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More Than Just the Rank: Teachers' Lived Experiences with the Expanded Career Progression System

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of public-school teachers navigating the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS) in the Schools Division of Bohol, Philippines, during School Year 2025–2026. Guided by Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology, it examined teachers' opportunities and motivations, challenges, adaptive strategies, and career aspirations and well-being. Twelve public elementary school teachers promoted through ECPS reclassification were purposively selected. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, supplemented by field notes and a reflexive journal, and analyzed using holistic, selective, and detailed reading approaches. Fifteen themes emerged and were interpreted through Van Manen's four lifeworld existentials. Lived time revealed how teachers revisited past accomplishments, reorganized present responsibilities, and envisioned renewed career possibilities, even near retirement. Lived space emerged as preparation moved from school into the home and unfamiliar demonstration classrooms became settings of uncertainty. Lived body illuminated the felt pressures of preparation and assessment, expressed through nervousness and stress and eased through breathing, prayer, and emotional preparation. Lived human relations revealed career progression as a shared undertaking sustained by school heads' encouragement, collegial guidance, and continuing responsibility toward learners. Teachers experienced ECPS as an opportunity for advancement and recognition that also demanded time, financial resources, and personal effort, while renewing their professional self-worth, confidence, and commitment to continuous learning. The study concludes that ECPS is more than attaining a higher rank: it involves rediscovering professional worth, purpose, and possibility. The findings informed a proposed action plan emphasizing timely guidance, records management, collaborative preparation, and support for teachers' well-being.

Keywords: *Expanded Career Progression System, Teachers' Lived Experiences, Hermeneutic Phenomenology, Van Manen, Lifeworld Existentials, Professional Self-Worth*

INTRODUCTION

Executive Order No. 174, s. 2022 established the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS), which introduced structural changes to the career ladder of Philippine public school teachers, including the addition of the Teacher IV to Teacher VII and Master Teacher V ranks, dual career paths in classroom teaching and school administration, and promotion principles aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) (Office of the President of the Philippines, 2022). The policy aims to address long-standing issues such as limited access to promotion, limited flexibility in career advancement, and the need for competency-based promotion mechanisms. It was operationalized through DepEd Order No. 024, s. 2025, as amended by DepEd Order No.

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034, s. 2025, which provide for retitling and for reclassification, through which qualified teachers advance to higher positions with corresponding salary grades (Department of Education [DepEd], 2025a, 2025b).

While the policy seeks to improve career mobility, challenges remain. Disparities in access to graduate education, professional development, and resources have been noted, particularly among teachers in rural and geographically isolated areas, and some teachers with long years of service remain ineligible for promotion because they do not meet the new qualification requirements (Capistrano & Tamayo, 2025). In the Schools Division of Bohol, only a limited number of teachers have availed themselves of the ECPS because of the perceived complexity of its requirements and procedures. This is consistent with Raquim et al. (2025), who concluded that while the ECPS is a highly beneficial and strategic tool for professional advancement, it introduces policy implementation pitfalls such as heavy documentation and misconstrued rules. These concerns raise questions about the system's impact on teachers' motivation, well-being, and career aspirations.

Recent studies in Bohol have examined teachers' awareness, engagement, and career aspirations under the ECPS (Apale, 2026) and its relationship with professional development and career advancement (Galamiton et al., 2026). These studies, however, focused primarily on measurable dimensions of the system, leaving unexplored the meaning teachers construct from actually undergoing the career progression process. Knowing teachers' levels of awareness, engagement, and aspiration does not fully explain what it means for them to experience the demands, opportunities, uncertainties, relationships, and personal changes associated with ECPS implementation.

This study therefore explored the lived experiences of public school teachers in the Schools Division of Bohol who navigated the ECPS through reclassification during School Year 2025–2026. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions: (a) How do teachers experience the opportunities and motivations associated with ECPS? (b) What lived challenges did teachers encounter in meeting the ECPS requirements? (c) What adaptive strategies did they employ to navigate those challenges? (d) How did navigating ECPS requirements reshape the teachers' career aspirations and well-being? and (e) Based on the findings, what action plan can be proposed to optimize the career progression experience and maximize teachers' growth?

The study gives teachers a voice in understanding the ECPS and may help future applicants learn about the processes through which their peer's achieved advancement. It may guide school organizations and administrators in strengthening communication, mentoring, and support mechanisms; help policymakers refine ECPS policies toward more equitable, responsive, and context-sensitive implementation; and inform the Learning and Development Section and the Human Resource Management Office in designing training programs and promotion processes that promote fairness, transparency, and appropriate support for teachers pursuing career advancement.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on several theories that explain teachers' motivations, beliefs, career decisions, and lived experiences related to the ECPS. Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory and Lent et al.'s (1994) Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) help explain teacher career advancement by showing how internal beliefs and surroundings shape a teacher's willingness to meet ECPS requirements. A formal pathway to advancement does not automatically guarantee teachers' participation (Gullan & Gaytos, 2026); rather, self-efficacy, expected outcomes, and goal setting mediate participation (Richardson & Watt, 2018). Self-efficacy, defined as individuals' judgment of their capacity to perform specific tasks (Bandura, 1997), helps teachers take on difficult promotion-related tasks, whereas teachers with low self-efficacy are more likely to remain in their current positions (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). Mastery experiences are the most powerful source of self-efficacy (Gale et al., 2021), while supportive school environments and encouragement from school management and colleagues strengthen teachers' professional identity and confidence in their readiness for career development (Collie, 2021; Dhonchak, 2025).

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SCCT further holds that even when teachers feel capable of meeting ECPS requirements, they must also expect that doing so will lead to positive outcomes such as financial security, professional recognition, or personal satisfaction (Aquino et al., 2022; Lent et al., 1994; Malipot, 2023). If teachers perceive that administrative demands outweigh the anticipated benefits, they may choose not to participate (Navalta, 2024), whereas explicit goals help them persist despite obstacles such as limited funds or non-teaching duties (David et al., 2019; Richardson & Watt, 2018). Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020) explains how expectations of success, perceived task value, and costs shape teachers' decisions to pursue reclassification, while Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) holds that motivation and well-being depend on the fulfillment of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology serves as the study's primary theoretical and methodological framework. It identifies four lifeworld existentials that offer a framework for reflecting on how individuals experience everyday situations: lived time (temporality), which concerns how people experience time in relation to their past, present, and anticipated future; lived space (spatiality), which concerns how physical and social environments evoke feelings and actions; lived body (corporeality), which concerns how situations are experienced through bodily sensations and emotions; and lived human relations (relationality), which concerns how relationships and interactions with others shape experience. In this study, these existentials were used not to predetermine the classification of findings but as tools for reflection that deepen the interpretation of themes identified from participants' accounts. Figure 1 presents the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study.

Policy Context of the Expanded Career Progression System

The ECPS is anchored on legislative and policy frameworks that promote teacher professionalization, including the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10533, 2013), the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers (Republic Act No. 4670, 1966), the Continuing Professional Development Act of 2016 (Republic Act No. 10912, 2016), and the PPST institutionalized through DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017 (DepEd, 2017). According to DepEd (2024), the ECPS aligns teacher promotion with professional standards and competency requirements so that promotions are based on merit, qualifications, and demonstrated performance. The system addresses the limitations of the previous career structure, in which promotion often depended on the availability of vacant higher positions, by creating additional teaching positions and recognizing two career tracks.

Recent reforms also emphasize teacher welfare. DepEd's 5-Point Agenda launched in 2024 prioritizes teacher welfare alongside an enabling learning environment, learner well-being, efficient learning delivery, and a future-ready workforce, underscoring the need for workload reduction, adequate resources, and stronger professional development opportunities. Correspondingly, the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II, 2024) identified teacher workload, inadequate support mechanisms, and limitations in professional development systems as significant barriers to educational improvement and recommended strengthening career progression frameworks and PPST-aligned professional development (Research Institute for Teacher Quality [RITQ], 2024). These recommendations reinforce the view that career advancement should be a comprehensive process of professional learning, leadership development, and capacity building, whose effectiveness depends on supportive working conditions.

Career Progression, Motivation, and Retention

International literature highlights the value of clear career progression for teacher effectiveness and educational quality. The OECD (2023) found that career structures that recognize expertise and performance encourage teachers to stay in the profession and keep developing their skills. Self-Determination Theory suggests that promotion opportunities, recognition, and leadership roles can satisfy teachers' psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and Han and Yin (2016) emphasized that career advancement opportunities serve as significant motivators because they provide recognition, professional status, and financial rewards. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) likewise found that professional growth opportunities positively influence teachers' enthusiasm for teaching while reducing burnout and career stagnation.

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Career progression is also linked to retention. Viac and Fraser (2020) found that teachers who see a route for career progression are more likely to remain in the profession despite its inherent difficulties, as progression offers financial reward, the chance to specialize in leadership, and professional recognition. In the Philippines, Aquino et al. (2022) found that career advancement opportunities positively influence teachers' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and motivation, while Malipot (2023) found that teachers link career progression to financial stability and personal fulfillment. Toradio (2026) found generally favorable perceptions of ECPS opportunities for professional development, leadership exposure, and incentives, and Parreño and Galicia (2026) found that the extent of ECPS implementation and professional identity predicted teachers' retention motivation. However, Gullan and Gaytos (2026) found that teachers' high motivation did not always translate into active engagement in career advancement activities, suggesting underlying barriers.

Challenges and Adaptive Strategies in Career Progression

Despite these opportunities, teachers often struggle to meet promotion requirements. Career progression typically requires extensive documentation, portfolio preparation, professional development, graduate studies, and performance evaluations, which add significant responsibilities to teachers' instructional duties. Zhao et al. (2022) found that job stress from heavy workloads and performance-evaluation pressures was associated with work–family conflict and burnout, and David et al. (2019) reported that Philippine public school teachers devote substantial time to administrative and non-instructional tasks that limit their professional development.

Studies on the ECPS report similar concerns. Agpuldo (2025) found that teachers' depth of understanding of and readiness to comply with ECPS requirements vary widely; Navalta (2024) reported that teachers encountered difficulties related to workload, administrative demands, and a perceived mismatch between promotion expectations and compensation; and Capistrano and Tamayo (2025) highlighted the gap between policy intentions and implementation, noting that inadequate institutional support, limited financial resources, and insufficient training constrain execution. To cope with such demands, teachers use strategies such as time management, professional learning communities, peer mentoring, collegial collaboration, and seeking support from administrators (Dhonchak, 2025; Zhao et al., 2022). Perceived organizational support predicts employee commitment and job satisfaction (Eisenberger et al., 2020), and administrative support, mentoring, and collaborative cultures help teachers maintain motivation (Collie, 2021).

Professional Identity, Aspirations, and Well-Being

Professional identity refers to how teachers understand themselves, their responsibilities, and their value as members of the profession. Richardson and Watt (2018) noted that participation in professional development and greater responsibilities contribute to identity development, leadership capacity, and professional confidence. Ignacio and Malonzo (2025) found that professional identity significantly predicts teacher self-efficacy, while Macapagal and Ricafort (2023) reported that public school teachers maintain high professional goals when given opportunities for planned effort, persistence, and professional development. Alvia et al. (2026) further linked teachers' self-efficacy to professional enhancement in career progression.

Changes in identity and aspirations may also affect teacher well-being. Positive workplace conditions, including opportunities for growth and advancement, can promote a sense of achievement and fulfillment, but excessive promotion requirements, unclear policies, or unmanageable workloads may heighten stress and emotional exhaustion (Zhao et al., 2022). Greenier et al. (2021) noted that positive well-being is essential for instructional effectiveness and professional longevity, suggesting that attention to well-being is important for the sustainable and humane implementation of the ECPS.

Synthesis and Conceptual Framework

Local studies show that the ECPS has become an important area of inquiry in Bohol. Apale (2026), using a convergent parallel mixed-methods design with 322 teachers in Congressional District I of Bohol, found moderate levels of awareness and engagement, high career aspirations, and significant positive relationships among these variables, while Galamiton et al. (2026) linked the ECPS to professional development and career

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advancement among teachers in Jagna District. These studies establish what teachers know about the ECPS, how much they engage with it, and their aspirations, but not the meaning teachers construct from undergoing the progression process. Although Apale (2026) incorporated qualitative data, the study was not designed as a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry into the meaning and structure of teachers lived experiences.

As shown in Figure 1, the study is anchored on Social Cognitive Theory, SCCT, Situated Expectancy-Value Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology, together with the legal bases of the ECPS. These frame the inquiry into the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers in the Schools Division of Bohol who underwent ECPS reclassification, interpreted through the four lifeworld existentials across three areas: opportunities and motivation, lived challenges and adaptive strategies, and career aspirations and well-being. The findings serve as the basis for a proposed action plan on career progression and professional growth.

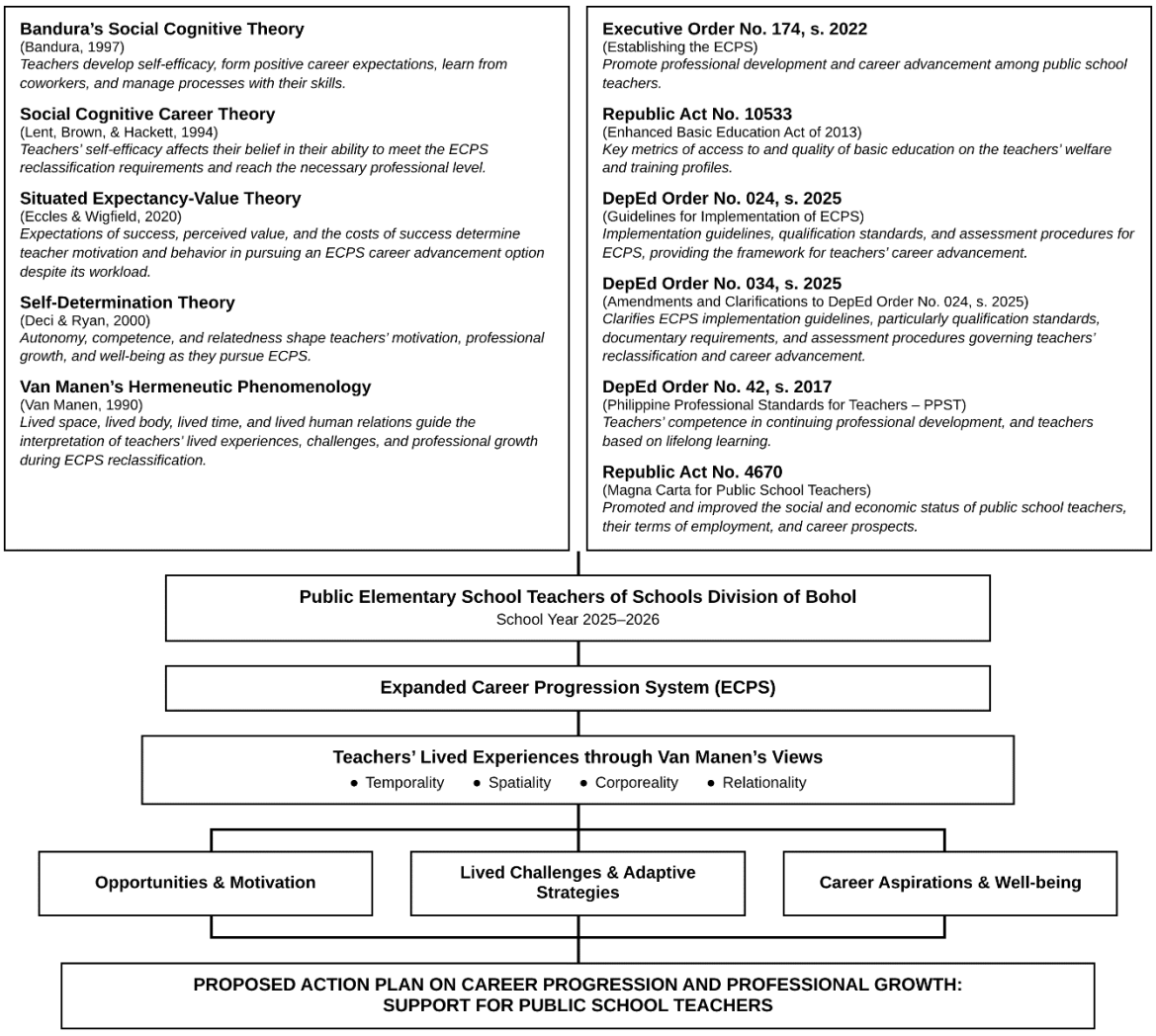


Figure 1. *Theoretical-Conceptual Framework of the Study*

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METHODS

Research Design

This study employed Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology to examine and interpret the lived experiences of public-school teachers as they navigated the ECPS. This design was appropriate because it focuses on understanding and interpreting the meanings people attach to their lived experiences, which in this study included opportunities, motivations, challenges, adaptive strategies, professional identity, aspirations, and well-being.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in public elementary schools across the three congressional districts of the Schools Division of Bohol, Philippines. This setting was chosen because it provided access to teachers who had directly experienced ECPS reclassification during School Year 2025–2026. To capture diverse experiences, the study included teachers from different districts whose ranks prior to reclassification were Teacher I, Teacher II, or Teacher III.

Participants and Sampling Technique

Twelve public elementary school teachers were selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria were (a) having held the rank of Teacher I, Teacher II, or Teacher III for six years or more; (b) having had direct access to ECPS activities during School Year 2025–2026; (c) having had their rank reclassified through the ECPS; and (d) willingness to participate. Teachers without direct ECPS experience, those stationed outside the specified districts, and teachers who were retitled rather than reclassified were excluded, as retitling does not involve the same preparation and evaluation process. Sample adequacy was assessed based on the information power of participants' accounts rather than sample size alone, as qualitative samples can provide adequate information when participants' experiences are highly relevant to the study's purpose (Malterud et al., 2016).

Research Instrument

The primary instrument was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide designed to elicit rich descriptions of participants lived experiences with the ECPS, focusing on the opportunities, motivations, challenges, adaptive strategies, professional identity, career aspirations, and well-being associated with the system. The guide was content-validated by a panel of experts in research, educational leadership, and teacher professional development, most of whom held doctoral degrees and served on the Schools Division Office Human Resource Merit Promotion and Selection Board and were directly involved in validating ECPS requirements. The experts reviewed the instrument for clarity, relevance, appropriateness, and alignment with the research questions and phenomenological framework, and their recommendations were incorporated. Field notes and a reflexive journal were maintained as supplementary data.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Dean of the School of Advanced Studies, the Campus Director, and the University President, and subsequently from the Schools Division Superintendent of the Division of Bohol and the heads of the participants' schools. After informed consent was secured, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face or, when necessary, through secure online platforms. Each interview lasted approximately 25 to 50 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participant's consent and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed following Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which involved continuous movement among participants' individual accounts, emerging themes, and the phenomenon as a whole. Table 1 summarizes the analytical procedures. Holistic reading was used to grasp the basic meaning

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of each transcript, selective reading to identify particularly revealing statements, and detailed reading to examine meaning line by line. Essential meanings were clustered into themes, which were then interpreted through the four lifeworld existentials as guiding frameworks rather than categories. Through writing and rewriting, the interpretations were refined into rich phenomenological descriptions and synthesized into a description of the essence of the experience, which served as the basis for the proposed action plan.

Table 1. *Data Analysis Procedure*

Stage	Analytical Procedure	Expected Output
1. Immersion in the lived experiences	Repeated, close reading of interview transcripts to understand participants' meaning-making	Initial understanding of participants' lived experiences
2. Phenomenological reflection and thematic isolation	Holistic, selective, and detailed reading; clustering of essential meanings into themes	Dominant themes addressing the research questions
3. Interpretation through the lifeworld existentials	Interpretation of themes in relation to lived time, lived space, lived body, and lived human relations as guiding frameworks	Fuller understanding of the meanings of teachers' experiences
4. Phenomenological writing and rewriting	Movement among participants' statements, themes, existentials, and the whole phenomenon	Refined interpretations and rich descriptions
5. Synthesis of the essence of the experience	Review of interrelationships among themes	Integrated description of the essence of the experience
6. Formulation of the action plan	Organization of findings according to the research questions as the basis for an action plan	Evidence-based action plan responsive to identified needs

Ethical Considerations

The study upheld participants' dignity, privacy, and well-being. Informed consent was obtained after the study's purpose, scope, potential risks, and benefits were explained. Participation was voluntary, and participants could decline to answer questions or withdraw without consequences. Identifying information was excluded from the report, with participants referred to by codes (P1 to P12), and responses were kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Interviews were conducted sensitively to minimize emotional discomfort and professional risks. The findings were shared with the participants, and all data will be securely disposed of six months after the study, with digital recordings permanently deleted and written records shredded. Trustworthiness was supported by interviewing teachers with direct ECPS experience, verbatim transcription, field notes, Van Manen's reading approaches, and reflexive journaling, while descriptions of the participants and setting support transferability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fifteen themes emerged from the analysis across the four areas of inquiry. The findings are presented according to these areas and interpreted through Van Manen's (1990) lifeworld existentials.

Opportunities and Motivations Associated with ECPS

Table 2 presents the three themes on teachers' opportunities and motivations for pursuing ECPS reclassification.

Table 2. *Themes on the Opportunities and Motivations Associated with ECPS*

Theme	Significant Vignettes	Codes
Career advancement and financial opportunity	"ECPS provided me with the opportunity to advance in rank and move forward in my teaching career." (P1); "ECPS allowed me to improve my salary through career progression." (P3, P4, P6, P8)	Opportunity to advance in rank; salary increases and promotion

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Theme	Significant Vignettes	Codes
Clear professional direction and growth	"ECPS gave me a clearer direction regarding my professional activities and engagements." (P1, P4, P7, P11)	Clearer direction in professional activities; training and graduate studies
Renewed opportunity and encouragement to pursue ECPS	"It was an opportunity that I did not want to miss." (P2); "My colleagues inspired me. I simply followed their example." (P3, P5); "The encouragement of my school head motivated me to apply." (P9)	Opportunity not to be missed; inspired by colleagues; school head's encouragement

Participants perceived the ECPS as a means of advancing their careers and improving their salaries. The phrase "move forward" captures the prospect of progression, while the salary increase gave that progression tangible substance. Through the lens of lived time, teachers saw the ECPS as a chance to move beyond their present position toward future advancement and better financial circumstances, while through lived human relations, improved remuneration carried implications for their families and dependents. This finding aligns with the intent of Executive Order No. 174 and DepEd Order No. 024, s. 2025, with SCCT (Lent et al., 1994), which explains how expected outcomes shape career choices, and with Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020), which explains how the value of expected benefits motivates goal pursuit. It is also consistent with Apale (2026) and Galamiton et al. (2026), who linked the ECPS to teachers' aspirations and career advancement.

Participants also associated the ECPS with clearer professional direction. The system helped them identify the professional activities, training, and graduate study required for advancement, linking their present development to future career possibilities. This reflects lived time, as teachers became more aware of the need to prepare for their future careers, and lived space, as the ECPS broadened the range of development opportunities they perceived within and beyond the school. The finding aligns with SCCT and Situated Expectancy-Value Theory, as participants' desire for professional development stemmed from its perceived value, and with Navalta (2024), who emphasized professional development in preparing for the ECPS.

Finally, participants were motivated by a timely opportunity and by the encouragement of colleagues and school heads. Participant 2 recognized the ECPS as an opportunity worth pursuing at that point in her career, while Participant 9's account shows how a school head's encouragement turned a possibility into a decision to apply. These experiences reflect lived time in the sense of a timely opportunity and lived human relations in the influence of supportive leaders and peers. The finding is consistent with SCCT's emphasis on environmental support, with Self-Determination Theory's emphasis on relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and with Gullan and Gaytos (2026) and Navalta (2024), who highlighted the roles of motivation and professional support in teachers' pursuit of advancement.

Lived Challenges in Meeting ECPS Requirements

Table 3 presents the four themes on the challenges teachers encountered in meeting ECPS requirements.

Table 3. *Themes on Lived Challenges in Meeting ECPS Requirements*

Theme	Significant Vignettes	Codes
Limited time and competing responsibilities	"The greatest challenge I encountered was time constraints while accomplishing the requirements." (P1, P5, P6, P7); "I had to balance my teaching duties while also completing the ECPS requirements." (P11)	Time constraints; balancing teaching duties and ECPS requirements

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Theme	Significant Vignettes	Codes
Heavy documentary requirements	"Gathering the NCOI documents and organizing the inventory of IPCRF indicators for the past three years was the most difficult part." (P1, P8); "Not all of my achievements were documented properly. I still need to find the documents and reconstruct some." (P10)	Gathering NCOI and IPCRF documents; discrepancies in records; reconstructing undocumented achievements
Pressure from demonstration and interview	"The demonstration lesson with actual learners was the most difficult requirement." (P4, P6); "Maybe the interview. The NCOI. Because I do not know what the question will be." (P12)	Unfamiliar learners in demonstration; uncertainty about interview questions
Financial and emotional strain	"One of my biggest challenges was the financial cost of retrieving the documents needed for the application." (P2); "I felt nervous because I was unsure whether I would achieve the promotion that I wanted." (P5); "I felt stressed and overwhelmed at times." (P11)	Cost of retrieving documents; nervousness; stress and feeling overwhelmed

The most common challenge was limited time, as teachers had to prepare documentation and meet other requirements within an already hectic schedule, so that preparation became an additional load on top of their teaching responsibilities. In terms of lived time, teachers struggled to complete requirements while meeting their instructional obligations, and in terms of lived human relations, their responsibility to learners shaped how they allocated their time. This is consistent with David et al. (2019), who found that administrative work limits teachers' development, with Raquim et al. (2025), who noted the heavy documentation demands of the ECPS, and with Navalta (2024), who identified workload and administrative demands as major obstacles.

Participants also described the difficulty of retrieving, organizing, verifying, and reconstructing evidence of past accomplishments, including Non-Classroom Observation Indicator (NCOI) documents and three years of Individual Performance Commitment and Review Form (IPCRF) indicators. As Participant 9 noted, "Although I possessed the necessary accomplishments and evidence, not all of them had been properly documented." Through the lens of lived time, past work remained central to present advancement, yet professional accomplishment and documentary readiness were not always the same. This finding confirms Apale (2026), who identified the burden of documentation as a challenge in ECPS implementation in Bohol, and shows that although DepEd Order No. 024, s. 2025 requires documentary evidence, preparation is complicated when records have not been systematically kept.

The demonstration lesson and interview created pressure because teachers had to teach unfamiliar learners and answer questions they could not anticipate. These experiences reflect lived space in the unfamiliar demonstration classroom, lived body in the stress and nervousness that teachers had to manage, and lived human relations in their interactions with unfamiliar learners and assessors. The finding relates to Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which highlights the role of self-efficacy in handling difficult situations, and shows that while these assessments measure professional competence, they also create stress and uncertainty. Teachers also bore financial costs in retrieving documents and experienced nervousness, stress, and feelings of being overwhelmed, reflecting lived body and showing that career advancement placed demands on teachers' personal resources and well-being. This is consistent with Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020), which recognizes the costs individuals weigh in pursuing valued goals, and with Self-Determination Theory, which highlights the supportive conditions needed to sustain motivation and well-being.

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Adaptive Strategies for Navigating ECPS Requirements

Table 4 presents the four themes on the strategies teachers used to navigate the ECPS requirements.

Table 4. *Themes on Adaptive Strategies for Navigating ECPS Requirements*

Theme	Significant Vignettes	Codes
Planning, scheduling, and prioritizing	"I scheduled the retrieval of documents and planned my tasks carefully." (P1); "I managed my time by setting priorities and creating a simple schedule." (P8); "I created a checklist of things that needed to be accomplished." (P9, P10); "I divided the tasks into smaller parts." (P11)	Scheduling; prioritizing; checklists; dividing tasks into smaller parts
Using available and personal time	"I compiled my documents during vacant periods, lunch breaks, and sometimes stayed up late at night." (P5); "I did the requirements during breaktime and after class hours. I also used some of my hours at home." (P10)	After class hours; vacant periods and breaks; late nights; time at home
Seeking help and working collaboratively	"I worked closely with my co-teachers who were also applying for ECPS. We shared experiences and helped each other." (P2); "We grouped ourselves according to the positions we were applying for and scheduled specific times to work on the necessary documents together." (P8)	Sharing experiences; following co-teachers' guidance; working and reviewing documents together
Preparing oneself for performance and pressure	"I visited and familiarized myself with the class where I would conduct my demonstration lesson." (P6); "I prayed before the interview. I took deep breaths and talked to others who were done with the interview." (P10)	Familiarizing with the demonstration class; staying calm; prayer; courage and perseverance

Teachers organized their preparation by scheduling, prioritizing, using checklists, and dividing requirements into manageable parts. These strategies strongly reflect lived time, as planning became an attempt to exert control over the demands of preparation. The finding aligns with Bandura's (1997) emphasis on self-regulation and with SCCT's account of goal-directed career behavior (Lent et al., 1994). Teachers also maximized their available time by working during vacant periods, breaks, after class hours, late at night, and at home. Participant 10's account of completing requirements at home reflects lived space, as ECPS work crossed the boundary between school and personal living space, making the boundaries between professional and personal life less distinct. This is consistent with David et al. (2019) and Zhao et al. (2022), who found that limited time and heavy workloads restrict teachers' professional development.

Teachers relied on colleagues by sharing experiences, following co-teachers' guidance, grouping themselves by the positions they were applying for, and reviewing documents together after work. Interpreted through lived human relations, these practices transformed an individual professional process into a collective activity in which teachers were both helpers and help-seekers, illustrating the relatedness emphasized in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Finally, teachers prepared themselves for the demonstration and interview by familiarizing themselves with the demonstration classroom (lived space), taking deep breaths and praying (lived body), and seeking advice from previous interviewees (lived human relations). This combination of practical preparation, emotional regulation, and collegial support aligns with Collie (2021), who described supportive relationships as helping teachers remain engaged in the face of adversity, and with Dhonchak (2025), who highlighted the role of professional relationships and supportive contexts in teachers' professional learning.

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Reshaping Teachers' Career Aspirations and Well-Being

Table 5 presents the four themes on how navigating the ECPS reshaped teachers' career aspirations and well-being.

Table 5. *Themes on Reshaping Teachers' Career Aspirations and Well-Being*

Theme	Significant Vignettes	Codes
Renewed professional self-worth and possibility	"It gave me the opportunity to advance in rank and showed me that career growth was still possible despite being close to retirement." (P3); "ECPS boosted my self-worth as a teacher and reminded me that my efforts have value." (P5); "That I can be more. That I was given what I deserve after all those years." (P12)	Career growth still possible near retirement; boosted self-worth; deserved recognition
Intentional and purposeful professional practice	"I have become more intentional in the things I do as a teacher." (P1); "I should be intentional with everything I do in school… I should always make and keep documents." (P10); "I need to be intentional in my teaching, I should never stop learning for my students." (P12)	Intentional practice; understanding recognized accomplishments; keeping documents; learning for students
Continuous learning and professional growth	"Teaching [is] not merely as a job but as a continuous journey of professional growth and service." (P7, P9); "It inspired me to become a more effective, reflective, purposeful, and learner-centered teacher." (P11)	Teaching as continuous growth and service; reflective and learner-centered practice
Greater confidence, motivation, and commitment	"The experience increased my confidence and strengthened my commitment to teaching." (P6, P10); "It gave me more confidence in my abilities because I was able to complete the process despite the challenges." (P11)	Increased confidence; elevated motivation; strengthened commitment

Completing the ECPS renewed participants' sense of professional self-worth and possibility. Through lived time, Participant 3's account suggests that approaching retirement did not end professional growth, while Participant 12's statement shows how present recognition gave new meaning to past efforts. This aligns with Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, as successful reclassification may positively alter teachers' perceptions of their capabilities, and with Parreño and Galicia (2026), who found that ECPS strengthened teachers' sense of professional value. Participants also became more intentional and purposeful in their practice, recognizing which accomplishments are valued and resolving to keep records of their work, while Participant 12 connected intentional practice to continued learning for students. In terms of lived time, present actions became records that may support future opportunities, and in terms of lived human relations, professional growth remained tied to responsibility for learners. This is consistent with Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020) and with Galamiton et al. (2026), who linked ECPS to professional development and career advancement.

Participants came to view teaching as a continuous journey of professional growth and service, and described becoming more reflective and learner-centered, showing that professional growth extends beyond acquiring a particular rank. This aligns with the competence need in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and with Alvia et al. (2026), who linked self-efficacy to professional enhancement in career progression. Finally, completing the process increased participants' confidence, motivation, and commitment to teaching; for Participant 11, earlier difficulties became challenges that had been overcome, so that past struggle contributed to a stronger present sense of capability. This finding is supported by Parreño and Galicia (2026), who found that ECPS strengthened professional identity and retention motivation, and by Gullan and Gaytos (2026), who identified motivation as important to professional advancement. At the same time, the demands of preparation imposed pressure, required more time, and reduced opportunities for personal activities and family time.

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The Lived Experience of ECPS through the Four Existentials

Across the 15 themes, the four lifeworld existentials illuminate how career progression was lived in teachers' everyday lives. In lived time, the ECPS brought different periods of the teachers' professional lives into a single field of reflection: documentation required them to revisit past accomplishments, present schedules constrained their preparation, and the prospect of advancement gave that preparation a future orientation, even for those near retirement. This is why preparation could be both difficult and motivating. In lived space, preparation was embedded in the classroom, which remained a place of ongoing responsibility, moved into the home when school hours were insufficient, and confronted teachers with unfamiliar demonstration classrooms that became settings of uncertainty and scrutiny.

In lived body, the stress of competing tasks, nervousness before demonstrations and interviews, and efforts to regain composure through breathing and prayer show that preparation was personally felt rather than a matter of arranging documents. The growth in confidence that followed reflected an increased sense of being able to perform under demanding conditions, balanced against the strain of preparation. In lived human relations, career progression emerged as a shared undertaking: encouragement from school heads and colleagues, collaborative document preparation, and advice from previous applicants provided motivation, practical assistance, and reassurance, while teachers' continuing responsibility to learners anchored their aspirations. These existentials are intimately linked, as the time available affected teachers' effort and well-being, relationships shaped their responses to demands, and teaching and assessment settings were where they lived out their aspirations. Taken together, the findings show that the ECPS was both an opportunity for progression, recognition, and renewed confidence and a demanding experience that required teachers to revisit their professional evidence, restructure their routines, draw on their relationships, and manage emotional and personal costs.

Proposed Action Plan on Career Progression and Professional Growth

Based on the findings, the study proposed an action plan to support teachers navigating the ECPS in the Schools Division of Bohol, grounded in Executive Order No. 174, s. 2022 and DepEd Order Nos. 024 and 034, s. 2025. Table 6 summarizes its components, which respond to the participants' need for timely guidance, organized documentation, collegial support, assessment readiness, time management, information on document retrieval, and continuing professional growth. The plan is complemented by a proposed professional development program, the Career Progression and Professional Growth Support Plan for Teachers, aligned with the PPST, particularly Domain 7 on Personal Growth and Professional Development.

Table 6. *Summary of the Proposed Action Plan*

Area of Concern	Strategies/Activities	Persons/Offices Involved	Success Indicators
Need for clear direction and early preparation	Early ECPS orientation; updated checklist of requirements and timelines; clear channel for inquiries	SDO Human Resource Office, school heads, ECPS personnel	Prospective applicants oriented and informed of requirements
Difficulty in gathering and organizing documents	Updated professional portfolios; periodic checks of records such as performance documents, certificates, and MOVs	School heads, teachers, records personnel	Updated and accessible records; missing documents identified early
Need for guidance and support from colleagues	Voluntary ECPS support groups; mentoring by experienced applicants; document review and experience sharing	School heads, master teachers, previous applicants	Applicants have access to mentors or peer-support groups
Pressure from demonstration teaching and interviews	Practice demonstrations with feedback; interview preparation sessions	School heads, master teachers, mentors	Applicants participate in practice sessions

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Area of Concern	Strategies/Activities	Persons/Offices Involved	Success Indicators
Limited time and competing responsibilities	Realistic preparation calendar; support activities coordinated with teaching schedules	School heads, ECPS personnel, teachers	Preparation planned systematically around teaching schedules
Difficulty and expenses in retrieving documents	Early information on required documents, sources, procedures, and legitimate fees	School heads, records personnel, SDO HR Office	Applicants informed of documents, sources, and expenses
Need for continuous professional growth	Professional reflection and career-planning sessions linked to learning and development activities	SDO Learning and Development Section, school heads	Teachers set and pursue professional development goals

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that teachers experienced the ECPS as more than a pathway to a higher rank. They pursued reclassification as an opportunity for career advancement, improved compensation, and clearer professional direction, encouraged by colleagues and school heads. Meeting its requirements, however, demanded time, financial resources, and personal effort, as teachers contended with competing responsibilities, heavy documentary requirements, the pressure of demonstration teaching and interviews, and emotional strain. They responded through planning and prioritizing, using their available and personal time, collaborating with colleagues, and preparing themselves for performance and pressure.

Navigating these demands renewed teachers' professional self-worth, confidence, and sense of possibility, encouraged intentional practice and continuous learning, and strengthened their commitment to teaching and to their learners. Interpreted through Van Manen's lifeworld existentials, career progression emerged as both a personal and a shared undertaking that teachers must balance with their well-being and responsibilities to learners. The study contributes a phenomenological understanding of the ECPS that complements existing quantitative research and shows that the system was ultimately an experience of rediscovering professional worth, purpose, and possibility. The ECPS is indeed more than just the rank.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusions, and subject to existing policies, local conditions, and available resources, the Schools Division Office may provide timely and consistent ECPS guidance based on memoranda from the Central or Regional Office and direct schools to conduct orientations for prospective applicants, including simplified checklists of requirements, clearly defined timelines, designated channels for inquiries, and clear information on documentary requirements, sources of supporting records, assessment procedures, and legitimate expenses.

School heads may integrate systematic records management, voluntary ECPS mentoring and preparation, and continuing professional development into a succession and career development plan, and, in coordination with ECPS focal persons, provide guidance aligned with official requirements while considering teachers' workload, personal time, and well-being. Teachers and prospective applicants may prepare by maintaining updated professional records, planning early, seeking information from authorized sources, and participating in available mentoring and preparation activities. The proposed action plan and professional development program may be adopted and implemented to support these efforts.

Future researchers may explore the experiences of teachers who deferred, withdrew from, or did not complete the ECPS process, as well as those with different outcomes, retitled teachers, and teachers in other divisions. Longitudinal studies may also examine how the ECPS influences teachers' career aspirations, confidence, commitment, and well-being over time.

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