

Public Elementary School Teachers' Perception of the Career Progression Scheme of the Department of Education in the Province of Albay

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Abstract

This study examined the awareness and perceptions of public elementary school teachers regarding the Expanded Career Progression System in the Schools Division of Legazpi City. Anchored in career development and motivation perspectives, particularly Life-Span, Life-Space theory, Social Cognitive Career Theory, and Herzberg's Two Factor Theory, the study sought to describe teachers' professional profile, assess their level of awareness of the system, and explore their perceptions, motivations, challenges, and prior preparation for promotion. An explanatory mixed-method design was employed, combining descriptive quantitative and qualitative approaches. The respondents were 97 permanent public elementary school teachers, with 10 participants included in the focus group discussion. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire checklist, open-ended questions, and focus group discussion, then analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance, Mann-Whitney U Test, and thematic analysis. The findings showed that the respondents were generally professionally mature, predominantly female, mostly married, and largely engaged in graduate studies. Both Teacher I–III and Master Teacher I–II groups demonstrated high awareness of professional development, qualification standards, and merit and competence indicators under the Expanded Career Progression System, with no significant difference in awareness between the two groups. However, the qualitative findings revealed that teachers viewed career progression as both an opportunity for professional growth and a source of burden due to documentation demands, financial constraints, family responsibilities, workload, and policy-related concerns. The study concluded that while the system supports teacher development and advancement, its effective implementation depends on stronger institutional support, clearer policy dissemination, and more accessible professional development opportunities. The study aligns mainly with SDG 4 on Quality Education and also connects with SDG 8 and SDG 9 through teacher development, professional sustainability, and institutional strengthening. Its sustainability impact lies in supporting educational, institutional, policy, and socio-economic sustainability by informing more responsive and sustainable teacher promotion practices.

Keywords: Awareness, Career Progression, Elementary School Teachers, Expanded Career Progression System, Legazpi City, Merit and Competence, Professional Development, Qualification Standards, Teacher Perceptions

1. Introduction

Teacher career progression has become increasingly important in the context of rapidly evolving technologies, artificial intelligence, and the growing demand for high-quality instruction for 21st-century learners. Across education systems, structured advancement pathways are viewed as essential to sustaining teacher growth, strengthening instructional quality, and supporting long-term professional development. International models show that career ladders, mentorship, leadership pathways, and professional learning opportunities help teachers advance according to competence and specialization (National Institute for School Leadership, 2022; Hite & Milbourne, 2022). In the Philippines, this direction is reflected in the Department of Education's Expanded Career Progression system, which aligns promotion with qualifications, merit, fitness, and competence under the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), and which has been institutionalized through Executive Order No. 174 and Republic Act No. 12288 (Parrocha, 2022; DepEd, 2022; Esguerra, 2025). Despite these reforms, implementation remains challenging at the local level, particularly for public elementary school teachers who face constraints related to workload, resources, preparation time, finances, and policy adjustments. In this context, examining teachers' perceptions and awareness is necessary for understanding how the scheme functions in practice and for identifying areas where implementation may be strengthened (DepEd, 2024; Quality Education, 2024; Sustainable Development, 2025; Rachmad, Y. E. 2022).

Teacher development is increasingly framed as a lifelong process that requires continuous learning, adaptation, and progression. Internationally, countries such as Singapore, Shanghai, Finland, Canada, and Australia have established structured systems that connect teacher advancement with professional evaluation, mentoring, leadership, and specialization (National Institute for School Leadership, 2022; Hite & Milbourne, 2022). In the Philippine setting, the Department of Education established the Expanded Career Progression system to address delayed promotion and to create additional higher teaching positions, allowing teachers to move forward based on competence rather than merely waiting

for plantilla vacancies (Parrocha, 2022; DepEd, 2022). The policy was later institutionalized through Republic Act No. 12288 in 2025, reinforcing the sustainability of merit-based promotion for public school teachers and school leaders (Esguerra, 2025).

The scheme is intended to help teachers focus on their primary instructional role while also recognizing their qualifications, professional development, and competence. However, despite its policy intent, the system is still in its early stages of implementation in local school communities. Teachers' awareness of the policy, their perceptions of its fairness and practicality, and their readiness to comply with its requirements remain critical concerns. In the Schools Division of Legazpi City, teachers encounter issues such as limited resources, lack of time for preparation, financial constraints for advanced study, policy revisions, and personal and health-related concerns. These realities make it important to assess whether the scheme serves as a genuine opportunity for growth or an added burden (DepEd, 2024; Rachmad, Y. E. 2022).

The reviewed literature shows that career progression is shaped by both personal and institutional factors. In terms of demographic and professional profile, age, educational attainment, present position, and length of service emerged as recurrent variables in understanding advancement, while civil status appears less directly related to performance or promotion outcomes (Mpiti et al., 2025; Mahat, 2024; Cabradilla, 2025; Remo and Marcia, 2025; Cruz, 2022; Scheirlinckx et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2025; Erden et al. (2023); Karaan Jr. et al. (2025); Oplas (2024)). Gender was also highlighted as significant in the teaching profession, which remains female-dominated both globally and locally, with implications for workload, emotional stress, and support needs (Sebastian et al. (2022); World Bank, 2025; Agpuldo (2025); Bongco and Abenes (2023)). Another major theme in the literature is professional development. NEAP training, INSET, and Learning Action Cell sessions are consistently presented as mechanisms that strengthen teacher efficacy, pedagogical awareness, classroom management, teamwork, and career readiness (Department of Education, 2019; Regional Memorandum, 2022; Sarrosa and Caspe (2025); Abdala et al., 2024; Zhou et al. (2023); Tzotzou et al., 2024; Maravilla (2025); Caoile and Pere (2024); Dilay and Ramos (2024); Vega's (2020)). These learning opportunities are not only viewed as beneficial for instructional improvement but also as essential requirements within the promotion system. The literature also emphasizes qualification standards, policy awareness, and competence-based advancement. Studies note that while teachers are generally aware of the Expanded Career Progression system, they continue to face challenges such as slow promotion, inadequate resources, unclear policy communication, and documentation burdens (REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7836 - Supreme Court E-Library, 2022.; Reyes (2025); Mangalindan et al. (2025); Exec. Order No. 174, 2022; Añosa et al., 2025; Simbre et al. (2023)). The PPST, classroom observation, and other merit-based indicators serve as core evaluative standards, but local implementation may be constrained by policy-practice gaps, changing requirements, and classroom realities (DepEd Order No. 20, s. 2022; Soreta, 2021; Serrano and Fallado). Further, the literature identifies observable and non-observable indicators of merit and competence, including interdisciplinary teaching, research integration, gamification, differentiated instruction, communication strategies, inclusive learning environments, responsiveness to learners in difficult circumstances, and project proposal development (Patrociño (2024); Baguio (2025); Gondao and Paglinawan (2025); Rivera et al. (2025); Bustamante et al. (2024); Giray Jr. & Ballado, 2025; Dehghanzadeh et al. (2024); Prince (2004); Ameko et al. (2025); Roque et al., 2025; Linda and Mukhaiyar (2020); Ghafar and Mahmood (2023); Cebelleros & Buenaventura, 2024; Alimahan & Ubayubay, 2025; Lalan & Oco, 2025; Soriano and Alcala (2024); Abuda and Sultan (2024); Olabiyi et al., 2025; Custodio, 2021; Kratochwill et al. (2004); Villanueva and Cruz (2021); Cullen, 2025). Together, these studies suggest that career progression is not simply a matter of tenure, but of sustained professional growth, contextual responsiveness, and documented competence.

Globally, education systems recognize that structured teacher advancement supports instructional quality and system resilience. Career ladders in countries such as Singapore and Shanghai demonstrate how differentiated pathways can reward specialization, leadership, and continuous professional learning (National Institute for School Leadership, 2022; Hite & Milbourne, 2022). At the same time, global teacher shortages underscore the need to strengthen recruitment, retention, and development across the profession (Educator, 2023). Nationally, the Philippine education system has responded to long-standing promotion delays and staffing limitations by introducing the Expanded Career Progression system. Executive Order No. 174 created new teaching and master teacher positions and formalized new advancement pathways, while subsequent institutionalization through Republic Act No. 12288 reinforced the continuity of the reform (Parrocha, 2022; DepEd, 2022; Esguerra, 2025). This reform is especially relevant in light of reports that promotion from Teacher I to Teacher III may take many years and that many teachers remain concentrated in lower ranks (Reyes (2025); Papa (2020); Francisco's (2024); Zerna's (2025)). The reform also exists alongside persistent challenges, including teacher shortages, resource limitations, and unequal access to training and graduate education (Porcalla (2025); Mangalindan et al. (2025)). Locally, the Schools Division of Legazpi City serves as a meaningful site for examining how these policies are experienced by public elementary school teachers. Teachers in this division are informed through school meetings and leadership support, yet they also contend with practical concerns such as limited resources, insufficient preparation time, financial struggles, policy updates, and personal constraints. These conditions make the local context especially relevant for evaluating whether the policy is fully understood and meaningfully experienced by intended beneficiaries (Rachmad, Y. E. 2022).

The study is anchored in several theories of career development and motivation. Donald Super's Life-Span, Life-Space theory explains that career development is a continuous process across developmental stages and that self-perception, experience, and education influence motivation to pursue higher positions (Cardello et al., 2024). This perspective supports the view that teachers' readiness for advancement evolves over time and is connected to their developing sense of career maturity. The study also draws from Social Cognitive Career Theory, which explains that self-efficacy, goal-setting, and environmental supports influence the pursuit of career advancement (Lent et al., 2002). In the context of teaching, this suggests that teachers who believe in their capacity to perform well and who receive mentoring and institutional support are more likely to engage in activities that lead to promotion. In addition, Herzberg's Two Factor Theory provides a motivation-based lens for understanding teachers' career decisions. Motivators such as achievement, recognition, and responsibility encourage advancement, while hygiene factors such as salary, policies, and working conditions influence dissatisfaction and retention (Peramatzis & Galanakis, 2022). Building on these theories, the study also presents a perception-based policy perspective that links teachers' lived experiences, awareness, and feedback to policy improvement and implementation outcomes (Millena, 2026).

Although the Expanded Career Progression system has been institutionalized and discussed in policy and related literature, there remains a need to examine how public elementary school teachers understand and experience the scheme in specific local contexts. Existing literature describes many dimensions of teacher career advancement, including demographics, professional development, qualification standards, merit and competence, motivation, and preparation. However, there is still limited localized evidence on how these elements converge in the perceptions of teachers implementing the policy on the ground, particularly in the Schools Division of Legazpi City. The literature also suggests a persistent gap between policy intent and practical implementation. Teachers may be aware of the system, yet still struggle with documentation, workload, financial constraints, graduate study requirements, and uneven access to training and support (Mangalindan et al. (2025); Raquim et al. (2025); Jaminal (2025); Santidad et al., 2025). This indicates that awareness alone does not guarantee readiness or equitable participation in the promotion process. Thus, the study is justified by the need to assess teachers' awareness, explore their perceptions, identify motivating and constraining factors, and generate a perception-based policy feedback report that can help improve implementation for teachers, schools, and the broader education system.

The study naturally aligns with SDG 4 – Quality Education because it focuses on teacher development, professional advancement, and the strengthening of instructional quality within the public education system. By examining how teachers understand and respond to the career progression scheme, the study contributes to the broader goal of ensuring qualified, motivated, and continuously developing educators (Quality Education, 2024). It also aligns with SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure because the Expanded Career Progression system supports human resource development and institutional strengthening within education. Career progression functions as a structured mechanism for building teacher competence, encouraging innovation in professional growth, and enhancing the capacity of schools and the education sector to respond to evolving demands (Sustainable Development, 2025). Where the discussion touches on workload, policy implementation, promotion systems, and institutional support, the study may also connect indirectly with SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, since promotion, salary improvement, recognition, and better work conditions shape teacher motivation and professional sustainability.

This study contributes to educational sustainability by examining a policy intended to strengthen teacher quality, professional growth, and long-term effectiveness in the classroom. A better-understood and better-implemented career progression system can help sustain teacher motivation, improve instructional delivery, and support learner outcomes across public elementary schools. It also contributes to institutional and policy sustainability because the findings can inform a feedback report that supports more responsive policy implementation. By identifying barriers such as limited resources, heavy documentation, uneven access to training, and financial constraints, the study offers a basis for refining systems that affect teacher promotion and retention. Further, the study has socio-economic sustainability relevance because career progression is tied to compensation, recognition, and professional fulfillment. Teachers who are supported in advancing their careers are more likely to remain engaged, productive, and committed to the profession. In this sense, the study supports not only the sustainability of teacher development but also the sustainability of school systems and public education more broadly.

The study is specifically focused on public elementary school teachers in the Schools Division of Legazpi City, particularly Teacher I, Teacher II, Teacher III, and Master Teacher I–II assigned in selected schools across Districts 1–8. It examines their professional profile and their awareness of the Expanded Career Progression system in terms of professional development, qualification standards, and promotion pathways. It also explores their perceptions, motivations, factors affecting advancement, and prior preparation, while excluding secondary teachers, private school teachers, non-teaching personnel, and administrative staff. The study does not measure actual teaching performance or formal promotion eligibility, but rather teachers' perceived awareness and experiences of the system.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study used an explanatory mixed method. The quantitative component was descriptive in nature and was used to assess the professional profiles and level of awareness of public elementary school teachers regarding the Expanded Career Progression System. As explained, a mixed-methods approach enables researchers to explain findings thoroughly through numerical and descriptive evidence (Creswell, 1999). The descriptive quantitative design did not manipulate variables but examined their characteristics naturally, consistent with the view that such a design yields reliable and authentic results useful in developing valid solutions (Siedlecki, 2020; Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023). The qualitative component was used to deepen understanding of teachers' lived experiences and realities regarding the factors, motivation, and prior preparation related to career progression. This qualitative dimension aimed to describe and observe the natural case of teachers' perceptions in context (Tenny et al., 2017).

2.2 Research Setting

The study was conducted in the Department of Education, Schools Division Office of Legazpi City, under Region V or the Bicol Region. This division oversees the implementation of educational programs, policies, and services for public elementary and secondary schools in the city and is responsible for supporting both basic education delivery and teacher professional development. Eight districts with assigned Public School District Supervisors were included. The selected schools were Albay Central School, Homapon Elementary School, Banquerohan Elementary School, Bagumbayan Central School, Cabangan Elementary School, Legazpi Port Elementary School, Rawis Elementary School, and Gogon Central School. These schools were chosen because they are located in districts where coordination, communication, and data collection could be carried out efficiently. The inclusion of both central schools and smaller public elementary schools allowed the researcher to gather perspectives from different school environments and organizational structures. The locale was therefore considered practical and relevant for examining teachers' awareness and perspectives on career progression within the Department of Education.

2.3 Respondents

The respondents were public elementary school teachers from the selected schools in the Schools Division of Legazpi City. A total of 97 respondents participated in the study, consisting of Teacher I, Teacher II, Teacher III, and Master Teacher I–II. These positions were included because they are directly covered by the Expanded Career Progression System. The respondents were required to be permanent public elementary school teachers currently assigned to the identified schools and to have rendered at least one year of teaching service in the Department of Education to ensure sufficient familiarity with the policies, professional standards, and promotion guidelines relevant to their roles. For the qualitative component, ten participants from Teacher I–III and Master Teacher I–II were selected for the focus group discussion based on the same minimum one-year service criterion. Secondary school teachers, private school teachers, non-teaching personnel, and administrative staff were excluded because they were outside the scope of the study. The study used a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling was applied in selecting the participating schools. The researcher deliberately chose schools located in districts where the Public School District Supervisors were stationed to facilitate coordination and respondent accessibility. Convenience sampling was then used to select teacher-respondents from those schools, focusing on readily available and willing participants during the data collection period. This approach was appropriate because it allowed efficient data collection within time and resource constraints while ensuring that participants met the inclusion criteria. The total sample size of 97 respondents was determined using the Cochran formula.

2.4 Research Instruments

The research instrument was a questionnaire checklist composed of three parts. Part I gathered the professional profile of public elementary school teachers, including age, gender, marital status, current position, educational attainment, and length of service. Part II assessed the respondents' level of awareness of the career progression scheme. Under professional development, the indicators included attendance in NEAP training, Learning Action Cell sessions, and INSET training. Under qualification standards, the instrument covered awareness of the guidelines and policies, teaching and administrative lines, salary grade limitations, the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers, educational qualification, and length of service. Under merit and competence, the instrument included classroom observable and non-classroom indicators evidenced during classroom observation and the teacher's ability to prepare lesson plans aligned with specific Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers indicators. This section used a four-point Likert-type scale with adjectival interpretations ranging from less aware to highly aware. Part III consisted of open-ended questions designed to gather teachers' perceptions, experiences, and perspectives on career progression. This section explored factors influencing promotion, institutional support, access to training, mentoring, personal motivation, barriers to advancement, and prior preparation such as NEAP trainings, Learning Action Cell sessions, INSET, graduate studies, leadership experiences, and other professional development activities. Together, the three parts were intended to provide a holistic view of teachers' professional backgrounds, awareness levels, and personal perspectives.

2.5 Data Collection

After the thesis title proposal was revised and accepted, the researcher sought validation of the research instrument from internal and external panel members of the Bicol College Graduate School. Upon approval of the instrument, permission to conduct the study was requested from the Department of Education through a transmittal letter addressed to the Schools Division Superintendent of Legazpi City. After this approval, requests to administer the survey were sent to the Public Schools District Supervisors of Districts 1–8 and to the selected elementary school principals. The survey was distributed through a Google Form link, which included an informed consent form in compliance with Republic Act No. 10173, the Data Privacy Act of 2012, regarding the collection, use, and storage of personal or sensitive information during the study (Republic of the Philippines, 2012). Respondents were informed that participation was voluntary and that they had the right to refuse or withdraw before data collection began. They were also encouraged to ask questions at the beginning of the procedure. The Google Form was distributed during the second quarter, specifically in October of School Year 2025–2026, and data retrieval was completed in mid-December 2025 before the Christmas break. The data were then given to the statistician for interpretation, and in January 2026 the researcher analyzed and interpreted the results based on the study indicators. The focus group discussion on factors, motivation, and prior preparation was conducted in February 2026. After transcription of the interview data, themes were analyzed and organized through meta-inference to connect the quantitative and qualitative findings. Throughout the process, the researcher regularly consulted with the adviser and statistician, and all gathered data were treated with fairness and confidentiality.

2.6 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in alignment with the study objectives using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Frequency counts and percentages were used to determine the professional profile of the respondents. The weighted mean was used to assess the teachers' level of awareness of the career progression scheme based on the Likert-scale responses. To determine the significance of agreement between the two respondent groups, Teacher I–III and Master Teacher I–II, Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance was used. This measure assesses the degree of consistency and agreement among rankings (Kendall, 1948). The Mann-Whitney U Test was also used to compare the two groups and assess significant agreement in professional development and merit and competence variables (Nachar, 2008). For the qualitative component, the researcher conducted focus group discussions, then transcribed and coded the responses to identify themes. The study also cites the use of simple frequency count as a statistical strategy for analyzing data sets by counting occurrences (Learn Statistics Easily, 2024), percentage for calculating data and formulating comparisons (Percentage, 2022), and weighted mean for data derived from different frequency levels using the Likert Scale (Calmorin & Calmorin, 2012). Thematic analysis was applied to the open-ended responses and focus group discussion data to contextualize and strengthen the quantitative findings.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical safeguards during data collection. Respondents' informed consent was obtained before participation, and voluntariness was emphasized throughout the process. Participants were informed of their right to refuse participation or withdraw at any time before the collection of data. The Google Form included a consent section compliant with Republic Act No. 10173, the Data Privacy Act of 2012, for the collection, use, and storage of personal or sensitive information (Republic of the Philippines, 2012). The researcher also ensured fairness, confidentiality, and respect for respondents during both the survey and focus group discussion phases.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Professional Profile of Public Elementary School Teachers

3.1.1 Age, Gender, and Civil Status

The results showed that among Teachers I–III, the largest group was aged 31–40, while among Master Teachers I–II, most were aged 41–50. Female teachers dominated both groups, and married respondents comprised the largest civil status category, especially among Master Teachers. These patterns indicate that the elementary teaching workforce in the division is largely female, professionally established, and mostly in the mid-career to later-career stage. These findings suggest that advancement in rank is associated with maturity and accumulated teaching experience. The strong presence of women is consistent with the broader pattern that teaching remains female-dominated (Sebastian et al. (2022); World Bank, 2025), while the predominance of mid-career teachers supports the view that experience and career-stage development matter in advancement (Cabrilla (2025); Remo and Marcia's (2025); Cruz, 2022). At the same time, civil status appears less central to advancement than competence and readiness, which is consistent with Erden et al.'s (2025) view that marital status does not determine performance.

3.1.2 Present Position, Educational Attainment, and Length of Service

The data further showed that most respondents were in Teacher III positions, while Master Teachers were concentrated in Master Teacher I and II ranks. Many Teachers I–III had master's units, whereas Master Teachers had higher academic qualifications, including master's and doctoral credentials. In terms of tenure, Teachers I–III were mostly within 11–20 years of service, while Master Teachers were concentrated in the 21–30 years bracket. These results indicate a progression

pattern in which teachers gradually accumulate years of service, pursue graduate education, and strengthen qualifications before reaching higher teaching ranks. The concentration in Teacher III also suggests possible stagnation in lower positions, even among experienced teachers. This supports the view that career advancement is not based on tenure alone but is tied to competence, postgraduate preparation, and continuing development (Zerna's (2025); Dignos (2025); Capistrano and Tamayo (2025); Orenstein and Lewis (2022)).

3.2. Level of Awareness on the Career Progression Scheme

3.2.1 Professional Development

The findings showed a highly aware level for professional development across both groups. Teachers I–III obtained a high average weighted mean, and Master Teachers scored slightly higher. Among the indicators, INSET received the highest awareness rating, followed by Learning Action Cell sessions, while NEAP-accredited programs received the lowest, though still within the highly aware range. The results indicate that respondents clearly recognized the importance of training, seminars, and collaborative learning opportunities in supporting professional growth and promotion. The results imply that professional development programs are being effectively communicated and valued within the division. The slightly higher scores of Master Teachers may be explained by their mentoring and leadership roles. These findings are consistent with the view that teachers' awareness of training opportunities supports efficacy and instructional quality (Gonio and Bauyot (2024); Sarrosa and Caspe (2025); Borja and Demalen (2025); Abdala et al. 2024; Zhou et al., 2025; Maravilla (2025); Dela Cruz & Baguio, 2024; Dilay & Ramos, 2024).

3.2.2 Qualification Standards

The respondents also demonstrated a highly aware level regarding qualification standards. Both groups showed awareness of the expanded career progression guidelines and policy, the classroom teaching and school administration career lines, salary grade limitations, Civil Service-approved qualification standards, PPST and performance requirements, educational qualifications, and required length of service. The highest-rated area was awareness of Civil Service-approved qualification standards, while the lowest involved the master's degree requirement for Master Teacher ranks, particularly among Teachers I–III. This finding indicates that policy dissemination within the division has been generally effective, though some teachers, especially those in lower ranks, may still be less familiar with higher-rank educational requirements. The result supports the argument that awareness of policy requirements helps teachers prepare for promotion and align their professional development with system expectations. This is supported by Mangalindan et al. (2025), Anosa et al. (2025), Simbre et al.'s (2023), Soreta (2021), Serrano and Fallado's (2023), Bautista and de Guzman (2018), and Cayabas's (2025), all of which emphasize policy awareness, institutional guidance, and readiness for reclassification.

3.2.3 Merit and Competence

On merit and competence, Teachers I–III were rated aware, while Master Teachers were highly aware, producing an overall interpretation of aware. The highest-rated indicators were classroom observation rating, lesson plan annotation with research integration, use of varied teaching strategies, and inclusive education. Lower-rated areas included communication strategies, responsiveness to learners with difficult circumstances, and maintaining a supportive learning environment, though these still remained within the aware range. These findings suggest that teachers generally understand the merit and competence indicators under the PPST, but that some areas still require strengthening through continued mentoring and targeted training. The consistently higher awareness among Master Teachers reflects their expanded professional and leadership roles. The result is aligned with Patrociño's (2024) and Spillane et al. (2022), which emphasize that knowledge of rubrics, standards, and policy tools influences preparedness for advancement and strengthens alignment between practice and promotion requirements.

3.3. Significant Agreement Between the Two Groups of Respondents

3.3.1 Agreement on Professional Profile

The analysis showed significant agreement between Teacher I–III and Master Teacher I–II on the rank order of professional profile indicators. The two groups generally converged on the importance of educational attainment, length of service, and present position, while age and gender were not shown to be central in agreement patterns related to advancement. This means that both groups perceive professional advancement as being driven more by qualifications, experience, and position-related readiness than by demographic factors. The result reinforces the idea that career progression is anchored in professional preparedness rather than age or gender alone, which is consistent with the study's broader emphasis on competence-based advancement.

3.3.2 Agreement on Professional Development, Qualification Standards, and Merit and Competence

The Mann-Whitney U and Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance results indicated no statistically significant difference between the two groups in their awareness of professional development, qualification standards, and merit and competence indicators. Both groups showed consensus across the identified indicators, despite Master Teachers tending to post slightly higher weighted means. This suggests that the career progression framework has reached both beginning and seasoned teachers in a relatively consistent way. The absence of significant difference indicates a shared understanding of promotion

requirements across ranks, even if actual opportunities and preparation levels differ in practice. This aligns with the view that clearly defined standards and common policy exposure can foster agreement across career stages (Shaoan et al. (2025); Karathanos-Aguilar & Ervin-Kassab, 2022).

3.4. Teachers' Perceptions of Career Progression

3.4.1 General Perception of the Career Progression System

The qualitative findings showed that teachers viewed career progression as both a professional opportunity and an additional burden. They described it as a continuous journey of personal and professional development, but also associated it with incomplete documents, financial incapacity, family responsibilities, inconsistent policies, and the need for supportive work environments. Overall, teachers were aware of the system yet constrained by practical and systemic challenges. This dual perception indicates that awareness of policy does not automatically mean ease of participation. Teachers recognize the value of promotion, yet actual compliance with its requirements may be difficult because of the realities of schoolwork and personal life. The results suggest that the policy is meaningful but that its implementation still places pressure on teachers' time, energy, and resources.

3.4.2 Factors Affecting Teacher Promotion

The focus group discussion identified three major factors affecting promotion: professional development, proper documentation, and personal factors. Teachers pointed to graduate studies, trainings, seminars, and professional accomplishments as important qualifications. They also emphasized the need for complete and organized documents, including portfolios, ratings, certificates, and means of verification. At the same time, they noted financial limitations, family obligations, and coordinatorship or workload demands as barriers to advancement. These findings show that promotion depends not only on awareness and competence but also on access to opportunities and the capacity to manage documentary and personal demands. Teachers who face financial and family burdens may find it harder to sustain graduate education or complete requirements. This is consistent with Kelchtermans and Deketelaere (2016) and Aquino (2025), who emphasized that teacher career development is shaped by both professional aspirations and personal well-being.

3.4.3 Motivation in Career Progression

Two dominant motivations emerged: personal fulfillment in teaching and the desire for a higher salary. Some teachers pursued promotion because they wanted to improve their teaching, become better role models, and contribute more meaningfully to learners and colleagues. Others were motivated by the financial benefits of promotion, especially in relation to family needs, rising costs of living, pension security, and recognition for long service. These results show that teachers' motivation is both intrinsic and extrinsic. Professional fulfillment supports commitment to continuous learning and better instruction, while compensation provides practical incentives for advancement. This pattern is consistent with Ryan and Deci's (2020), Gupta and Shaw (2014), and Ramos et al. (2025), which highlight the role of both inner commitment and financial reward in sustaining professional engagement and performance.

3.4.4 Prior Preparation for Career Progression

The participants identified two major forms of prior preparation: continuous professional development and preparation and organization of documents. Teachers stressed the need to attend trainings and seminars, pursue graduate studies, maintain high performance, and actively strengthen their qualifications. They also emphasized the importance of organizing portfolios, ratings, transcripts, certificates, and means of verification required during evaluation. This indicates that teachers understand promotion as a process requiring both competence-building and documentary readiness. However, the preparation process also creates mental and emotional strain, especially when combined with regular teaching duties and other school responsibilities. The findings support Santidad et al. (2025), Sevim and Akın (2021), Padmadewi (2020), Honchar et al. (2021), and Magtalas and Eduvala (2024), which collectively show that career readiness requires professional growth, organized evidence, psychological preparedness, and reasonable institutional support.

3.5. Meta-Inference of the Findings

The integrated quantitative and qualitative findings show that public elementary school teachers in the Schools Division of Legazpi City are generally highly aware of the Expanded Career Progression system, especially in terms of professional development and qualification standards, while remaining adequately aware of merit and competence indicators. At the same time, the qualitative data reveal that awareness does not remove barriers related to documentation, workload, finances, and access to training. Teachers therefore perceive career progression as a meaningful avenue for development and recognition, but one that also introduces added burdens in practice. Taken together, the findings indicate that career progression in this context is shaped by the interaction of awareness, motivation, institutional support, educational attainment, and personal circumstances. The policy is functioning as a framework for professional growth, but its success depends on whether teachers are sufficiently supported in meeting its requirements. This suggests that improving access to training, reducing documentary complexity, and strengthening support structures are necessary to make the promotion system more responsive and sustainable for teachers.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that public elementary school teachers in the Schools Division of Legazpi City are generally professionally mature, predominantly female, mostly married, and largely engaged in graduate studies, with many already having more than a decade of service. Both Teacher I–III and Master Teacher I–II groups demonstrated high awareness of the Expanded Career Progression System in terms of professional development, qualification standards, and merit and competence, and they also showed agreement on key professional indicators such as educational attainment, length of service, professional development, qualification standards, and merit and competence, while age and gender were not significantly associated with agreement on career advancement. At the same time, teachers perceived career progression as a continuing process of personal and professional development, but one still affected by incomplete documentation, financial limitations, family responsibilities, inconsistent policies, and other practical constraints within the Department of Education.

Based on the findings, the study recommends strengthening the implementation of the Expanded Career Progression System through sustained professional development initiatives, improved dissemination of policy information, and stronger institutional support for teachers preparing for advancement. The Department of Education, the Schools Division Office of Legazpi City, school administrators, and partner institutions may use the findings as a guide in supporting teachers' professional growth by improving access to training opportunities, offering financial assistance for graduate studies, simplifying documentation procedures, and enhancing mentoring programs so that teachers can navigate the promotion process more effectively and with greater long-term commitment to the profession.

The study was limited to selected permanent public elementary school teachers in eight schools within Districts 1–8 of the Schools Division of Legazpi City, specifically Teacher I, Teacher II, Teacher III, and Master Teacher I–II, and therefore its findings should not be generalized to all schools in the Province of Albay or to secondary teachers, private school teachers, non-teaching personnel, and administrative staff. It focused only on teachers' perceived level of awareness and perceptions of the Expanded Career Progression System and did not measure actual teaching performance, professional competence, or eligibility for promotion.

Compliance with ethical standards

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors and was conducted through self-funding. Ethical principles were observed throughout the study, particularly in securing voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality of the public elementary school teachers involved in the research. The authors also express their sincere gratitude to the Schools Division Office of Legazpi City, the participating elementary schools, and the teacher-respondents for their valuable cooperation and contribution to the study on awareness and perceptions of the Expanded Career Progression System.

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