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Quenie Romorosa 
Central Mindanao University, Philippines

Jenyliza Uchang 
Central Mindanao University, Philippines

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Quenie Romorosa, Jenyliza Uchang

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Abstract

Teachers' participation in diverse professional development initiatives is crucial for personal and professional advancement. This study focused on exploring the perspectives of public-school teachers in their pursuit of professional development. A case study was conducted through purposive sampling, utilizing a semi-structured interview to gather data among the six public school teachers in Bukidnon, Philippines. Using Braun and Clarke's approach to thematic analysis, the data were analyzed and interpreted, which uncovered the teachers' perceptions that urged them to engage in such activities in two themes: continuous learning and growth and fostering professional collaboration. Continuous learning and growth comprised the subthemes: being relevant and updated in their field, enhancing content knowledge and pedagogy, improving students' outcomes, promotion, and compliance with professional standards. Furthermore, various implications for professional development providers and education administrators were also discussed. Further research is suggested to enrich the results and implications of the study.

Introduction

Teachers play an important role in the learning process. The Education and Training Policy Division of the OECD (2005) emphasizes that teachers and teaching have the most substantial impact on student learning. They also state that the quality of teachers is the most crucial factor influencing student achievement. Additionally, the current landscape of teacher education emphasizes the importance of enhancing professional learning for effective teaching and learning (Ancho & Arrieta, 2021; Clinkenbeard & Ultan, 2024; Muslu et al., 2022; Post et al., 2022). Therefore, it is essential to ensure that teachers receive continuous professional development to improve learning outcomes (Ocampo & Lucasan, 2019).

The ongoing professional development of educators plays a fundamental role in the field of education. Professional development, as described by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), involves organized learning activities that lead to modifications in teaching methods and enhancements in student educational outcomes. Professional development activities include training, seminars, workshops, and graduate studies (Ancho & Arrieta, 2019). Additionally, conducting classroom and school research not only improves teachers' teaching styles and practices but also allows teachers to grow professionally and personally (Ulla, 2018). Thus, professional development has been shown to equate quality teachers to quality education.

Educational institutions offer systematic professional development interventions that cater to the specific needs and competencies of their staff on a more frequent basis. For instance, the Department of Education has been ensuring that teachers are equipped with enough knowledge and skills. The DepEd Order (DO) No. 42, s. 2017 stipulated that personal growth and professional development as one of the domains to be evaluated in the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). Among the strands in this domain of professional standards are the demonstration of "professional reflection and learning to improve practice" and "professional development goals" (DepEd, 2017, p. 24).

Furthermore, the majority of professional development initiatives for public school teachers typically involve formal training. These training programs encompass the Teacher Induction Program (TIP) and in-service training (INSET) programs which are offered by schools, school districts, or divisions during summer and semester breaks. In addition, DO No. 35, s. 2016, institutionalizes the learning action cell (LAC) as a major strategy in providing professional development for teachers. LAC was defined as "a group of teachers who engage in collaborative learning sessions to solve shared challenges in the school facilitated by the school head or a designated LAC leader" (DepEd, 2016, p. 3).

Also, DepEd has instructed school leaders and administrators nationwide to embrace the "enclosed Basic Education Research Agenda." This initiative encourages teachers to conduct research within schools to identify and address issues and to contribute to their professional growth and skills development. Through research, teachers are expected to enhance their teaching methods, resulting in improved student learning and overall school performance. Clearly, the DepEd has been committed to support Filipino teachers in their pursuit of professional development.

Teachers were challenged to engage in professional development (Fernandez et al., 2022). Yet, they were motivated because they yearned for continual learning (Arrieta & Ancho, 2021), work promotion, cultivating relationships with stakeholders (Aquino et al., 2023), and self-interest and practical enhancement (Alzahrani, 2021). Moreover, local studies have proven that professional development activities have helped teachers achieve mastery in instructional planning, delivery, subject matter knowledge, rapport with students, and classroom management (Padillo et al., 2021). Thus, it emphasizes refined and enhanced teaching practices (Arrieta & Ancho, 2022).

Therefore, it is interesting to study how teachers perceived the demand to pursue professional development, especially among public school teachers who were bound by responsibilities both personally and professionally. More importantly, the study provides appropriate suggestions for enhancing professional development programs for teachers. Having deemed these necessities, the researcher finds the need to pursue this study further.

Method

Research Design

In this research, a qualitative case study design was employed to explore the perspectives of public-school teachers

regarding their professional development. The study involved conducting semi-structured interviews using a guide that had been validated by experts. Data were collected from six secondary school teachers in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, who were chosen for the study using purposive sampling.

Participants

All participants shared common characteristics, including holding a professional teaching license, having at least five years of teaching experience in public schools, and holding a master's or doctoral degree in their field. Additionally, they were recognized as proficient, highly proficient, or distinguished teachers, and had received satisfactory to outstanding ratings in their previous performance evaluations. Furthermore, they willingly participated and provided honest responses.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before the data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Schools Division Superintendent and School Principals. Additionally, a provisional notice to proceed was secured from the Institutional Ethics Review Committee (IERC) to ensure compliance with ethical standards.

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's approach to thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, and the consistency of the themes was confirmed through intercoder agreement among experts. The final results were verified and validated by the participants.

Results and Discussion

With all the perceptions and experiences of the public-school teachers on their journey towards professional development gathered from the interviews, major themes were classified: (a) continuous learning and growth, and (b) professional collaboration.

Perceptions of Public School Teachers on the Pursuit for Professional Development

The insights and perspectives shared by the participants underscore the significant demand for ongoing professional development within the teaching community. As the cornerstone of education, their active involvement is fueled by both their personal and professional aspirations. The prevalent themes are illustrated in Figure 1.

Continuous Learning and Growth

Professional development is the ongoing process of learning that helps individuals excel in their professional

fields. Teachers must continually learn to keep up with changes in education. This involves improving their skills and acquiring new knowledge to meet the demands of the evolving educational system. The participants believe that their participation and engagement in various professional development activities provides them with continuous learning and growth that keeps them on pace on the demands of the 21st century education. Furthermore, teachers achieve optimal growth through professional development tailored to their specific needs. Thus, teacher professional development should be considered an ongoing and lifelong process. It is essential to recognize that learning is a continuous endeavor. Inability to adapt to global changes, especially those driven by technology, may lead educators to struggle to keep pace with the demands of this era (Fernandez, et al., 2022).

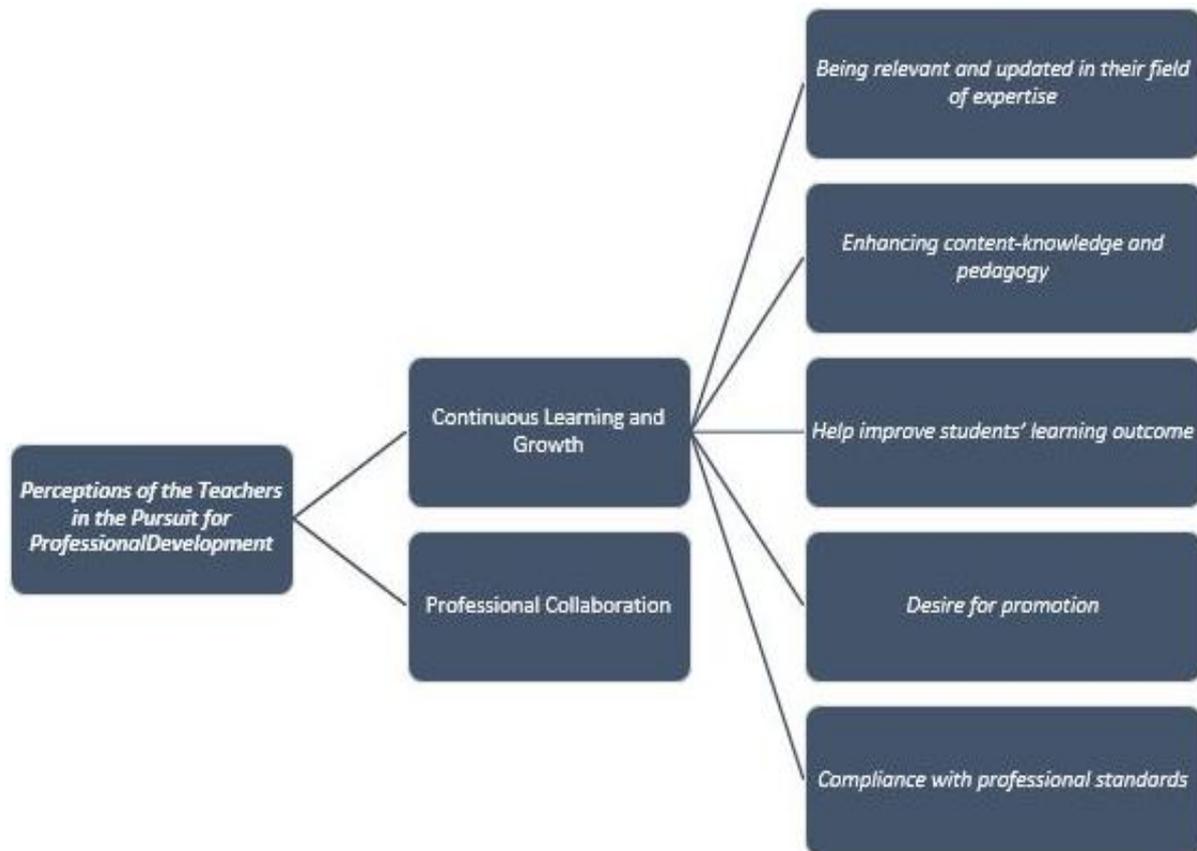


Figure 1. Teachers' Perceptions on the Professional Development

Being Relevant and Updated in Their Field of Expertise

Teachers have a crucial role in imparting knowledge. They recognize that the field of teaching and learning is always changing, and they must constantly update and improve their knowledge and teaching methods to keep up with current trends and challenges in education. They understand that experience alone is not enough to enhance instruction, and they emphasize the importance of refining their abilities, learning effective teaching techniques, and deepening their grasp of the subject matter to effectively convey it to students. Additionally, the participants with over ten years of experience expressed that:

"You cannot learn if you simply rely on your bachelor's degree, even a master's degree if you stop there."

The moment you stop learning, you become absolutely obsolete."(P6)

"I don't think it's good to be contented with what you already learn to keep yourself updated with what's going on in the field where you are in." (P1)

Moreso, Arrieta and Ancho (2021) on their phenomenological study revealed that teachers yearn for continual learning. They strive to adapt and evolve by unlearning outdated knowledge and acquiring new skills. Their motivation is driven by the desire to meet the present and future needs of their students and the world. They prioritize personal growth to ensure their teaching remains relevant and beneficial to their students.

Enhancing Content-Knowledge and Pedagogy

Teachers are encouraged to maintain a growth mindset, continuously seeking knowledge from both experienced individuals and younger peers within the school community. They are open to change and lifelong learning, understanding the significance of professional development to adapt to changes in curriculum, teaching methods, and technology (Santos, 2018). For instance, a teacher in her thirties with eight years of experience realized that:

"Engaging professional development such as teaching strategies and techniques are very important in the sense that you can adapt to the changes brought about by technology. In order for you to do more, teach more too to our younger generations... another new technique that the students should be engaging in and also for them to fully understand the 21st century learnings... For my students to learn not just in the four corners of the classroom but also integrating it to ICT, integrating it to learning by playing outside, and other forms of new techniques and strategies that will catch up the attention of my students."
(P3)

Additionally, Fernandez et al. (2022) accentuated that ongoing professional development can deepen one's understanding of professionalism and foster a passion for the implications and effects of work. It enhances existing skills and knowledge, contributing to one's effectiveness as an educator. By performing adeptly and meeting the expectations of both students and superiors, individuals can bolster public trust in themselves and their profession.

Help Improve Students' Learning Outcome

Participant 4 and Participant 5 were eager to embrace change and develop in order to assist their students in enhancing their learning and achievement. They expressed their enthusiasm for acquiring new skills and knowledge that they could impart to their students, with the hope that it would contribute to improved performance. Additionally, teachers who are intrinsically motivated are more inclined to apply additional knowledge and skills that have a positive impact on their teaching methods and student performance (Tan & Reyes, 2021). Furthermore, this underscores the crucial role of teachers' ongoing learning and enthusiasm in contributing to improved student success.

“Professional development is a continued learning in order to improve my performance as a teacher, to improve my teaching capability as well as the performance of the students.” (P4)

“I engage in professional development for my students. What will I teach if I don’t have the necessary knowledge? [Thus], I acquire new skills and knowledge that I can share with my students.” (P5)

This result was corroborated by Kind (2019) where he examined teachers' experiences with professional development and its impact on instructional practice found that effective professional development can boost students' achievement by about 21 percentile points. Thus, the continuous learning opportunities helped teachers to address educational needs in the evolving educational landscapes.

Desire for Promotion

The participants further enhanced their professional expertise in pursuit of professional development. Most of them expressed that promotion serves as a key internal drive for their professional development. According to Aquino et al. (2023), the pursuit of professional growth is fueled by aspirations for promotion and salary enhancements among educators.

“I was forced to take my Master’s in Business Management so I could be aligned because it’s needed for the promotion.” (P1)

Thus, this suggests that professional development and financial incentives play a pivotal role in motivating educators to further develop their professional skills. Studies have shown that teacher’s commitment to participate in various professional development activities is linked to their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation which boils down to seeking of personal achievement and professional identity (Bosch, 2013; Le et al., 2016) which also includes work promotion and salary increase (Aquino et al., 2023). Rodriguez and Cudiamat (2021) also revealed that teachers who have a high salary (e.g., salary grade 11) are always professionally motivated.

Compliance with Professional Standards

The participants aimed to participate in professional development to meet the requirements of their profession and adhere to the standards outlined in RA 10912 and DO 42, s. 2017. Specifically, three participants mentioned that:

“CPD somehow affects my engagement in professional development.”(P1)

“It is needed for CPD.” (P2)

“It’s part of our IPCRF.” (P4)

Moreover, license holders are obligated to meet the criteria for license renewal in accordance with the regulations set for school personnel licensure. Individuals must adhere to the mandatory units every three years. This

necessitates satisfying both educational and experiential components that demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the knowledge pertinent to the field of education (Fernandez et al., 2022). Therefore, teachers were motivated by both personal and professional aspirations to seek out opportunities for professional growth. It is important to note that teaching as a career involves an ongoing process of development and learning (Bates & Morgan, 2018).

Professional Collaboration

In alignment with the concept that two heads are better than one, professional learning communities offer opportunities for educators to learn from each other. When educators can share their knowledge and experiences, they can gain valuable insights and receive validation of their own experiences from their peers. Furthermore, this aligns with adult learning theory, which suggests that transformative learning takes place when adult learners have the opportunity to engage with one another, allocate time for meaningful discussions, reflect on and derive meaning from their learning in the context of their previous experiences, and relate the new knowledge to their specific circumstances, objectives, and requirements (Knowles, 1970). One participant highlighted that:

“The best part of it was knowing other professionals who are in the same field. We were able to exchange ideas, strategies, and other relevant learnings about our program.” (P1)

Furthermore, Ancho and Arrieta (2021) highlighted the importance of prioritizing collaboration within the program. This claim was supported by Broad and Evans (2006) which emphasized on their reviewed literature the importance of experienced teachers engaging in study groups, peer-assisted learning, and teacher researcher/practitioner collaborations. These activities help teachers develop and refine the instructional strategies required to teach 21st-century skills. Therefore, this allows teachers to create a platform for exchanging ideas, offering mutual support, and fostering professional development through interactions with their colleagues.

Conclusion

The exploration of the perspectives among the public school teachers regarding their engagement in professional development revealed their motivations for participating in such activities, which include a desire for continual learning, personal and professional growth, and collaborative opportunities within their field. Public school teachers are driven to enhance their skills and knowledge in order to become more effective educators.

Recommendations

Recognizing these underlying factors has significant implications for professional development providers and education administrators. It suggests the importance of offering meaningful and relevant professional development opportunities that align with teachers' needs. Moreover, it highlights the significance of encouraging ongoing participation in training and seminars, as well as the importance of selecting knowledgeable and effective speakers and facilitators.

This study limits only the perceptions of the public school teachers on their pursuit for professional development. Furthermore, future research could employ alternative qualitative and quantitative research methods or a combination of both to gain a more nuanced understanding of this topic and to identify further implications. Additionally, exploring the perspectives of private school teachers and gaining insights from professional development providers and education administrators would offer a more comprehensive understanding of this context.

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Author Information

Quenie Romorosa

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6890-7328>

Central Mindanao University

Philippines

Contact e-mail: s.romorosa.quenie@cmu.edu.ph

Jenyliza Uchang

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1180-3880>

Central Mindanao University

Philippines