

Teacher Motivation and Professional Identity within the Expanded Career Progression (ECP) System: A Case Study in a Philippine Public School

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Abstract

This study examined the lived experiences of teachers with the Expanded Career Progression (ECP) System in a semi-rural Philippine public school, particularly in relation to teacher motivation, professional identity, and career progression. Anchored in Self-Determination Theory and Identity Theory, the study employed a simple qualitative research design involving all teachers of San Antonio North Elementary School, including one Alternative Learning System teacher, through total population sampling. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, document review, field notes, and classroom observations where permitted. Thematic analysis was used to examine teachers' experiences in terms of autonomy, competence, relatedness, commitment, engagement, self-concept, role perception, social validation, challenges, opportunities, and recommendations. Findings revealed that the ECP System strengthened teacher competence through training, mentoring, and peer sharing, and enhanced relatedness through collaboration and community involvement. However, its influence on autonomy remained limited due to centralized decision-making, administrative workload, unclear promotion guidelines, heavy reporting, and limited resources. The system also supported teachers' evolving professional identity as mentors, teacher-leaders, role models, and contributors to school growth, although recognition remained partly tied to paperwork and clerical tasks rather than classroom innovation. The study concludes that the ECP System has potential to support teacher development, but its implementation should be refined by simplifying requirements, reducing paperwork, clarifying promotion standards, and giving greater value to instructional leadership and classroom excellence. The study supports SDG 4 on Quality Education, SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities, SDG 16 on Strong Institutions, and SDG 17 on Partnerships for the Goals. Its sustainability impact lies in strengthening teacher motivation, institutional responsiveness, community support, and policy improvement in semi-rural education contexts.

Keywords: Career Progression, Expanded Career Progression System, Professional Identity, Quality Education, Semi-Rural School, Teacher Development, Teacher Motivation, Teacher Recognition, Teacher Voice, Thematic Analysis

1. Introduction

The Expanded Career Progression (ECP) System represents a major reform in Philippine teacher development, recognition, and retention. Anchored in Executive Order No. 174, s. 2022 and DepEd Order No. 024, s. 2025, the system seeks to address long-standing issues of career stagnation, limited promotion opportunities, teacher burnout, and declining motivation. This study examines how teachers in a semi-rural Philippine public school experience the ECP System, particularly in relation to teacher motivation, professional identity, and career progression. Using Self-Determination Theory and Identity Theory, the study highlights the need to understand reforms not only as policy structures but also as lived realities shaped by school context, available resources, community expectations, and teachers' voices.

1.1 The Expanded Career Progression System and Teacher Development in Philippine Public Schools

The teaching profession has long been viewed as essential to nation-building because teachers serve as intellectual, moral, and social foundations for future generations (Bernardo, 2021; David & Mendoza, 2020). In the Philippine context, teachers are not only facilitators of learning but also community leaders whose motivation and professional identity directly influence the quality of education. The implementation of Executive Order No. 174, s. 2022 and DepEd Order No. 024, s. 2025 introduced the Expanded Career Progression (ECP) System as a response to career stagnation, limited promotion opportunities, and the need for professional growth (DepEd, 2025; Capistrano & Tamayo, 2025; Agpullo, 2024; Bongalon Bihasa et al., 2026). These reforms are especially urgent because teacher attrition, burnout, and stagnation continue to affect the Philippine teaching profession (Manalo, 2021; Bautista, 2022). The ECP System recognizes that teacher career development should not be limited to administrative promotion but should also value classroom excellence, instructional innovation, leadership, and professional growth. Many Filipino teachers have expressed dissatisfaction with systems that appear to reward administrative roles more than classroom-based competence (Bernardo, 2021; Reyes, 2022). This imbalance may weaken motivation and professional identity by discouraging teachers from investing in pedagogy and

innovation. The ECP System therefore provides a potential mechanism for restoring professional recognition and strengthening teacher commitment through differentiated career pathways (Llego, 2023; Bongalon Bihasa et al., 2026).

1.2 Related Literature on Teacher Career Progression, Motivation, and Professional Identity

Internationally, career progression systems have been used to sustain teacher morale, retention, and professional development. Singapore, Finland, and the United Kingdom have established teacher career frameworks that recognize classroom excellence and leadership roles (Singapore MOE, 2018; Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017; UK Department for Education, 2019). These models emphasize that education systems must develop organizational capacity while recognizing teaching expertise and professional practice (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). However, while global models may inform reform, their effectiveness in the Philippines depends on how well they are localized to teachers' actual working conditions (Avalos, 2011; Sahlberg, 2011). Research also shows that teacher motivation and burnout are central to educational quality. Teacher turnover and shortages are often linked more to organizational conditions than to individual limitations (Ingersoll, 2001). Burnout, job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion are strongly connected to structural conditions that influence teacher commitment (Linke & Behn, 2021). Similarly, teachers' long-term retention is shaped by intrinsic motivation, recognition, and the perceived value of their work (Richardson & Watt, 2014; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). These insights support the need to examine whether the ECP System strengthens teachers' autonomy, competence, relatedness, commitment, engagement, and classroom practice. Professional identity is equally important because it reflects teachers' beliefs, values, self-concept, and sense of worth within their profession (Sachs, 2001; Kelchtermans, 2009; Flores & Day, 2006). Strong professional identity is associated with perseverance and investment in teaching, while weak identity is linked to disaffection and possible withdrawal from the profession (Olsen, 2008; Izadinia, 2013; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Within the ECP System, recognition practices may either strengthen professional identity by validating classroom excellence or weaken it if teachers perceive that administrative work is valued more than instructional expertise.

1.3 Localized Context of the ECP System in Semi-Rural Philippine Public Schools

Although international literature provides important insights into teacher motivation, identity, and career progression, localized evidence in the Philippines remains limited. Studies from broader contexts have examined career progression and professional identity (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Day & Gu, 2010), but fewer studies have explored Filipino teachers' lived experiences with the ECP System. This gap is especially evident in semi-rural schools, where teachers face large classes, limited resources, agricultural-based community contexts, and strong parent-school relationships (Cruz, 2020; Gonzales, 2020; Salazar, 2021). In semi-rural schools such as San Antonio North Elementary School in Nueva Vizcaya, teachers' motivation and identity are influenced by community expectations, resource limitations, and local socioeconomic conditions (Villanueva, 2021; Navarro, 2019). These local realities may shape how teachers understand career progression, recognition, and professional growth. For this reason, examining teachers' experiences in such contexts can provide a more representative understanding of how the ECP System operates beyond policy documents (Pascual, 2022; PIDS, 2022). Nationally, the study is relevant because the ECP System is being implemented while Philippine education continues to confront teacher attrition, burnout, heavy workloads, overcrowded classrooms, and administrative burdens (Manalo, 2021; Reyes, 2022). International research supports this concern, showing that organizational factors contribute to teacher turnover and shortages (Ingersoll, 2001), while burnout contributes to emotional exhaustion and lower job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). These conditions make it necessary to examine whether the ECP System responds to teachers' professional needs or simply adds another layer of reform disconnected from classroom realities.

1.4 Self-Determination Theory, Identity Theory, and Teacher Agency as Bases of the Study

This study is grounded in Self-Determination Theory and Identity Theory. Self-Determination Theory explains teacher motivation through autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are essential for long-term commitment and meaningful engagement (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2017). In the context of the ECP System, motivation is reflected in teachers' perceptions of career pathways, recognition mechanisms, classroom engagement, and professional commitment. When classroom innovation and instructional competence are valued, teachers may feel empowered; when promotion appears to favor administrative roles, they may feel undervalued and disengaged (Han & Yin, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Identity Theory explains how teachers form their self-concept, role perception, and social validation within institutional and social contexts (Gee, 2000; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Professional identity is shaped by how teachers interpret their roles and how their contributions are recognized by the school system (Beijaard et al., 2004; Day & Gu, 2010; Sachs, 2001; Kelchtermans, 2009; Flores & Day, 2006). Within the ECP System, recognition of classroom excellence may strengthen teachers' professional identity, while emphasis on administrative promotion may create role conflict or weaken their instructional self-worth. Teacher agency also forms part of the study's conceptual basis. Teachers are not passive recipients of reform but active stakeholders who interpret, negotiate, and reshape policies based on their professional realities (Mockler, 2011; Coldron & Smith, 1999). Their recommendations are therefore essential in assessing whether the ECP System is meaningful, context-sensitive, and sustainable. By integrating teacher voice, the study views reform as a participatory process rather than a purely top-down policy intervention.

1.5 Research Gap and Rationale for Examining Teachers' Lived Experiences of the ECP System

The central gap addressed by this study is the limited local evidence on how teachers experience the Expanded Career Progression (ECP) System in semi-rural Philippine schools. While previous studies have examined teacher motivation, professional identity, and career progression in international contexts (Beijaard et al., 2004; Day & Gu, 2010), there remains a need to understand how these constructs interact within the ECP System in Philippine public schools. This is important because teacher experiences are shaped by local culture, economic conditions, community relationships, school resources, and institutional expectations (Salazar, 2021; Dela Cruz, 2021; Navarro, 2019; Pascual, 2022; PIDS, 2022). Another gap concerns the limited documentation of the obstacles and opportunities teachers encounter in managing career progression. Promotions have often been perceived as more closely associated with administrative roles than classroom expertise (Bernardo, 2021; Reyes, 2022). This may create frustration among teachers whose instructional competence and pedagogical innovation are not sufficiently recognized. By documenting teachers' lived experiences, the study seeks to determine whether the ECP System addresses these frustrations or reproduces existing patterns of marginalization. The study is also justified by the need to include teacher voice in policy refinement. Without teachers' perspectives, reforms may remain technically sound but practically disconnected from classroom realities. By focusing on motivation, professional identity, challenges, opportunities, and recommendations, the study aims to bridge the gap between policy and practice and contribute to a more responsive implementation of the ECP System (Mockler, 2011; Coldron & Smith, 1999; Izadinia, 2013).

1.6 Alignment of the ECP System, Teacher Motivation, and Professional Identity with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals

This study aligns most directly with SDG 4 – Quality Education because it focuses on teacher motivation, professional identity, career development, and classroom practice. Strengthening teachers through meaningful career progression can support improved teaching quality, learner engagement, and educational outcomes. Since teachers are central to the delivery of quality education, reforms that recognize their competence and sustain their commitment contribute to the broader goal of inclusive and effective education. The study also relates to SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth because it examines career pathways, professional recognition, retention, and work-related motivation among teachers. By exploring whether the ECP System provides clearer and more meaningful opportunities for career growth, the study contributes to discussions on decent work conditions within the education sector. It also supports SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities by recognizing the role of semi-rural schools as important community institutions where teacher empowerment can strengthen social cohesion, local leadership, and community development. The study may also support SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions because it examines whether an institutional reform is implemented in a way that is participatory, responsive, and grounded in teachers' lived realities. By emphasizing teacher voice, policy alignment, and evidence-based improvement, the study contributes to stronger and more accountable educational institutions. Finally, it supports SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals by highlighting the importance of collaboration among teachers, school leaders, policymakers, parents, learners, and communities in sustaining meaningful education reform.

1.7 Multidisciplinary Sustainability Relevance of Teacher Development under the ECP System

The study contributes to educational sustainability by examining how teacher development, motivation, and professional identity influence classroom practice and long-term educational quality. Motivated teachers with strong professional identities are more likely to sustain effective, engaging, and meaningful learning experiences for students (Richardson & Watt, 2014; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). In this sense, investment in teacher development is also an investment in learner achievement, school improvement, and national development (Darling-Hammond, 2010; UNESCO, 2020). It also contributes to socio-economic and community sustainability by focusing on semi-rural schools where education is closely connected to local development. In these communities, schools serve as central institutions that support learners, families, and community participation. Teacher empowerment through the ECP System may strengthen local leadership, social cohesion, and community resilience, particularly in contexts affected by limited resources and agriculture-based livelihoods (Cruz, 2020; Dela Cruz, 2021; Navarro, 2019; Reyes & Villanueva, 2022; Gonzales, 2020; Salazar, 2021; PIDS, 2022; UNESCO, 2020). The study further contributes to institutional and policy sustainability by generating localized evidence that can guide school administrators, DepEd, and other stakeholders in refining teacher development and recognition systems. By documenting teachers' challenges, opportunities, and recommendations, the study supports reforms that are not only theoretically grounded but also responsive to classroom realities. Its multidisciplinary value lies in connecting education policy, teacher psychology, professional identity, community development, and sustainable institutional reform within the implementation of the ECP System.

1.8 Scope of the Study on Teachers' Motivation, Professional Identity, and Career Progression under the ECP System

This study focuses on teachers' lived experiences with the Expanded Career Progression (ECP) System in a semi-rural Philippine public school. Specifically, it examines how the system influences teacher motivation in terms of autonomy, competence, relatedness, commitment, engagement, and classroom practice. It also explores how the ECP System affects professional identity in relation to self-concept, role and value, and social validation. Finally, the study identifies the

obstacles and opportunities teachers encounter in managing career progression and documents their recommendations for improving the system. Conceptually, the study positions the ECP System as both a policy framework and a lived reality. Teacher motivation is understood through autonomy, competence, relatedness, commitment, engagement, and classroom practice (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Professional identity is understood through self-concept, role perception, and social validation (Beijaard et al., 2004; Day & Gu, 2010; Sachs, 2001). Teacher agency connects these constructs by emphasizing how teachers interpret and reshape reform through their lived experiences (Mockler, 2011; Coldron & Smith, 1999). Through this framework, the study seeks to provide evidence that can help align the ECP System with teacher development, recognition, retention, and the realities of semi-rural education.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a simple qualitative research design to explore how teachers understood and experienced the ECP System in relation to motivation, professional identity, and career advancement. This design was appropriate because simple qualitative research focuses on how individuals interpret their experiences and how these meanings shape their behavior and worldview. It allowed the researcher to describe teachers' experiences in terms of autonomy, competence, relatedness, commitment, engagement, classroom practice, self-concept, role, social validation, challenges, opportunities, and recommendations.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in San Antonio North Elementary School, Bambang II District, Municipality of Bambang, Province of Nueva Vizcaya. The district is under the Schools Division of Nueva Vizcaya and implements the K–12 Basic Education Curriculum. The school is located in a semi-rural community shaped by agricultural livelihood, limited resources, small-scale businesses, and strong parent-community involvement (Cruz, 2020; Dela Cruz, 2021; Gonzales, 2020; Salazar, 2021; Navarro, 2019; Reyes, 2022; Villanueva, 2021). With 211 learners, seven teachers, one Alternative Learning System teacher, and a Head Teacher, the school provided a suitable context for examining teacher motivation, professional identity, and agency under the ECP System.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were all teachers of San Antonio North Elementary School, including one Alternative Learning System teacher. Their participation ensured that the study captured the perspectives of the whole teaching community, including both formal classroom teaching and non-formal education experiences.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study used total population sampling by including all teachers in the school. This sampling method was appropriate because the study prioritized depth of understanding rather than broad statistical representation. It also ensured that the experiences of all teachers directly involved in the ECP System were included.

2.5 Research Instrument

The main research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide designed to explore teachers' lived experiences under the ECP System. The guide was aligned with the research questions and focused on motivation through autonomy, competence, relatedness, commitment, engagement, and classroom practice; professional identity through self-concept, role perception, and social validation; and career progression through challenges, opportunities, and recommendations. The interview guide was reviewed by education research and policy specialists and refined through a pilot interview with a non-participant teacher. Field notes and document analysis of DepEd memoranda, school implementation reports, and teacher performance portfolios were also used to strengthen the data.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Before data collection, permission was secured from the school head, and informed consent was obtained from the teacher-participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather individual narratives, while focus group discussions were used to obtain shared insights and collective experiences. Document review provided contextual evidence on career progression and professional development, while classroom observations were conducted where permitted to examine how motivation and professional identity appeared in teaching practice. Interviews and discussions were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and validated through member checking. Field notes were also prepared during data collection.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The study used qualitative thematic analysis guided by Self-Determination Theory and Identity Theory. Interview transcripts, field notes, documents, and observation notes were examined through open coding. Codes were grouped according to motivation, professional identity, and career progression. From these categories, themes were developed to

describe teachers' experiences under the ECP System. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing with academic mentors.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study observed informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, member checking, reflexivity, academic integrity, cultural sensitivity, and responsible dissemination of findings. Permission was obtained from the school head of San Antonio North Elementary School and the Bambang II District Office of the Department of Education. Participants were informed of the purpose, methods, and implications of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Pseudonyms were used, and data were stored in password-protected files. Ethical practice was guided by international standards such as the UNESCO guidelines on ethics in educational research (2020) and policy frameworks established in the Philippines (PIDS, 2022). The researcher also disclosed the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools for organizing, revising, and improving clarity, while retaining full responsibility for the study, consistent with the responsible digital research practice advocated by UNESCO (2020).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Influence of the ECP System on Teacher Motivation

3.1.1 Autonomy and Decision-Making

The findings showed mixed experiences regarding autonomy and decision-making under the ECP System. While the system was intended to provide greater professional autonomy, teachers experienced a gap between policy and practice. Teacher 1 stated that the ECP provided "more freedom in lesson planning," while Teacher 2 and Teacher 5 described their autonomy as "limited" because of continued dependence on administrators. Teacher 6 also described decision-making as "top-down." This result suggests that the ECP System has not yet fully strengthened teacher autonomy in practice. In relation to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), autonomy is an important psychological need that supports motivation; however, the teachers' experiences show that administrative control may still limit their sense of professional independence. Thus, while the ECP promotes autonomy as a reform goal, its actual implementation appears inconsistent.

3.1.2 Competence Development through Training

The findings showed that the ECP System helped improve teachers' competence. Participants reported that their skills were strengthened through "training," "mentoring programs," and "peer sharing." Teacher 3 stated that the system encouraged teachers "to try new approaches," indicating that the ECP provided opportunities for professional learning and instructional improvement. This result implies that the ECP System contributes positively to competence development, which is another key component of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). When teachers receive training, mentoring, and peer support, they become more confident in their professional abilities. This strengthens their motivation and supports their capacity to improve classroom practice.

3.1.3 Relatedness and Professional Collaboration

The findings revealed that the ECP System strengthened professional and community relationships. Teachers described their interactions as "more collaborative" and "stronger." Teacher 4 shared that "relatedness with the community is stronger" because the new career path increased teachers' visibility and involvement. This result indicates that the ECP System may promote relatedness by encouraging collaboration among teachers and strengthening their connection with the school community. In the context of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), relatedness supports motivation because teachers feel connected, recognized, and supported by others. The findings show that the ECP System has potential to enhance collegial and community-based support for teachers.

3.1.4 Commitment and Engagement

The findings showed that most participants maintained steady or high levels of commitment and engagement under the ECP System. However, this motivation was affected by "workload," "time constraints," and "bureaucracy." Although teachers remained committed, their enthusiasm was limited by administrative and structural demands. This result suggests that the ECP System can support teacher engagement, but its positive effect may be weakened by heavy workloads and bureaucratic requirements. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), motivation is sustained when teachers feel supported and capable, but excessive administrative burdens may reduce their energy and professional commitment.

3.2 Impact of the ECP System on Professional Identity

3.2.1 Evolving Teacher Self-Concept

The findings showed that teachers' self-concept was gradually changing under the ECP System. Participants no longer saw themselves only as staff but also as professionals with broader roles. They identified themselves as "teacher-leaders," "mentors," "role models," and "contributors to school growth." This result suggests that the ECP System contributes to a stronger professional identity by allowing teachers to view themselves as active contributors to school development. From

the perspective of Identity Theory, self-concept is shaped by how teachers understand their professional roles. The findings indicate that the ECP System may help teachers develop a more empowered and leadership-oriented sense of identity.

3.2.2 Role Perception and Perceived Value

The findings revealed that teachers generally felt “more valued” under the ECP System. However, they also believed that their value continued to be “measured by paperwork” or “tied to clerical tasks.” Teacher 7 noted that despite the ECP, “promotion favors admin work.” This result suggests that although the ECP System provides recognition, teachers still experience tension between classroom excellence and administrative expectations. In relation to Identity Theory, professional identity is influenced by how teachers perceive their role and how institutions validate their work. The findings show that the system may strengthen teacher identity only if recognition is more clearly connected to teaching performance and classroom innovation rather than clerical functions.

3.2.3 Social Validation from Students, Parents, and Administrators

The findings showed that teachers received validation from students, parents, and the school community. Participants shared that “parents appreciate my efforts more” and that “recognition from students is motivating.” However, recognition from administrators remained more focused on administrative assistance than classroom excellence. This result indicates that social validation plays an important role in strengthening teachers’ professional identity. Recognition from students and parents supports teachers’ sense of worth, but limited administrative recognition of classroom excellence may weaken the full impact of the ECP System. From the perspective of Identity Theory, institutional validation is essential in shaping how teachers value their professional role.

3.3 Obstacles, Opportunities, and Teacher Recommendations under the ECP System

3.3.1 Obstacles in Career Progression

The findings identified several barriers to career progression under the ECP System. The main obstacles were “unclear promotion guidelines,” “heavy reporting,” “administrative burden,” and “lack of resources” in the semi-rural school setting. These challenges affected how teachers experienced the system and limited its intended benefits. This result suggests that the effectiveness of the ECP System depends not only on policy design but also on practical implementation. Unclear guidelines, excessive reporting, and limited resources may reduce teachers’ motivation and weaken their trust in the reform. These barriers show the need for clearer procedures and stronger support mechanisms in semi-rural schools.

3.3.2 Opportunities for Professional Growth

The findings showed that the ECP System also created opportunities for teachers. Participants identified a “clearer career path,” access to “seminars,” and the “recognition of classroom excellence” as positive aspects of the system. These opportunities helped teachers see the ECP as a possible pathway for professional advancement. This result indicates that the ECP System has the potential to support teacher development when its opportunities are accessible and clearly implemented. A clearer career path and professional learning opportunities may strengthen motivation, competence, and professional identity. However, these benefits must be balanced with reduced administrative burden and stronger recognition of instructional work.

3.3.3 Teacher-Generated Recommendations

The findings showed that teachers recommended improvements to make the ECP System more responsive to their professional realities. Across participants, the main recommendations were to “simplify requirements,” “reduce paperwork,” and ensure that promotions “highlight classroom innovation” over administrative functions. This result suggests that teachers view the ECP System as valuable but in need of refinement. Their recommendations emphasize the importance of making career progression more teacher-centered, practical, and aligned with classroom excellence. These insights show that teacher voices are essential in improving the implementation of the ECP System and ensuring that it supports motivation, professional identity, and meaningful career development.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that the Expanded Career Progression (ECP) System supports teacher competence and relatedness by providing structured professional growth and encouraging collaboration; however, its effect on autonomy remains limited because centralized decision-making and administrative workload continue to affect teachers’ long-term motivation. The system has also helped teachers develop professional roles as mentors and leaders, although their professional identity remains divided because institutional rewards still tend to emphasize clerical compliance rather than pedagogical innovation. Overall, a gap remains between the policy goal of promoting classroom excellence and the teachers’ lived experience of bureaucratic burden, especially in a semi-rural school context where limited resources and unclear standards make career progression more difficult. The findings also show that teachers are active agents of reform who are willing to innovate but need a system that gives greater value to classroom results than administrative documentation.

The Department of Education should simplify and clarify promotion guidelines and revise evaluation criteria to give greater weight to classroom innovation and student impact rather than administrative and clerical evidence. School administrators should balance recognition by actively rewarding instructional leadership and allowing teachers greater pedagogical autonomy in their classroom contexts. Teachers should continue using the ECP career ladder for mentoring and peer-sharing while advocating for reduced clerical tasks to protect instructional time. Parents, local government units, and community stakeholders should sustain their support for the school because teacher motivation in rural settings is strongly influenced by community relatedness and validation.

The study is limited to the experiences of teachers in San Antonio North Elementary School, a semi-rural school context where limited materials, unclear standards, and resource scarcity affect the implementation of the ECP System. Because the findings are grounded in this specific setting, they may not fully represent the experiences of teachers in other school contexts. Future research may conduct comparative studies between urban and rural schools to examine how resource scarcity affects the implementation of the ECP System's career stages.

Compliance with ethical standards

The study observed ethical principles, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, member checking, reflexivity, academic integrity, cultural sensitivity, and responsible dissemination of findings. Pseudonyms were used, and data were stored in password-protected files. The researcher also disclosed the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence tools for organizing, revising, and improving clarity, while retaining full responsibility for the study.

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