

Challenges Encountered by Teachers Towards Professional Growth and Development in Public Secondary Schools of Albay

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Abstract

This study investigated the challenges encountered by public secondary school teachers in Albay in relation to their professional growth and development, particularly in pursuing graduate studies. Anchored on Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation, Knowles' Theory of Andragogy, and Expectancy-Value Theory, the research examined how professional profiles relate to barriers in academic advancement. A descriptive-correlational design was employed, utilizing a researcher-made Likert-scale questionnaire administered to 614 teachers across three congressional districts. Statistical tools included frequency, weighted mean, and Spearman's rank-order correlation. Findings revealed that most respondents were mid-career teachers with ongoing master's units, indicating a "completion plateau" in higher education. Among the identified challenges, time management emerged as the most critical barrier, followed by financial constraints and 21st-century literacy demands. Support systems were perceived as moderately challenging but varied by locality. Correlation analysis showed no significant relationship between teachers' profiles and the challenges encountered, suggesting that these barriers are systemic and universal rather than dependent on individual characteristics. The study concludes that teachers demonstrate strong motivation for professional advancement; however, structural constraints—particularly "time poverty," financial burdens, and institutional limitations—impede their progress. To address these issues, the study proposed the Scaffolded Teacher Time Optimization Framework (ST-TOF), which integrates academic milestones into coursework and institutionalizes time-protection strategies to facilitate degree completion. This study supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by highlighting the need to strengthen teacher development systems and ensure equitable access to lifelong learning opportunities. It also aligns with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by addressing structural barriers that affect teachers' career progression. The sustainability impact of the study lies in its contribution to improving institutional support mechanisms, enhancing teacher capacity, and promoting a more equitable and efficient professional development system that ultimately benefits educational quality and community development.

Keywords: 21st Century Literacy, Descriptive-Correlational Design, Professional Growth and Development, Support System, Time Management

1. Introduction

Professional growth and development are essential for teachers to meet evolving educational demands; however, access to graduate studies remains constrained by financial, temporal, and technical barriers. If teachers cannot complete advanced education, reforms in the Philippine education sector may remain aspirational rather than transformational. Graduate education is considered the most rigorous form of professional advancement, requiring sustained application of 21st-century literacy and research skills. Despite national policies supporting career progression, teachers often struggle due to workload, institutional limitations, and competing responsibilities (DepEd Order No. 42 s. 2017; DepEd Order No. 020, s. 2024; DepEd Order No. 024, s. 2025).

Literature consistently emphasizes that professional development is influenced by institutional support, workload, and personal circumstances. External motivators such as leadership encouragement and job security drive engagement in professional development (Ozeskin & Yildiz, 2025). Studies highlight the role of family dynamics and work-life balance in shaping teachers' participation in graduate studies (Rani & Dua, 2025; Flores et al., 2023). Administrative workload and lack of institutional support contribute to burnout and reduced participation in professional development (Umma & Zahana, 2020; Che Ani et al., 2025; Stoddart, 2024). Financial constraints, limited access to resources, and inadequate infrastructure are repeatedly identified as major barriers (Villaflares, 2025; Landertinger et al., 2021; McGraw et al., 2025). Additionally, mentorship and institutional culture significantly influence teachers' motivation and persistence (Scott et al., 2023; Knussen & Agnew, 2022; Esteban et al., 2022).

Globally, the pursuit of teacher development is tied to addressing learning poverty, which increased significantly due to the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2022). In the Philippines, low performance in PISA assessments highlights the

need for improved teacher competencies (World Bank Group, 2023; Department of Education, 2023). At the local level, Albay presents unique challenges, including geographical isolation, unstable infrastructure, and digital divide issues (Bautista, 2025; Gregorio, 2025; Notario, 2022). These constraints, combined with limited institutional support, hinder teachers' ability to pursue graduate studies effectively (Moral et al., 2024).

The study is conceptually grounded in examining the relationship between teachers' professional profiles and the challenges they encounter in pursuing graduate education. It considers the perceived "cost" of professional advancement, including time, financial resources, and emotional stress, which may outweigh its perceived value (Eccles & Wigfield; Adornado, 2026). The framework also aligns with policy mandates such as RA 11713 and RA 12288, which emphasize advanced academic qualifications as essential for career mobility in education.

Despite extensive global and national studies on teacher professional development, there is a lack of disaggregated and localized data specific to Albay. Existing research does not adequately capture the intersection of teacher profiles and context-specific challenges such as time management, resource availability, support systems, and 21st-century literacy demand (Frianeza et al., 2024). This gap limits the effectiveness of policy implementation and intervention strategies. Without context-specific evidence, efforts to support teachers remain generalized and insufficient to address localized barriers.

This study aligns primarily with SDG 4 – Quality Education, which emphasizes the need for qualified teachers and lifelong learning opportunities. It also supports SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals, recognizing that addressing educational challenges requires institutional support and resource collaboration (World Bank Group, 2023; Department of Education, 2023). Additionally, the study relates to SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, as it highlights the removal of structural barriers that hinder teachers' professional advancement (Global Society, 2025).

The study contributes to educational sustainability by identifying systemic barriers that affect teacher development and, consequently, student learning outcomes. It also supports institutional and policy sustainability by providing evidence for improving support systems within DepEd and higher education institutions. From a socio-economic perspective, enhancing teachers' access to professional growth promotes career mobility and economic stability. Furthermore, addressing challenges such as digital divide, workload, and financial constraints contributes to community and technological sustainability, ensuring that teachers in diverse geographic contexts can equally participate in professional advancement and educational reform.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design, a non-experimental quantitative approach that describes existing conditions and examines relationships among variables as they naturally occur. This design was appropriate for identifying patterns between teachers' professional profiles and the challenges they encounter without manipulating variables (Clarete et al., 2023).

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the province of Albay, Philippines, covering public secondary schools across different municipalities. The research setting included both mainland and coastal areas, allowing representation from geographically diverse schools within the province.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents consisted of public secondary school teachers in Albay who are engaged in or pursuing professional growth and development, particularly through graduate studies. These participants represent various professional profiles in terms of years in service, training exposure, and educational attainment.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study employed a coordinated and decentralized sampling procedure facilitated through school principals and administrators. Public secondary schools across multiple municipalities in Albay were included, and participants were reached through institutional coordination with the Schools Division Office (SDO). Survey distribution was localized through school heads who integrated the instrument into faculty communication channels, ensuring access to a broad and representative sample of teachers across the province.

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary data collection tool was a researcher-made survey questionnaire designed to assess the challenges encountered by teachers in pursuing professional growth. The instrument consisted of two parts: the first gathered data on respondents' professional profiles, including years in service, seminars attended, and highest educational attainment, while the second measured challenges across four dimensions—time management, financial and resource availability, support system, and 21st-century literacy and academic skills. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, which is appropriate for capturing perceptions in quantitative educational research. The instrument underwent content validation through expert review, including evaluation by the research adviser and approval by the technical committee and institutional authorities to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with research objectives. Although pilot testing and statistical reliability testing were not conducted due to logistical constraints, expert validation ensured the instrument's adequacy for the study.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection followed a structured process beginning with securing approval from the research adviser, panel of examiners, and technical committee. Formal permission was then obtained from the Schools Division Office of Albay to access public secondary school teachers. The distribution of the survey was coordinated through school principals, who facilitated dissemination within their respective institutions. The questionnaire was administered using Google Forms, enabling efficient data collection across geographically dispersed areas. To ensure confidentiality and encourage honest responses, the survey was configured anonymously, creating a secure environment for participants. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods consistent with a descriptive-correlational design. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the professional profiles of respondents and the extent of challenges encountered, while inferential analysis, specifically Spearman Rank Correlation, was employed to determine the relationship between teachers' profiles and the challenges they experience.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Main Findings

3.1.1 Professional Profile of Respondents

The results revealed that the majority of respondents were mid-career teachers with approximately 5–10 years of service. Most had attended local seminars and trainings and were currently holding Master's units, indicating a tendency toward partial completion rather than full attainment of graduate degrees. This pattern suggests a stagnation point in graduate education among teachers, where initial enrollment is common but completion remains limited. The observed plateau reflects structural constraints rather than lack of motivation, indicating that teachers begin professional advancement but encounter barriers that prevent progression toward degree completion.

3.1.2 Extent of Challenges in Professional Growth

The findings showed that time management was the most significant challenge, particularly in balancing teaching responsibilities with graduate studies. Financial constraints, especially high tuition costs, were also identified as major barriers to professional growth. These results indicate that teachers face competing demands between professional duties and academic requirements, leading to what can be described as "time poverty." The financial burden further compounds this issue, limiting access to sustained academic engagement. This supports the view that professional development is not solely dependent on individual effort but is influenced by structural conditions such as workload and economic capacity.

3.1.3 Relationship Between Professional Profile and Challenges

The analysis revealed no significant relationship between teachers' professional profiles and the challenges they encounter. Statistical results showed weak to moderate correlations across variables such as years in service, trainings attended, and educational attainment, with all computed values falling below the critical threshold, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis. This indicates that challenges in professional growth are experienced uniformly regardless of experience, training exposure, or academic level. The findings suggest that these barriers are systemic rather than individual, as both novice and experienced teachers encounter similar difficulties. This aligns with Yi et al. (2024), who emphasized that barriers to teacher development are rooted in institutional limitations, and with Matafwali et al. (2024) and Scott et al. (2023), who highlighted the influence of resource availability and organizational support over individual characteristics.

3.2 Challenges Affecting Professional Growth

The results identified time management and financial constraints as the most dominant challenges, alongside issues related to resource availability and support systems. These challenges persist across different teacher profiles, indicating their widespread nature within the system. The persistence of these challenges suggests that teachers operate within an environment where institutional demands and limited support structures hinder professional advancement. The findings reinforce the notion that improving access to professional growth requires systemic interventions, including workload adjustments, financial assistance, and stronger institutional support mechanisms.

3.3 Proposed Strategic Intervention

The study proposed the Scaffolded Teacher Time Optimization Framework (ST-TOF), which introduces a structured subject-to-thesis approach that integrates research milestones into regular coursework. This framework aims to align academic requirements with the professional realities of teachers, providing a more efficient pathway toward degree completion. This intervention reflects the need for context-responsive solutions that address time and structural constraints rather than relying solely on individual effort. By embedding academic progress within existing workloads, the framework offers a practical approach to mitigating time limitations and supporting sustained professional development among teachers.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that teachers in public secondary schools of Albay are predominantly mid-career professionals who actively participate in short-term professional development but experience a plateau in completing advanced academic degrees. Despite their motivation, they face a “triple-burden” of professional growth characterized by time management difficulties, financial constraints, and increasing academic demands, which collectively hinder sustained engagement in postgraduate studies. The absence of a significant relationship between teachers’ profiles and the challenges encountered indicates that these barriers are systemic and universal rather than individual. Consequently, the Scaffolded Teacher Time Optimization Framework (ST-TOF) is identified as a necessary institutional response, as it aligns academic requirements with teachers’ professional realities and mitigates structural constraints affecting their progression.

It is recommended that the Schools Division Office (SDO) of Albay establish a localized system to monitor teachers’ academic progress and provide targeted access to scholarships and advanced degree opportunities. School heads and administrators should enforce policies that reduce non-teaching workloads to allow teachers sufficient time for professional growth activities. Furthermore, Local Government Units (LGUs) and policymakers should allocate dedicated funding to support teachers’ postgraduate education, including tuition and research expenses, ensuring equitable access to professional advancement opportunities.

Compliance with ethical standards

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This study complied with recognized ethical standards for human-participant research by ensuring voluntary participation with informed consent, the right to withdraw without penalty, and strict confidentiality through anonymous, secure, and aggregated data handling. Given the focus on psychological well-being, procedures were non-invasive, and safeguards were observed to minimize discomfort, with guidance to appropriate support services when needed, and required institutional permissions were secured for instrument use and access to academic records.

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