

A Phenomenological Study of Teachers' Experiences Under the Expanded Career Progression System

John Mark C. Dela Peña

Bukidnon State University

Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines

Email of corresponding author: macky181994@gmail.com

Abstract: Teacher career advancement is central to professional development, motivation, and instructional leadership. The Department of Education's Expanded Career Progression (ECP) system provides structured opportunities for teacher promotion; however, limited research has examined teachers' lived experiences following reclassification. This study explored the experiences of teachers reclassified under the ECP in the Schools Division of Malaybalay. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed to capture the essence of participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attribute to career progression. Ten reclassified teachers (2023–2025) participated in semi-structured interviews, and data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Four themes emerged: recognition of professional competence, increased responsibilities and expectations, challenges in role adjustment, and motivation for continued professional development. Findings indicate that while promotion enhances professional identity and leadership engagement, it also introduces role strain and adjustment demands. Practically, the results highlight the need for structured post-promotion orientation, formal mentoring systems, workload management support, and targeted leadership training to facilitate smoother role transition and sustain teacher effectiveness. These insights inform policymakers and school leaders in strengthening career progression frameworks and support mechanisms for newly promoted teachers.

Keywords— career progression; teacher promotion; professional development; teacher leadership; phenomenological study; educational administration; lived experiences, teacher reclassification

1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher career advancement plays a significant role in strengthening professional competence, motivation, and leadership capacity in schools. Promotion systems provide educators with opportunities to enhance their professional status, increase their responsibilities, and contribute more effectively to school improvement initiatives. In recent years, the Department of Education implemented the Expanded Career Progression system to provide structured opportunities for teachers to advance professionally while remaining in classroom teaching positions (DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020).

The Expanded Career Progression system allows teachers to be reclassified to higher professional ranks such as Teacher II–VII and Master Teacher II–IV based on qualifications, performance, and professional achievements. This reform aims to recognize teacher expertise, improve morale, and strengthen instructional leadership within schools. Career advancement systems are widely recognized as essential mechanisms for improving teacher retention, motivation, and instructional quality.

Despite the benefits of career progression policies, teachers who undergo promotion often experience significant changes in professional expectations, responsibilities, and leadership roles. These changes may require adjustments in time management, collaboration, and professional relationships. Understanding how teachers experience promotion is important for school leaders who are responsible for

supporting professional growth and ensuring effective implementation of career development programs.

Previous studies have established that career advancement enhances teacher motivation, professional identity, and commitment to the teaching profession. However, most of these studies are conducted in general or international contexts, with limited focus on the lived experiences of teachers under the Expanded Career Progression system in specific local divisions. There is also a lack of phenomenological inquiry that captures the meaning-making processes of teachers as they transition into higher career ranks. This gap limits the understanding of how ECP implementation is experienced at the ground level.

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of teachers who were reclassified under the Expanded Career Progression system in the Schools Division of Malaybalay.

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of teachers who were reclassified under the Expanded Career Progression system?
2. How do teachers describe their professional adjustments after promotion?
3. What challenges do teachers encounter following career progression?
4. How does career progression influence teachers' motivation for professional development?

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of teachers who were reclassified under the Expanded Career Progression system. Descriptive phenomenology focuses on capturing and describing the essence of participants' experiences as they are lived, while setting aside prior assumptions through bracketing. This approach is appropriate for the study as it allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers perceive and make meaning of their career progression experiences. The study is grounded on the phenomenological approach of Moustakas (1994), which emphasizes the systematic description of lived experiences to uncover their essential structures and meanings.

Participants

The participants consisted of ten teachers from selected public schools in the Schools Division of Malaybalay who were reclassified under the Expanded Career Progression system between 2023 and 2025. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who met the following criteria:

1. Teachers who were reclassified under the career progression system
2. Currently teaching in public schools within the division
3. Willing to participate in the study

The participants were composed of five elementary school teachers and five secondary school teachers, ensuring representation across basic education levels. A sample size of ten participants was considered sufficient as data saturation was achieved, where no new themes or significant information emerged from the interviews, indicating that the data collected was adequate to fully capture the lived experiences of the participants.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Each participant was interviewed individually using guide questions focusing on their experiences during the reclassification process, adjustments after promotion, and the professional and personal impacts of reclassification. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, allowing sufficient time for participants to fully express their lived experiences. Interviews were conducted face-to-face. All interviews were audio-recorded with the informed consent of the participants, and confidentiality was strictly observed by anonymizing their identities through codes. The recorded interviews were later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following a systematic process of data familiarization, coding of significant statements, categorization of similar responses, development of themes, and interpretation of meanings. Coding was conducted manually by identifying significant statements from the transcribed interviews and assigning

initial codes before grouping them into broader thematic categories. This approach enabled the researcher to identify patterns and shared experiences among participants. To ensure trustworthiness of the findings, member checking was conducted by returning summarized interpretations to participants for validation, alongside peer debriefing to enhance the credibility of the analysis.

1. Results and Discussion

Recognition of Professional Competence

Participants expressed that reclassification served as formal recognition of their professional competence, validating years of service, performance, and qualifications. Promotion was perceived not only as career advancement but also as acknowledgment of their expertise and dedication.

One participant stated: *"It feels rewarding because after many years of teaching, my efforts were finally recognized through promotion."* (Participant 2)

Another added: *"The promotion gave me confidence that I am trusted as a professional teacher."* (Participant 7)

This finding aligns with Ingersoll and Collins (2018), who emphasized that teacher recognition systems strengthen professional identity and retention.

Increased Responsibilities and Expectations

Participants reported increased workloads and expanded leadership responsibilities after promotion, including mentoring, instructional leadership, and administrative tasks.

A participant shared: *"I thought promotion would make things easier, but instead, I was given more responsibilities in school."* (Participant 4)

Another noted: *"Now I have to guide other teachers while still managing my own classes."* (Participant 6)

This supports Leithwood and Louis (2012), who found that teacher leadership roles significantly expand following career advancement, requiring stronger organizational support.

Challenges in Role Adjustment

Teachers experienced difficulty adjusting to new expectations, particularly in balancing teaching duties with added leadership responsibilities.

One participant explained: *"I struggle sometimes because I still have full teaching loads, but I also need to do reports and mentoring."* (Participant 1)

Another said: “*The transition was overwhelming at first because expectations increased immediately after promotion.*” (Participant 9)

These findings are consistent with Day and Gu (2014), who noted that teacher career transitions often involve stress and adaptation challenges that require institutional support.

Motivation for Continued Professional Development

Promotion also served as a strong motivator for teachers to pursue further studies and professional growth opportunities.

A participant shared: “*After I was promoted, I decided to enroll in my master’s degree to improve myself further.*” (Participant 3)

Another stated: “*It motivated me to attend more trainings because I want to perform better in my new role.*” (Participant 8)

This supports Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), who emphasized that career progression systems enhance continuous professional learning and instructional improvement.

Conclusion

The Expanded Career Progression system has significantly influenced the professional experiences of teachers in the Schools Division of Malaybalay. Promotion provided recognition of professional competence and increased opportunities for leadership and professional growth. However, teachers also experienced challenges related to increased responsibilities and role adjustment.

The study demonstrates that career progression is an important mechanism for strengthening teacher leadership and motivation. It also highlights the need for systemic support to ensure that promotion translates into effective professional performance and well-being.

Recommendations

1. School leaders and administrators should establish structured post-promotion support programs, including formal induction and mentoring systems, to help newly promoted teachers transition effectively into expanded roles.
2. The Department of Education may consider enhancing workload management policies for reclassified teachers, ensuring that additional leadership responsibilities are balanced with teaching duties to prevent role overload.
3. Continuous professional development programs should be institutionalized and aligned with career progression levels, particularly focusing on

instructional leadership, coaching skills, and research capability to sustain long-term teacher growth.

Acknowledgment

The researcher expresses sincere gratitude to the participating teachers and school administrators in the Schools Division of Malaybalay for their cooperation and support during the conduct of this study. Appreciation is also extended to academic advisers and colleagues who provided guidance throughout the research process.

REFERENCES

- [1] Creswell, J. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage Publications.
- [2] Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Teacher education around the world: What can we learn from international practice? *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(3), 291–309. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2017.1315399>
- [3] Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Learning Policy Institute.
- [4] Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2014). *Resilient teachers, resilient schools: Building and sustaining quality in testing times*. Routledge.
- [5] Department of Education. (2022). *Career progression system for teachers and school leaders*. Department of Education.
- [6] Department of Education. (2024). *Revised guidelines on the implementation of the expanded career progression system for public school teachers*. Department of Education.
- [7] Fullan, M. (2014). *The principal: Three keys to maximizing impact*. Jossey-Bass.
- [8] Fullan, M. (2016). *The new meaning of educational change* (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.
- [9] Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. Teachers College Press.
- [10] Hargreaves, A., & O’Connor, M. (2018). *Collaborative professionalism: When teaching together means learning for all*. Corwin.
- [11] Ingersoll, R. M., & Collins, G. J. (2018). The status of teaching as a profession. In J. Ballantine, J. Spade, & J. Stuber (Eds.), *Schools and society: A sociological approach to education* (6th ed., pp. 199–213). Sage Publications.
- [12] Ingersoll, R. M., Merrill, L., & Stuckey, D. (2014). *Seven trends: The transformation of the teaching force*. Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

- [13] Leithwood, K., & Louis, K. S. (2012). *Linking leadership to student learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- [14] Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School Leadership & Management*, 28(1), 27–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430701800060>
- [15] MacBeath, J. (2016). *Leadership for learning: Principles and practices*. Sense Publishers.
- [16] Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications.
- [17] Robinson, V. M. J. (2011). *Student-centered leadership*. Jossey-Bass.
- [18] Timperley, H. (2011). *Realizing the power of professional learning*. Open University Press.