

Policy-Driven Professional Development and Expanded Career Progression for Basic Education Teachers: A Systematic Review of Lifelong Learning

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Abstract: This systematic review examines policy-driven professional development and the Expanded Career Progression (ECP) system for basic education teachers in the Philippines through the lens of lifelong learning. Anchored on Executive Order No. 174, s. 2022, and DepEd's implementing issuances, including the IRR, DepEd Order No. 024, s. 2025, and DepEd Order No. 034, s. 2025, the review synthesizes literature and policy documents published from 2017 to 2025 to assess teacher professional development, career progression, lifelong learning, and implementation issues in the DepEd context (Duterte, 2022; DepEd, 2024, 2025a, 2025b). The review finds that professional development is most effective when it is sustained, aligned with curriculum and teacher needs, and supported by school leadership and institutional resources, while lifelong learning strengthens the view of teachers as continuing professionals whose growth should be embedded in policy and practice rather than treated as an isolated event (Prudente et al., 2025; Rivera et al., 2025). However, the literature also points to persistent concerns regarding implementation clarity, uneven access, and the gap between policy design and school-level practice. The review concludes that DepEd should strengthen policy communication, implementation support, and teacher-centered learning systems so that ECP functions as a meaningful pathway for both career advancement and lifelong professional growth.

Keywords: Professional Development, Expanded Career Progression, Basic Education Teachers, Lifelong-learning, Implementation DepEd policy

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I. INTRODUCTION

Teacher professional development is a central concern in basic education because instructional quality depends on teachers' continuous learning, adaptability, and readiness to respond to changing classroom demands. In the Philippines, this concern is reflected in Department of Education policies and programs that position teacher learning as ongoing, work-related, and linked to professional standards. This orientation supports the idea that teacher growth should be embedded in the everyday life of the profession rather than treated as an occasional event (DepEd, 2017; DepEd, 2024).

The Expanded Career Progression system extends this logic by linking learning with advancement. Executive Order No. 174, s. 2022 established the ECP framework for public school teachers, while DepEd's implementing issuances operationalized and clarified its procedures for implementation

(Duterte, 2022; DepEd, 2024, 2025a, 2025b). This makes ECP not only a promotion mechanism but also a policy instrument for professional growth.

The issue is whether the policy is being exercised in a way that truly reflects lifelong learning, competency development, and fair advancement in the actual school context. A systematic review is needed because the literature on teacher development, career progression, and policy implementation is spread across different studies and policy documents, making synthesis necessary for clearer interpretation. Such synthesis also helps clarify how policy intent is translated into practice across different contexts (Lipsky, 1980; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983).

The central problem is the relationship between policy intent and policy exercise. The ECP system was designed to promote merit-based and competency-based career

progression, but implementation in schools may vary in clarity, access, and consistency. When teachers do not fully understand the process or when implementation support is uneven, the policy risks becoming a formal structure without a strong developmental effect (DepEd, 2025a, 2025b).

The intervention being examined is the policy framework itself: DepEd professional development structures, ECP guidelines, and related issuances that are intended to support teacher growth. The review focuses on whether these policies work together to support lifelong learning as a sustained professional process rather than as a one-time training event. This makes the policy environment itself a key part of the developmental process (DepEd, 2017; DepEd, 2024).

This review is important because teacher development and career progression are often discussed separately, even though they are closely connected. A systematic review can bring together evidence on how professional development, ECP, and lifelong learning interact in the DepEd context. It can also highlight whether policy design, implementation support, and teacher experience are aligned in practice (Prudente et al., 2025; Rivera et al., 2025).

II. OBJECTIVES

The aim of this review is to synthesize evidence on how policy-driven professional development and the Expanded Career Progression system support lifelong learning among basic education teachers in the Philippines. The review examines how the policy framework, professional development structures, and implementation environment interact to shape teacher growth, career movement, and professional identity.

The objectives are as follows:

- To synthesize studies on policy-driven professional development and ECP among basic education teachers;
- To examine how these policies support lifelong learning in the DepEd context; and
- To identify policy and practice implications for strengthening teacher development and career progression systems.

III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES

➤ *Professional Development*

Teacher professional development is widely recognized as a cornerstone of teacher effectiveness because it strengthens instructional practice, updates professional knowledge, and builds confidence in teaching. Across the Philippine professional standards environment, professional development is increasingly understood as a continuous process that supports teachers' growth across career stages, consistent with DepEd's emphasis on lifelong learning (DepEd, 2017; DepEd, 2024). Furthermore, this orientation reflects UNESCO's (2015) global advocacy that teacher learning must be embedded in national systems to ensure sustainability. Moreover, PD is no longer viewed as compliance but as a developmental pathway that builds competence and readiness for career progression. Finally, this shift underscores the importance of PD as both a national and international priority for teacher effectiveness.

Recent analyses of teacher development in the Philippines reveal that programs are most effective when they are sustained, curriculum-aligned, responsive to teacher concerns, and supported by school leadership (Prudente et al., 2025). In addition, findings highlight that teacher learning is most meaningful when contextualized and connected to actual teaching conditions rather than delivered as isolated seminars. Moreover, collaborative learning and administrative support were found to be critical in ensuring program success. Furthermore, these results align with Rivera et al. (2025), who emphasized that PD must be structured and continuous to prepare teachers for policy-driven progression systems. Finally, such evidence strengthens the argument that PD is a vital mechanism for professional growth in Philippine education.

Additionally, adult learning theory, particularly Knowles' andragogy (1980), reinforces the orientation of PD by stressing that professional growth must be self-directed, experiential, and relevant to teachers' immediate contexts. Moreover, NEAP programs have been designed to reflect these principles, positioning teachers as active participants in their own learning journeys. Furthermore, UNESCO (2015) underscores that PD must be embedded in lifelong learning frameworks to ensure equity and sustainability. In contrast, short-term seminars without follow-up have been criticized for failing to produce lasting changes in teacher practice (Prudente et al., 2025). Finally, this theoretical anchoring ensures that PD is not treated as a one-time event but as a continuing process of reflection and adaptation.

Moreover, the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) institutionalize PD as a lifelong process by embedding continuous improvement, reflective practice, and professional collaboration into the professional identity of teachers (DepEd, 2017). In addition, PPST indicators require teachers to demonstrate growth across career stages, linking PD directly to career progression. Furthermore, this alignment with DepEd Orders (2017; 2024) ensures that PD is not only a professional expectation but also a policy mandate. Additionally, this perspective positions PD as a deliberate step within the teacher's lifelong-learning journey. Finally, the review underscores that PD is essential for linking teacher growth with broader policy reforms in Philippine education.

➤ *Expanded Career Progression*

The Expanded Career Progression (ECP) system formalizes the principle that teacher advancement should be based on competence, readiness, and professional growth rather than tenure alone. Following this, Executive Order No. 174 (Duterte, 2022) and Republic Act No. 12288 (2025) established the legal and policy framework for a structured career ladder, introducing higher-level positions such as Master Teacher IV–VII. Moreover, these reforms expanded opportunities for teachers to demonstrate specialized expertise and leadership roles. In addition, DepEd Orders No. 024 and 034 (2025) translated ECP into implementation guidelines, emphasizing transparency and competency-based criteria. Finally, this policy shift reflects a broader movement toward merit-based advancement in Philippine education.

Literature suggests that career progression systems are most effective when transparent, competency-based, and supported by clear procedures. Furthermore, when teachers clearly understand standards, documentary requirements, and advancement pathways, the policy becomes credible and motivates sustained professional learning (DepEd, 2025a; DepEd, 2025b). Moreover, unclear implementation can weaken trust in the system and reduce its developmental value. In addition, Prudente et al. (2025) observed that weak support systems often turn competency-based policies into bureaucratic filters. Finally, this contrast underscores the importance of clarity and fairness in policy application.

Together with this findings, theoretical perspectives such as Competency-Based Education (Spencer & Spencer, 1993) and Adaptive Leadership (Heifetz, 1994) provide lenses for understanding ECP. In addition, competency frameworks stress advancement based on demonstrated skills, while adaptive leadership highlights the need for institutional support and flexibility in implementing reforms. Furthermore, UNESCO (2015) advocates for career systems that link professional growth with lifelong learning, ensuring that promotions reflect genuine competence rather than bureaucratic compliance. Moreover, Philippine ECP aligns with this global orientation by embedding advancement within structured PD pathways. Finally, this integration of theory and policy positions ECP as both a national reform and a contribution to international education standards.

Hence, in this study, ECP is treated not only as a promotion mechanism but also as a policy architecture that can encourage professional learning and long-term growth. Furthermore, it becomes meaningful when teachers see the connection between competence, development, and advancement. Moreover, this perspective emphasizes that promotions should be perceived as natural outcomes of sustained learning. In addition, the review examines whether ECP functions as a genuine support for professional growth or merely as an administrative pathway for reclassification. Finally, this analysis highlights the dual potential of ECP as either a growth engine or a bureaucratic exercise.

➤ *Lifelong Learning*

Lifelong learning provides the deeper educational rationale for teacher development, framing learning as a continuous process across the professional life span. Moreover, Yeaxlee (1929) and Faure et al. (1972) emphasized that education should extend beyond formal schooling, positioning professionals as continuing learners. In addition, UNESCO (2015) stresses adaptation to evolving curriculum and policy demands, making lifelong learning central to teacher effectiveness. Furthermore, this perspective is especially relevant in education, where changing learner needs require ongoing adaptation. Finally, lifelong learning positions teachers as reflective practitioners who grow through experience and collaboration.

Evidence drawn from Philippine teacher development studies reveals that lifelong learning is linked to reflective practice, professional reading, continuing coursework, mentorship, and collaboration with peers (Torres, 2024; Hassan et al., 2024). Moreover, these activities help teachers remain

responsive and effective throughout their careers. In addition, empirical studies confirm that teachers with positive attitudes toward lifelong learning are more likely to engage in meaningful PD and apply new knowledge in practice. Furthermore, this evidence suggests that lifelong learning habits directly influence instructional effectiveness and readiness for career progression. Finally, this finding underscores the importance of cultivating lifelong learning attitudes among teachers.

Next, the PPST reinforces this orientation by embedding continuous improvement and reflective practice as core expectations of the profession (DepEd, 2017). Moreover, NEAP programs explicitly treat PD as a lifelong pathway, guiding teachers from Beginning to Distinguished stages. In addition, UNESCO (2015) emphasizes that lifelong learning must be institutionalized within national education systems. Furthermore, this alignment between PPST and UNESCO frameworks strengthens the rationale for lifelong learning in Philippine education. Finally, this integration highlights the global and local relevance of lifelong learning.

For this study, lifelong learning is important because it provides the philosophical foundation for linking PD and ECP. Furthermore, if advancement is understood as part of continuing growth, then career progression becomes a visible outcome of sustained learning rather than a detached personnel process. Moreover, this perspective positions lifelong learning as central to understanding how policy and professional identity work together in teacher development. In addition, Hassan et al. (2024) emphasized that lifelong learning habits foster resilience and adaptability among teachers. Finally, this study underscores lifelong learning as the anchor that connects teacher growth with broader policy reforms.

➤ *Policy Implementation*

Policy implementation determines whether educational reforms achieve their intended effect. A study of Lipsky's street-level bureaucracy theory (1980) highlights that policies are ultimately shaped by local actors, while Mazmanian & Sabatier (1983) emphasize clarity and consistency as critical to successful implementation. Moreover, Edwards (1980) argued that policy success depends on communication and support systems. In addition, DepEd memoranda and issuances provide guidelines for ECP and PD, but their effectiveness depends on how consistently they are applied at school and division levels. Finally, this stage is decisive in determining whether reforms achieve their intended developmental impact.

Moreover, recent Philippine studies show that weak planning, limited resources, unclear guidance, and uneven access reduce the effectiveness of reforms (Prudente et al., 2025; Rivera et al., 2025). In addition, these findings highlight that even well-designed policies can fail without adequate support. Furthermore, inconsistent application weakens trust in competency-based systems. Additionally, this contrast underscores the importance of strong institutional backing for policy reforms. Finally, this evidence positions implementation as the critical test of policy effectiveness.

Equally important, UNESCO (2015) emphasizes that policy implementation must be supported by resources,

leadership, and monitoring systems to sustain lifelong learning cultures. Moreover, mentoring and reflective collegiality are critical supports that align with ECP criteria. In addition, Rivera et al. (2025) observed that inconsistent application weakens trust in competency-based systems. Furthermore, DepEd's NEAP framework highlights the importance of scaffolding teacher learning through structured support. Finally, this alignment underscores.

IV. SYNTHESIS

The literature shows that professional development, ECP, lifelong learning, and policy implementation are closely connected rather than separate topics. Professional development provides the learning foundation, ECP provides the structural pathway for advancement, lifelong learning provides the philosophical basis, and policy implementation determines whether the system actually works in practice. When these elements are aligned, teacher growth becomes both developmental and policy supported.

This synthesis shows that the strength of a teacher career system depends not only on its legal design but also on its educational meaning and practical execution. The review therefore examines how these four ideas interact in the DepEd context and whether they collectively support meaningful teacher growth. In this way, the literature provides the conceptual bridge between policy intent and the actual experiences of teachers.

V. METHODS

This study uses a systematic review design to identify, appraise, and synthesize literature published from 2017 to 2025 on teacher professional development, career progression, lifelong learning, and policy implementation in the Philippine basic education context. The review includes both research studies and relevant policy documents because the study examines the relationship between the legal framework and its implementation. Search terms include combinations of policy-driven professional development, Expanded Career Progression, teacher career progression, lifelong learning, DepEd policy, and basic education teachers (PRISMA, 2020).

Studies are screened through title, abstract, and full-text review, then organized into themes aligned with the study objectives. In this review, thematic synthesis refers to a method of qualitative synthesis in which the reviewers code text line-by-line, develop descriptive themes that remain close to the primary studies, and then generate analytical themes that provide broader interpretations across studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008). This approach is appropriate because it allows the review to identify recurring patterns, compare policy and practice issues across sources, and derive insights that are directly relevant to the review question.

The synthesis is thematic so that the review can identify recurring patterns, gaps, and policy implications. The search strategy includes education databases, repositories, and official policy sources, and reference lists of relevant studies are also checked to identify additional sources. Studies are included if they focus on basic education teachers, relate to professional

development, ECP, lifelong learning, or policy implementation, are published within the selected period, and are relevant to the Philippine context; studies focused only on higher education, unrelated occupations, or outside the review focus are excluded. Policy documents are included because they form part of the implementation environment being examined.

VI. FINDINGS

The first set of findings shows that professional development is most effective when it is sustained, school-based, and aligned with teacher needs and educational goals. Studies indicate that professional development works best when it is not treated as a one-time activity but as a continuing process supported by collaboration, leadership, and relevant learning opportunities (Prudente et al., 2025; Rivera et al., 2025).

The second set of findings shows that ECP gains strength when it is anchored on competency standards and a clear progression structure. The policy documents suggest that career progression is intended to be merit- and competency-based, with promotion guided by qualification, performance, and professional accomplishment rather than length of service alone (Duterte, 2022; DepEd, 2024, 2025a, 2025b).

The third set of findings shows that lifelong learning provides a deeper rationale for teacher development in the DepEd context. Literature frames teachers as continuing professionals whose growth should be embedded in policy and practice, yet implementation issues such as uneven access, unclear guidance, and inconsistent support continue to limit the full effect of the policy environment (DepEd, 2017; Hassan et al., 2024; Torres, 2024).

VII. DISCUSSION

The findings show that ECP functions best when it is part of a broader professional learning system. Teacher development becomes more meaningful when it is continuous, supported, and connected to actual career pathways. This means that career progression should be understood as part of a learning culture rather than as a stand-alone administrative process (Prudente et al., 2025; Rivera et al., 2025).

The discussion also confirms that lifelong learning is not merely a philosophical add-on. It gives reviews its deeper educational meaning by placing teacher growth at the center of policy. If DepEd strengthens implementation clarity, access, and support, then ECP can become a fair and credible expression of lifelong professional development (DepEd, 2017; DepEd, 2024).

VIII. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

DepEd should continue strengthening the connection between professional development and ECP by improving communication, implementation guidance, and access to learning opportunities. School leaders should help teachers understand how progression works and how professional

growth can support advancement. This can improve both participation and confidence in the system (DepEd, 2024, 2025a, 2025b).

The policy should remain transparent, competency-based, and teacher-centered so it supports both fairness and development. If these conditions are present, ECP can better support both career advancement and lifelong professional growth. The findings also suggest that policy support should be matched by school-level mentoring and administrative clarity (DepEd, 2025b; Rivera et al., 2025).

IX. LIMITATIONS

The review is limited by the availability of directly relevant studies, by differences in research design, and by the changing policy environment from 2017 to 2025. Some literature discusses teacher development in general rather than ECP specifically (Prudente et al., 2025; Rivera et al., 2025).

Because implementation differs across divisions and schools, findings may not be identical across all contexts. These limits should be acknowledged to keep the review balanced and credible. Acknowledging these constraints also helps situate the findings appropriately within the Philippine policy setting (DepEd, 2024, 2025a).

X. CONCLUSION

Policy-driven professional development and ECP are strongest when they are aligned with lifelong learning, competency-based progression, and fair implementation. The literature shows that teacher growth is most meaningful when supported by clear policy, school-based development, and continuing learning opportunities (DepEd, 2017; Prudente et al., 2025).

In this way, ECP can function not only as a career pathway but as a professional development framework that strengthens basic education teaching. The review therefore suggests that teacher advancement should be understood as part of a broader lifelong learning system rather than as a stand-alone personnel process (Duterte, 2022; DepEd, 2024).

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS

DepEd should continue strengthening professional development programs, so they are sustained, aligned with teacher needs, and connected to classroom practice. School leaders should also support teachers with mentoring, collaboration, and access to relevant learning opportunities (Prudente et al., 2025; Rivera et al., 2025).

DepEd should frame ECP and related policies within a lifelong learning perspective so that teachers see development as continuous across their careers. This can be done by reinforcing professional standards, reflective practice, and learning pathways that support long-term growth. Policy communication, implementation guidance, and access mechanisms should be improved so that teachers experience ECP as fair and transparent (DepEd, 2017; DepEd, 2025a, 2025b).

Future research should also examine how implementation varies across divisions and schools so that policy refinements can be evidence-based. This will help determine which supports are most effective in making ECP a meaningful part of teacher professional growth (Lipsky, 1980; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983).

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