined and supported by vivid, representative quotes extracted through NVivo’s query functions. The software’s Memo function was used to document the analytical trial, ensuring the transition from raw data to the final report was transparent and rigorous. By synthesizing these thematic patterns, the study provided a comprehensive narrative that characterized the current state of DepEd’s career progression, highlighting both the successes of the policy and the areas requiring intervention to better support public school teachers.

➤ *Qualitative Analysis*

This section presents the qualitative procedures employed to address the research questions on the implementation and impact of the Department of Education’s (DepEd) Career Progression System (CPS) for public school teachers. Given the multidimensional nature of the CPS—encompassing teacher perceptions, lived experiences,

challenges in compliance, and its influence on professional and motivational outcomes—this research study calls for a qualitative analysis using Thematic Analysis on data gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Since the data is textual (non-numerical), the statistical tool was the systemic process of coding and theme development, which act as the analytical framework for interpreting the teacher’s collective experiences and perceptions.

The resulting themes and sub-themes served as the "findings" that answer the following problem statement: (1) What are the perceptions of Public School Teachers regarding DepEd’s Expanded Career Progression? (2) What are the experiences of teachers in navigating the expanded career progression process? (3) What challenges do teachers face in complying with the system’s requirements? (4) How do teachers’ experiences influence their motivation for Career Progression? (5) What recommendations can be made to improve the implementation and effectiveness of the system?

Table 2 Analytical Structure and Expected Thematic Categories

Problem Statement	Core Analytic Focus	Expected Themes/Categories
1. What are the perceptions of Public School Teachers regarding DepEd’s Expanded Career Progression?	Overall sentiments (positive, negative) and understanding of the system’s goal.	Theme 1: System Comprehension and Value Sub-theme: Clarity of pathways, perceived fairness/meritocracy, alignment with professional standards (PPST)
2. What are the experiences of teachers in navigating the expanded career progression process?	Procedural aspects and the emotion/practical reality of the process.	Theme 2: Navigation Reality Sub-theme: length and pace of promotion, transparency of evaluation, support from School administrator, impact on workload/time.
3. What challenges do teachers face in complying with the system’s requirements?	Specific barriers that prevent or delay advancement.	Theme 3: Compliance and Resources Barriers Sub-theme: documentation overload, financial coast, access to training opportunities.
4. How do teachers’ experiences influence their motivation for Career Progression?	The impact of the system’s design and implementation on professional drive.	Theme 4: Motivation, Morale and Attrition Sub-theme: Demoralization/burnout, Desire for growth vs. stagnation, incentive for high performance.
5. What recommendations can be made to improve the implementation and effectiveness of the system?	Suggested changes and policy improvements.	Theme 5: Proposals for system reform Sub-theme: Streamlining documentation, increasing Plantilla items, contextualizing requirements (e.g. rural areas), enhancing training and mentorship.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

➤ *Perceptions of Public School Teachers Regarding DepEd’s Career Progression System*

The result of the focus group discussion with public school teachers revealed a complex psychological and professional landscape regarding the Department of Education’s (DepEd) Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS), with hopes for career advancement and recognition, but also apprehensions about the new system’s requirements and potential biases. As one participant noted, "DepEd’s expanded career progression system for us teachers, it is our chance to advance our careers and gain recognition, take on more challenging roles, self-assessment, and identifying

areas of growth." The system’s emphasis on recognizing and rewarding teachers’ efforts and performance was particularly encouraging, with the promise of higher salaries and promotions serving as a significant motivator. According to Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory (1959), motivation is driven by factors such as recognition, achievement, and growth opportunities, which aligns with the teachers’ hopes for ECPS. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943) also supports this, suggesting that individuals are motivated by physiological, safety, and esteem needs, including recognition and self-actualization. Furthermore, the ECPS supports teacher retention by allowing experts to remain in the classroom while achieving higher pay grades, a structure that Darling-Hammond (2017) argued is essential for

maintaining high instructional quality in modern education systems.

The teachers' sentiments suggest that ECPS has the potential to boost morale, motivation, and job satisfaction among educators, with many viewings it as a chance to take on more challenging roles, engage in self-assessment, and identify areas for growth. As participant noted, that DepEd's expanded career progression system is a chance to advance careers and gain recognition, take on more challenging roles, self-assessment, and identifying areas of growth. The system's emphasis on recognizing and rewarding teachers' efforts and performance is particularly encouraging, with the promise of higher salaries and promotions serving as a significant motivator. However, the teachers' apprehensions about ECPS can be explained by Lewin's Change Management Model (1951), which suggested that individuals go through a process of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing when faced with change. Kübler-Ross's Change Curve (1969) also proposed that individuals experience a range of emotions when faced with change, aligning with the teachers' mixed emotions about ECPS.

The transition toward Fairness and Objectivity marks a significant cultural shift from a seniority-based culture to a meritocratic one. The participants' preference for objective criteria reflects the principles of Organizational Justice, specifically Procedural Justice, which focuses on the fairness of the processes used to make decisions. When teachers like Participant 7 emphasized that the system prioritizes competence and performance, they are validating the framework's intent to reduce the whom you know culture. Adams' Equity Theory (1963) suggests that individuals perceive fairness when their inputs are matched by their outputs, supporting the idea that ECPS should prioritize merit-based progression and clear criteria. However, the apprehension regarding Classroom Observation Tool (COT) ratings and potential bias from school heads highlights a fragility in Interpersonal Justice. According to Ingersoll (2001), when high-stakes evaluations were perceived as vulnerable to personal politics or administrative inconsistency, the motivational benefits of the reform can be neutralized. For the ECPS to be successful, it must ensure that the application of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) remains consistent across different school leaderships to maintain its credibility as a truly merit-based system.

Research on teacher motivation and evaluation systems also informs this discussion. Deci and Ryan (2000) highlighted the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in motivating teachers, while Springer et al. (2016) suggested that merit-based pay systems can motivate teachers, but also raise concerns about potential biases. Darling-Hammond et al. (2012) emphasized the importance of clear criteria, multiple measures, and fair evaluation processes in teacher evaluation systems. These studies and theories provide a foundation for understanding the complexities of teacher motivation, change management, and fairness in evaluation systems, informing the implementation and improvement of ECPS.

Despite the optimism, a significant theme of Apprehension about Change surfaced, characterized by documentation fatigue and confusion over new requirements. This reaction is consistent with Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1977), which suggested that a teacher's willingness to adopt a new system is tied to their belief in their ability to meet its demands. The description of the process as confusing and time-consuming suggests a temporary dip in self-efficacy as teachers navigate the transition. This struggle is often seen in the neutral zone of Bridges' Transition Model (Bridges, 2009), where the old system has been left behind but the new one is not yet fully mastered, leading to anxiety and uncertainty. Moreover, the administrative burden of preparing portfolios and repeating steps in the IPCRF aligns with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, which warns that when administrative demands outweigh the provided professional resources, it can lead to burnout rather than growth (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

The findings from the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with teachers from Sta. Cruz Elementary School and Del Carmen Memorial High School of Casiguran II District revealed a complex psychological and professional landscape regarding the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS). Through thematic analysis via NVivo 15, the results highlighted a duality of experience: a strong sense of professional optimism tempered by practical anxieties regarding implementation and evaluative integrity.

➤ *Experiences of Teachers in Navigating the Process*

The qualitative findings revealed a complex and challenging experience for public school teachers navigating the DepEd Career Progression System (ECPS). While the system aims to promote career growth and recognize teacher performance, the participants' experiences highlighted significant obstacles to success. The participants' confusion and uncertainty about the ECPS process are understandable, given the complexity of the system and the lack of clear guidance. According to Lewin's Change Management Model (1951), individuals go through a process of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing when faced with change. In this case, the introduction of ECPS represents a significant change, and the lack of clear communication and support has led to confusion and uncertainty among teachers. Teachers expressed profound anxiety regarding the lack of transparency in the evaluation process, particularly the subjectivity of demo-teaching ratings. This sentiment reflects a deficiency in Procedural Justice, where the fairness of the outcome is compromised by perceived inconsistencies in the rules of the game (Colquitt et al., 2001). When Participant 1 mentioned the whom, you know system, it underscored a classic organizational hurdle where personal bias overshadows meritocratic standards. According to Cognitive Dissonance Theory, (Festinger, 1957) teachers experience psychological stress because the department's promise of a professionalized, objective pathway conflicts with their lived reality of opaque requirements and inconsistent evaluation. This confusion is further exacerbated by the struggle to align existing Means of Verification (MOVs) with new Non-Classroom Observable Indicators (NCOI), suggesting that the

transition lacks the meaning-making phase essential for successful educational reform (Fullan, 2007).

The resulting Stress and Overwhelm experienced by the participants can be analyzed through the lens of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model. According to this model, job strain occurs when high demands—such as the exhaustive preparation of portfolios and the pressure to meet deadlines—outpace the available resources, such as time and administrative support (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Teachers reported sacrificing evenings, weekends, and even their duties as parents to comply with the ECPS requirements. Participant 12's admission of neglecting her role as a mother to satisfy document preparation highlights a severe case of Work-Family Conflict, which occurs when the pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). This imbalance not only leads to burnout but also creates a spillover effect, where the stress of promotion-seeking diminishes the quality of classroom instruction, as seen in teachers resorting to giving students activities merely to free up time for paperwork.

The theme of Lack of Clear Guidance serves as a primary institutional barrier, leaving teachers to rely solely on peer support rather than official channels. Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) posits that individuals learn new behaviors and systems more effectively through modeling and clear instructions; however, the lack of structured workshops or templates forced teachers into a trial-and-error mode. The participants' call for expert-led symposiums and standardized templates suggests a need for Scaffolding, an instructional technique where support is provided during the early stages of a new task and gradually removed as mastery is achieved. Without this institutional scaffolding, the transition to ECPS feels like a tiring repetition of their initial application to the department, rather than a sophisticated progression of their existing professional identity. Additionally, the pressure to complete the requirements and meet the deadlines has led to significant stress and overwhelm among the participants. This is consistent with the findings of a study by the American Psychological Association (2015), which found that work-related stress can lead to burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and decreased productivity. The participants' experiences highlight the need for more support and resources to help teachers manage the demands of the ECPS process.

Finally, the Time Management Challenges and the overall Impact on Personal and Professional Life underscore the high opportunity cost of the ECPS. Participants like Participant 9, who managed multiple coordinator roles and graduate studies alongside the promotion process, demonstrate the limits of Teacher Agency. While these educators are driven and resilient, the systemic requirement for excessive documentation creates a performativity culture where the evidence of good teaching becomes more important than the act of teaching itself (Ball, 2003). To mitigate these negative impacts, the literature suggests that professional development systems should be integrated into regular working hours rather than being an additive burden.

For the ECPS to fulfill its potential as a motivational tool, the Department must shift from a compliance-heavy model to a support-centric model, ensuring that the path to promotion does not come at the expense of the teacher's well-being or the learner's classroom experience. The ECPS process has had a significant impact on the participants' personal and professional lives, affecting their well-being, family relationships, and teaching duties. This is consistent with the findings of a study by the National Education Association (2015), which found that teacher stress and burnout can lead to decreased job satisfaction and decreased student achievement. The participants' experiences highlight the need for more support and guidance to help teachers navigate the ECPS process successfully. According to Deming's Total Quality Management (1986), organizations should focus on continuous improvement and employee empowerment. The participants' experiences suggest that the department should provide more support and resources to help teachers succeed in the ECPS process.

In conclusion, the participants' experiences highlight the challenges and obstacles that teachers face in navigating the ECPS process. The findings suggest that the department should provide more support and resources to help teachers succeed, including clear guidance, training, and support. By addressing these challenges, the department can promote a more positive and supportive environment for teachers to grow and develop in their careers.

➤ *Challenges Encountered in Complying with the System's Requirements*

The findings from the focused group discussion highlight a significant tension between the aspirational goals of the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS) and the practical realities of school-level implementation, particularly regarding the Documentation and Paperwork Burden. Teachers reported profound frustration over redundant requirements, such as the duplication of Non-Classroom Observable Indicators (NCOI) already present in their Individual Performance Commitment and Review Form (IPCRF). This phenomenon is best explained by Stephen Ball's Theory of Performativity (2003), which posits that in modern educational reforms, teachers are often required to spend more time producing evidence of their work than performing the work itself. This fabrication of evidence leads to what literature describes as administrative professionalization, where the teacher's identity is shifted from a pedagogical expert to a bureaucratic clerk. As noted by Participant 9, the redundancy of folders creates a performativity paradox where the search for professional growth diminishes the quality of teaching due to extreme time diversion. Participants noted that due to the enthusiasm of having a high score they put an effort into preparing the documents.

The issues surrounding Unclear Guidelines and Interpretations suggest a breakdown in institutional communication, leading to varied requirements across districts. This inconsistency triggers concerns regarding Procedural Justice, as teachers feel the goalposts for promotion move depending on local interpretation (Colquitt,

2001). When Participant 25 mentions complying with additional requirements not found in official memorandums just to avoid disqualification, it indicates a lack of transparency and standardization. According to Organizational Information Theory (Weick, 1979), when administrative messages are equivocal or ambiguous, employees experience high levels of anxiety and often resort to peer-dependent sense-making. This lack of a unified truth in policy interpretation undermines the meritocratic promise of the ECPS, replacing objective standards with localized bureaucratic whims.

Furthermore, the Time Management and Workload challenges expressed by the participants demonstrate a severe imbalance within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model. In this context, the ECPS acts as a massive job demand without a corresponding increase in job resources like time, digital tools, or administrative assistance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The narratives of exhaustion and the tiring nature of gathering documents reflect Burnout Theory (Maslach, 1982), specifically the dimension of emotional exhaustion. When teachers are forced to manage heavy teaching loads while simultaneously navigating a complex new promotion system, the result is a zero-sum game where personal well-being and classroom efficacy are the primary casualties. The preparation and submission for the reclassification under the Expanded career progression system falls year-round. It is understood that applicants will comply for, during school days including weekends to submit on time.

Finally, the Systemic Challenges and Lack of Support and Resources—such as limited budget allocations and poor internet connectivity—reveal the infrastructure gap in the Philippine education sector. Participants expressed a valid fear that even after meeting the grueling documentation standards, the promise of promotion might be stalled by budgetary constraints. This reflects Resource Dependency Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1970), where the success of a professional's career is tied not just to their competence, but to the external availability of resources beyond their control. As Fullan (2007) argues, for educational reform to be successful, there must be a triad of support: clear policy, adequate resources, and professional capacity. The FGD results suggest that while the policy exists, the lack of resources and structured training creates a barrier that transforms an opportunity for growth into a source of systemic uncertainty and unfairness.

➤ *How Teachers' Experiences Influence Their Motivation for Career Progression*

The findings from the focused group discussion illustrated a multidimensional motivational profile among teachers, characterized by the interplay between Intrinsic Motivation and professional duty. Many participants emphasized that their drive to engage with the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS) stems from a desire to enhance pedagogical skills and improve student outcomes. This alignment with making a greater impact reflects Self-Determination Theory (SDT), specifically the need for competence—the inherent desire to feel effective in one's

environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When teachers like Participant 19 view graduate studies and competency standards to benefit their students rather than just themselves, they demonstrate identified regulation, where the professional task is accepted as personally important. According to Daniel Pink's Drive Theory (Pink, 2009), this intrinsic focus on mastery and purpose is a more sustainable long-term motivator than external rewards, as it fosters a genuine commitment to the teaching profession.

Simultaneously, the narratives highlight the powerful role of Extrinsic Motivation, particularly the promise of increased salary and prestige. For many educators, especially those serving as family breadwinners or nearing retirement, the three-step salary promotion serves as a crucial incentive. This is consistent with Victor Vroom's Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964), which suggests that motivation is high when there is a clear Instrumentality—the belief that successful performance (passing the ECPS requirements) will lead to a valued reward (higher income). Literature on teacher compensation, such as studies by Odden and Kelly (2002), supports the idea that while money may not be the primary reason teachers enter the profession, a competitive and transparent salary structure is essential for professional prestige and the mitigation of economic stress, which otherwise leads to attrition.

However, the discussion also reveals a Mixed Influence on Motivation, where the systemic complexity of the ECPS acts as a demotivator that competes with the excitement of growth. Participant 13's comment that complexity reduces enthusiasm illustrates the Over justification Effect, where excessive bureaucratic hurdles and compliance-heavy requirements can undermine a person's initial intrinsic interest in a task. This creates a motivational friction where the teacher wants to grow (intrinsic) but is exhausted by the process (extrinsic burden). This duality is reflected in Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1968); while the ECPS offers motivators like recognition and advancement, the administrative paperwork and unclear guidelines represent hygiene factors that, if handled poorly, cause significant dissatisfaction and negate the positive impact of the promotion. Additional documents needed for the promotion to secure the quality of education and the preparedness of educators to changes.

Despite these frustrations, a recurring theme of Challenges and Resilience emerged, showcasing the grit inherent in the teaching vocation. Participants expressed that the difficulties of the ECPS—such as documentation and rigorous standards—strengthened their commitment and helped them become bolder. This psychological phenomenon is known as Post-Traumatic Growth or Challenge-Related Stress, where individuals find positive meaning and increased personal strength through the process of overcoming professional obstacles (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). This resilience is deeply rooted in Public Service Motivation (PSM), a theory suggesting that individuals in the public sector are driven by a sense of duty to the community and the lives of learners. As Participant 24 noted, the ultimate satisfaction comes from seeing students grow, which acts as

a buffer against the potential disappointment of a failed promotion, ensuring that the teacher's core dedication remains intact regardless of the systemic outcome.

➤ *Recommendations for System Improvement and Effectiveness*

The results of the study highlight the need for reforms in the Education Career Progression System (ECPS) to make it more efficient, effective, and equitable. The participants' recommendations emphasize the importance of simplifying requirements and documentation, providing support and resources, focusing on teaching effectiveness, and providing alternative pathways for career progression.

Simplifying requirements and documentation is a key recommendation, with participants suggesting that reducing paperwork and focusing on key indicators would improve the effectiveness of the ECPS process. This is in line with the principles of New Public Management (NPM), which emphasizes the importance of streamlining processes and reducing bureaucratic red tape (Hood, 1991). By simplifying the requirements, teachers can focus on their core work of teaching and learning, rather than being bogged down by excessive documentation.

The participants also emphasized the importance of providing support and resources to teachers to help them navigate the ECPS process. This is consistent with the theory of social support, which suggests that individuals are more likely to achieve their goals when they receive support from their organization (House, 1981). Providing resources such as training, mentoring, and clear templates can help teachers develop the skills and confidence they need to succeed in the ECPS process.

Focusing on teaching effectiveness is another key recommendation, with participants suggesting that the ECPS process should prioritize authentic, impact-based measures of teaching effectiveness rather than excessive documentation. This is in line with the principles of performance-based accountability, which emphasizes the importance of evaluating teachers based on their performance and impact on student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2013). By focusing on teaching effectiveness, the ECPS process can promote meaningful professional development and improve student learning outcomes.

Finally, the participants suggested providing alternative pathways for career progression, especially for teachers who may not have the resources or support to pursue higher education. This is consistent with the theory of career development, which suggests that individuals should have opportunities for growth and development throughout their careers (Super, 1980). Providing alternative pathways can promote inclusivity and equity in the ECPS process, ensuring that all teachers have opportunities for career advancement regardless of their background or circumstances.

Overall, the participants' recommendations suggest that the ECPS process should be reformed to prioritize simplicity, support, teaching effectiveness, and inclusivity. By

implementing these reforms, the ECPS process can become a more effective and equitable system for evaluating and promoting teachers.

IV. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ *Findings*

- Teachers have mixed perceptions toward the Expanded Career Progression system, ranging from hope and motivation to apprehension and uncertainty. While they appreciated the system's emphasis on fairness and objectivity, many expressed concerns about unclear requirements, possible biases in evaluation, and the heavy documentation involved. These perceptions reveal both optimism for professional advancement and skepticism about the practicality of the system's implementation.
- Teachers' experiences in navigating the ECP process were marked by confusion and uncertainty about requirements and procedures. Many reported stress, overwhelm, and difficulties in managing time, which affected both their personal well-being and professional responsibilities. The absence of clear guidance, workshops, and seminars left teachers struggling to understand and comply with the process. Their experiences highlight the need for structured support mechanisms to help them navigate the system more effectively.
- Teachers encountered challenges in complying with the systemic requirements, particularly the burden of documentation and paperwork, unclear guidelines, and inconsistent interpretations. They also struggled with workload balance, heavy documentations, and limited resources. These challenges often led to frustration, anxiety, burnout, and exhaustion, undermining both teacher well-being and classroom effectiveness. The compliance demands were perceived as disproportionate to the support provided, creating an imbalance between expectations and resources.
- Teachers remain resilient and motivated by both intrinsic dedications, such as the desire for professional growth and development, and extrinsic rewards such as salary increases and prestige despite administrative burdens. However, the complexity and stress associated with the systemic requirements risked reducing enthusiasm, creating tension between aspiration and discouragement. While teachers recognized the opportunities for recognition and growth, they felt that the process itself could dampen motivation.
- Teachers recommended simplifying requirements and documentation to reduce administrative burden, as well as providing clearer guidelines, workshops, and resources to support them throughout the process. They emphasized the importance of shifting the focus toward teaching effectiveness and meaningful professional development rather than paperwork. Additionally, they suggested offering alternative pathways for career progression to accommodate diverse teacher contexts. These recommendations aim to enhance the system's effectiveness, promote genuine growth, and strengthen

teachers' contributions to student learning and school development.

➤ *Conclusions*

- Teachers perceived the Expanded Career Progression system with both optimism for fairness and growth and concern over unclear requirements and heavy documentation.
- Teachers' experiences navigating the process were marked by confusion, stress, and lack of guidance, significantly affecting their personal and professional lives.
- The system's heavy documentation, unclear guidelines, and limited support created frustration, burnout, and diminished teaching effectiveness.
- While the process motivated teachers through aspirations for growth and recognition, its complexity and stress risked reducing their enthusiasm.
- Teachers recommend simplifying requirements, providing clearer support, and focusing on meaningful professional development to improve the system's effectiveness.

➤ *Recommendations:*

- Clarify requirements and reduce paperwork to strengthen teachers' confidence in the system's requirements.
- Provide structured workshops and accessible guidance materials to ease navigation and reduce stress.
- Streamline paper works by removing redundant requirements and ensuring MOV criteria across districts to ease burnout and inequality.
- Create a more supportive and transparent progression pathways to sustain motivation and encourage resilience.
- Adoption of the recommendation of the participants. Simplifying requirements and documentation, providing support and resources to teachers, focusing on teaching effectiveness and providing alternative pathways for career progression.

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