

## Hurdles Faced by Secondary Public School Teachers in their Professional Development Journey

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**Abstract:** Teachers are agents of curriculum and instruction. This requires teachers to pursue continuous professional development to maintain and enhance competence in teaching effectively. Their participation in a span of professional development programs is essential to both their professional and personal development. A case study research design was used to explore the challenges faced by public-school teachers in their pursuit of professional development. In-depth semi-structured interview to gather the data among the six public school teachers of Malaybalay City, Bukidnon was utilized through purposive sampling. The collected data were analyzed and interpreted using thematic analysis. The findings of this study uncovered the challenges they faced were overlapping of responsibilities, time constraints, financial constraints, misalignment of professional development attended, and health problems. Furthermore, understanding these realities of cases posed various implications for the professional development providers, policymakers and stakeholders to combat these challenges, and further evaluation of professional development to ensure that it is targeted appropriately and effectively. Also, further research is suggested to enrich the results and implication to the present study.

**Keywords:** challenges, financial constraints, overlapping of responsibilities, personal growth, professional development

### 1. Introduction

Teachers are agents of curriculum and instruction. This requires teachers to pursue continuous professional development to maintain and enhance competence to teach effectively. Changes in this field are constant because of the ever-evolving demands and nature of the teaching profession. Professional development is the core of improved teaching performance which brings improvement in forms of student achievement and professional practice. Professional development can be further enhanced and advanced by engaging in faculty development activities like course design, delivery, subject-matter competence, student rapport, and classroom management. The quality of teachers is one of the considerations to deliver a quality education. Practices, issues and concerns of the 21st century teachers in delivering instructions which led the author to recommend the support of professional development among teachers (Uchang, 2022). In addition, in light of the fact that teaching is an ongoing, lifetime learning process, Arrieta and Ancho (2021) emphasized the importance of teacher professional development programs like the Teacher Development Program (TDP) as a means of helping educators advance their knowledge, abilities, and professional development. TDP also provides teachers with valuable perspectives that enable them to develop their personal and professional vision. Thus, professional development is important to uplift the quality of the teachers in delivering the educational needs of the students.

In the Philippines, teachers in public schools have a structured career and professional growth through a ladderized faculty position and incentives. Thus, the Philippine government has authorized and reinforced the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program for all regulated professions which is needed in the renewal of their licenses through Republic Act No. 10912. As well as the Department of Education which issued DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). CPD allows teachers to acquire better content knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and exposure to advanced methods and strategies with fellow educators and experts. Mentors and mentees both benefit from this collaboration process (Van der Klink et al., 2017), and strengthening work performance through coaching, training sessions, and leadership mentoring (Madams, 2023). The PPST emphasize the importance of professional development for teachers properly equipped to effectively

implement the K to 12 Program. It also encourages ongoing professional development, not limited to one-time workshops or training sessions. These policies provide measures on the professionals to improve their competence in accordance with the international standards of practice. Teachers should develop personal and professional improvement plans based on self-assessment and reflection. This asserted in the study of Padillo et. al (2021) that the professional development activities enhanced teachers' mastery in instructional delivery, subject matter expertise, rapport with students, and classroom management skills. Others also emphasized on the positive effects of professional development such collaboration and innovation which led to increase in teaching methodologies (Nairz-Wirth & Feldmann, 2019), refined and enhanced teaching practices (Arrieta & Ancho, 2022), and increase students' achievement (Kind, 2019).

However, despite efforts by the DepEd and NEAP to improve professional development for teachers, some teachers experience challenges in participating professional activities such as time constraints, lack of resources, limited support from school administration, and their motivation and commitment (Day & Gu, 2013) that may affect their participation. Public school teachers face various challenges hindering their professional development, including lack of recognition and awards (Lim & Ramos, 2019); time constraints due to workload (Eroglu & Kaya, 2021; Pasique & Maguate, 2023); insufficient support from administration and limited resources (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011); lack of professional development opportunities and financial and personal problems (Eroglu & Kaya, 2021). Initiatives such as collaboration among teachers (Lyna et al., 2016), co-planning of lessons (Andrews-Larsen et al., 2017), and assessing teacher's interest in professional development opportunities (Smith & Lindsay, 2016) can help overcome these challenges. In the Philippines, the Department of Education and other organizations offer free courses, trainings, and workshops through online platforms, webinars, e-learning initiatives and peer teaching and collaboration on both school-based and clustered-based In-Service Training such as Learning Action Cell (LAC) (DO No. 35 s, 2016). Moreover, graduate studies and advanced degrees is highly encouraged. Public teachers are given permit to study and study leave as stipulated in the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers (RA 4670). Thus, knowledge of their challenges is essential to help them maximize their full potential.

Furthermore, this study was guided by the Communities of Practice Theory which emphasizes the importance of social learning and collaborative engagement within the teaching-learning environment (Wenger, 1998). Provided a safe environment in which teachers can work together to overcome obstacles, share knowledge, and develop a dedication to lifelong learning. Lastly, the Compensatory Model of Resilience (Werner & Smith, as cited Ledesma, 2014) suggests four characteristics of resilience "active approach toward problem-solving, a tendency to perceive negative experiences in a positive light, the ability to gain other people's positive attention, and a strong reliance on faith to maintain a positive life view".

Moreover, there is not enough of study in the Philippine setting that examines the difficulties teachers face on their path to professional growth, particularly in places that combine urban and rural areas and have a growing number of public and private schools such as in the Division of Malaybalay City, Bukidnon. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the specific challenging experiences of the public-school teachers face in their pursuit for professional development. Through this study, educational leaders and policymakers will be able to facilitate adjustments and identify potential solutions. Specifically, it sought to answer the research question:

1. What are the challenging experiences that the teachers encountered on their professional development journey?

## 2. Methodology

This study used case study research design to explore the challenging experiences of the public-school teachers in their pursuit for professional development. Six public secondary school teachers in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, who consented to participate in the study were chosen through the use of purposeful sampling. Using the expert-validated interview guide questions, semi-structured interviews with the teachers were conducted.

All of the following criteria were shared by all of the participants that were selected: (a) they were licensed professional teachers; (b) they had completed a master's or doctoral degree in their field and at least five years of experience teaching in public schools; (c) they were classified as proficient, highly proficient, or distinguished teachers on their career path; (d) they had received ratings of satisfactory, very satisfactory, or outstanding on their

previous Result-Based Performance Management System (RPMS) evaluation; and (e) they were willing to participate and give honest answers.

Before the data gathering procedure, a letter of permission from the Schools Division Superintendent and School Principals granting the conduct of the study was secured. Meanwhile, a provisional notice to proceed was also obtained from the Institutional Ethics Review Committee (IERC) ensuring that this study adhered to the ethical standards.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This is composed of six (6) phases: familiarization of data, generation of initial codes, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, report of findings (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Also, the researcher put aside her prior preconceptions to ensure the firsthand information and avoid bias conclusion. The consistency of the themes and final results was agreed through the verification and validation of the participants.

**Table 1. Profile of the Participants**

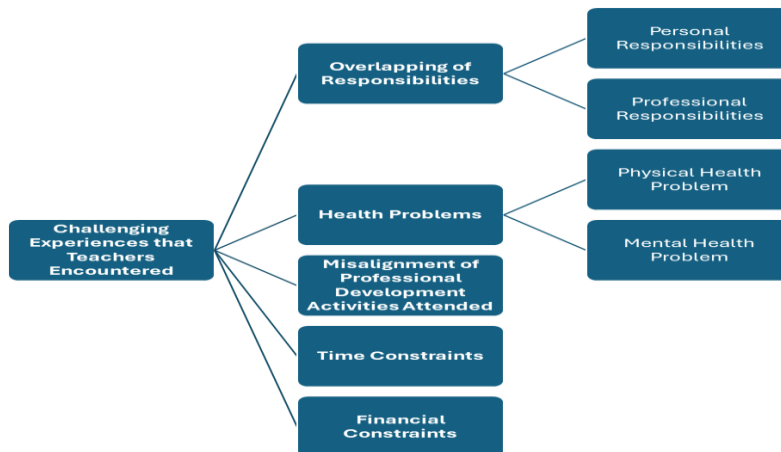
Participant	Gender	Age	Years of Teaching	Teaching Position	Grade level Taught	Highest Educational Attainment
1	Female	45	17	Teacher III	G11 & G12	Master of Arts in Special Education
2	Female	36	16	Teacher II	G12	Master of Education - Science
3	Female	32	8	Teacher III	G7, G8, G9, & G10	Master of Arts in Guidance and Counseling
4	Female	60	32	Master Teacher II	G11	Master of Arts in Education Administration
5	Female	48	10	Teacher III	G8, G9, & G10	Master of Arts in Teaching Social Studies
6	Male	31	10	Master Teacher I	G11	Doctor of Philosophy in Mathematics Education

**3. Results and Discussions**

With all the challenging experiences of the public-school teachers on their journey towards professional development gathered from the interviews, major themes were classified as overlapping of responsibilities, health problems, misalignment of professional development activities attended, time constraints and financial constraints.

*Challenging Experiences that Teachers Encountered*

The journey of the public-school teachers towards professional development remarkably posed challenges. Figure 1 reveals the challenging experiences of the public-school teachers in the middle of their journey towards professional development.



**Figure 1. Challenging Experiences that Teachers Encountered**

### 3.1. Overlapping of Responsibilities

Overlapping of responsibilities emerged as a major challenge for teachers as they engage with professional development activities. Due to the combination of all school and domestic duties, the participants felt the struggle to deal with responsibilities on their multiple roles effectively. They also claimed that they were always pre-occupied with accomplishing bulk of ancillary tasks and school requirements excluding their teaching load. Thus, engaging to professional development activities seems given to have least importance. The participants highlighted two (2) overlapping responsibilities — *Professional Responsibilities* and *Personal Responsibilities*.

#### i. Professional Responsibilities

One of the most challenging roles of a teacher is facing the reality that they have a lot of things to do aside from teaching at the four walls of the classroom. Professionally, they must adapt advancement, constant changes and upskilling their capabilities in order to relate to younger generation students. As a result, enrolling themselves in professional degree programs is a resort for the needed improvement for quality education and advancement, yet also a strenuous path to take for teachers in public schools due to bulk of tasks to comply. Two participants noted that:

*"...you can never say that your schooling is in order, right? There are many works because of course; you are a teacher in the first place. The Master's Degree is like a spare time for you... Because of course if you are in DepEd you are fully loaded, you are not only expected in the teaching field but also with the works with the non-teaching because there are so many- 'okay pass this today', tomorrow, ASAP". (P3)"*

*"...you need to prepare a lesson plan, prepare a PowerPoint presentation. So, you have a lot to think about. (P5)"*

The participants experienced overlapping of responsibilities professionally with their non-teaching tasks at school while meeting deadlines and their responsibilities in pursuing professional development. Moreover, according to Pasique and Maguate (2023) stated that educators must meet deadlines first before they commit to engage with professional growth activities. Thus, this implies that teachers' workloads and responsibilities are important factors to consider when working towards achieving professional development goals.

#### ii. Personal Responsibilities

Apart from being challenged professionally, teachers concerned themselves more with their responsibilities personally. In the same way that teachers have different roles at school, they also do so at home or in other settings. Specifically, issues at home can frequently affect one's performance at work. As a result, teachers often experience overlapping of personal responsibilities at home and at school. A participant stated that:

*"If there is a problem in the family, you can usually bring it to the school. (P3)"*

The participant noted how personal responsibilities occur even at school. She also expresses pressures of having dual responsibilities can cause stress, guilt, and even conflicts at school, which can have both emotional and practical implications. To effectively support teachers in balancing their job and family obligations, teachers and institutions must have a thorough understanding of these difficulties (Aquino et al., 2023). In addition, personal responsibility also entails having personal decisions and goals that might need their attention and focus, one of that is being pregnant. A participant noted that:

*"So, when I got pregnant, I quit right away. (P2)"*

The participant prioritized her pregnancy over studies. She highlighted her decision of quitting the job to take focus on herself being pregnant. She strongly decided to take on her personal responsibility of becoming a mother rather than continuing her professional degree. Hence, as stated in the study of Smith et al (2016) emphasized the result of the teacher position, and that parents are required to devote more time to their family and children's education and be aware of their responsibilities in both their professional and personal lives.

### 3.2. Time Constraints

Pursuing with professional development activities needs a lot of effort, dedication and right mindset that a teacher should be equipped with, but due to teacher's multiple roles one thing that is inevitably in nature when engaging in professional development is time. Time constraints is one of the biggest concerns that challenge a teacher pursuing in professional development where teachers juggling competing demands with limited time. Accordingly, participants felt the need for time management in complying the requirements needed on time. Two participants once said that:

*"...balancing between family, work, and studies. Yeah, so time was so very challenging." (P1)*

*"When I have a master's report, the class is usually Saturday, but your time is needed at your school because there are activities that fall into Saturdays." (P3)*

On these notes, the participants experienced difficulty in time management due to multiple duties of teachers in public school and personal obligations at home. According to Mohanti (2013), undertaking with continuing professional development requires time management. Difficulty in time management often experienced with people having a lot on their plate. It is seen in any educational organizations where teachers have to practice time management between teaching-learning and beyond that of is personal obligations at home where time is also demanded.

### 3.3. Misalignment of Professional Development Activities Attended

Seminars, workshops and trainings some of the professional development activities offered in public schools and other stakeholders. Participating in these events helped teachers gain new knowledge and skills directly related to their teaching practice. However, for some participants expressed their lack of motivation to engage in professional development activities due to its misalignment to their field. The participants also felt no choice to participate even if the seminars they will be attended is not aligned to their field. In addition, they also emphasized that the topics were outdated and too generic. Two participants stated that:

*"Because in DepEd, what is given to you in your work is what you will do. Like for example, the principal said, "okay, you will be sent to the seminar." So, it's a challenge for us even if it's not our field, because we don't like it, we don't understand, the topic is not related to ours, it's not in lined with our field, so, we don't like to listen. (P3)"*

*"...That's it. So, it looks like that. Then it is not about senior high school Science delivery. Sometimes it's just too generic. Generic that maybe we can apply for elementary school. There is nothing like content-based senior high school seminars. (P2)"*

Moreover, the participants felt the need of more in-depths teaching-learning strategies and something new to their plate that they could offer and apply to their students. Furthermore, Pasique and Maguate (2023) suggested that institutions that are implementing Continuing Professional Development must take time to offer appropriate seminars and a variety of improvements when it comes to the implementation. To that, professional development activities must be designed to align the needs of the teachers in terms of knowledge and skills.

### 3.4. Health Problems

Enhancing their career while maintaining their life outside the school is quite hard and challenging. Teachers are often getting stressed and preoccupied given its high emotional involvement of the things they faced under their job along with competing in professional development activities. Hence, *physical health* and *mental health* arise and get compromised.

#### *i. Physical Health Problem*

Teachers are exposed of many unfavourable physical health consequences. The high levels of burnout in the teaching profession may be one of the reasons why this is the case (Madigan et al., 2023), in addition, pursuing in professional development might cause more physical health problems. Two participants stated that:

*"My blood pressure and sugar [level] increased. This [is] maybe because of professional development, that I really need to pursue it. (P5)"*

*"...I can't do it anymore. Now my back will even hurt. (P2)"*

On these notes, the participants encountered physical health problems that affects their engagement in professional development such as increase in sugar and high blood pressure and even more so a back pain.

#### *i. Mental Health Problem*

In the same way, mental health problems arise. A participant explained how mental health became a challenge for her when pursuing her professional development, she stated that:

*"I had my mental drama, it felt like I was getting anxiety, it was like stress. It [even] finally came to the point where I felt like I had a breakdown and that's the time that I ended." (P2)*

On this note, the participant expressed their struggles in dealing with their mental health due to complication in stress management, felt anxiety and had a breakdown that led to a brief pause. One participant noted that it took her seven years of healing from mental health issue before continuing her graduate studies. This implies that teachers often suffer mental and physical health problems due to constant stress and fatigue brought by managing both duties in school and at home, as well as juggling in their professional development activities. Moreover, teachers leave the field due to professional stress and burnout which further impacts the educational profession (Kratt, 2019). Thus, this suggested that balancing work with health and well being activities as an effective protective factor against stress is necessary.

### **3.5. Financial Constraints**

One of the demanding factors when pursuing in professional development is the teacher's financial factor. At present in the Philippine setting, aside from gaining advance new skills and new knowledge teachers are required to have Continuing Professional Development (CPD) units to renew their license mandated by the government stipulated in RA 10912. Teachers have access to free seminars and workshops advised by their colleagues and higher-ups; however, it is unfortunate that not all teachers can benefit from them. Hence, it is a challenge for most of the teachers engaging in professional development. Two participants stated that:

*"The challenge that I have met is only financial." (P4)*

*"First is financial struggle. (P5)*

On these findings, the participants highlighted their financial struggle in supporting their professional development activities. Especially, with those teachers opted to enroll themselves for graduate studies whether in state and universities or private institutions. According to Eroglu and Kaya (2021) stated that teachers are lack professional development opportunities to attend the training that they need, due to lack of financial support. It cannot be denied that most teachers suffered financially and that teachers themselves lack budget too when it comes to training participation.

### **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

This paper examined the challenging experiences of the public-school teachers in their pursuit for professional development. The cases of their experiences are not a bed of roses, challenges always arise as expected. Some of the challenges they encountered were overlapping of responsibilities, time, financial constraints, misalignment of professional development attended, and health problems.

Moreover, the findings of this study reinforced the theoretical frameworks of communities of practice theory, and compensatory model of resilience. Thus, understanding these realities of cases posed various implications for the

professional development providers, policymakers and stakeholders to combat these challenges, and further evaluation of professional development to ensure that it is targeted appropriately and effectively. For instance, they should provide teachers professional development activities that are meaningful and responsive to the present needs of the teachers in aligned with their field. In addition, they can hire reputable speakers and facilitators and encourage other demotivated instructors to attend training sessions and seminars for a variety of reasons.

This study also suggests that the professional development activities must not only include about the enhancement of teacher's technological, content-knowledge and pedagogy but also on the mental well-being of the teachers. The education administration may also show their support by giving fewer ancillary works to those teachers who were involved in professional development activities.

To produce more thorough results and implications for the current study, more research can be carried out using quantitative techniques, different qualitative research approaches, or a combination of the two. One may also examine an alternative perspective, such as that of private school educators or even the perspectives of education administrators and professional development providers.

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