

# NAVIGATING CAREER STAGNATION: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF UNPROMOTED SEASONED TEACHERS

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## ABSTRACT

**Aims:** This study explored the lived experiences of seven unpromoted teachers in selected public schools in Digos City, Davao del Sur, Philippines, focusing on their challenges, coping mechanisms, and the support they need in relation to career stagnation.

**Study design:** A qualitative phenomenological approach was used to gain insights into the participants' personal experiences.

**Place and Duration of Study:** The study was conducted in Digos City, Davao del Sur, Philippines.

**Methodology:** The study involved seven teachers aged 40 and above, who had been in their entry-level positions for at least seven years selected through purposive and convenience sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, and key themes were identified through Colaizzi's method.

**Results:** The results of the study revealed that the challenges of unpromoted seasoned teachers regarding career stagnation are the inability to pursue further education, limited training opportunities and rigid requirements, and emotional impact. Despite these challenges, they have developed coping mechanisms, including an engagement in professional development, constructive perspective, and work-life balance. On the other hand, they need leadership support and better opportunities for professional growth to alleviate their challenges of career stagnation.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that unpromoted teachers face significant barriers to career progression. Although they demonstrate resilience through various coping mechanisms, these challenges underscore the need for comprehensive career development programs that can better support their professional and personal growth.

Furthermore, it provides valuable contributions to the scientific community by exploring systemic challenges and coping mechanisms that impact educators' professional growth and job satisfaction. The study emphasizes the crucial role of leadership support and professional development opportunities in addressing these barriers.

*Keywords: Navigating; career stagnation; lived experiences; unpromoted seasoned teachers; qualitative-phenomenological study; thematic analysis.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Career progression among teachers has become a key focus of government initiatives that intend to enhance teachers' professional growth and retention. However, despite these efforts, many seasoned teachers have remained in a lower-ranking position, specifically as Teacher I, even after years of dedicated service, which can lead to career dissatisfaction, emotional distress, and decreased motivation [1].

A study on secondary school teachers in Tanzania revealed that key determinants of job satisfaction among teachers aside from salary, job conditions, social interactions, and job security is the opportunities for promotion [2], which is found to be essential in increasing job retention and helps lower turnover [3]. This is supported by a study conducted in tertiary institutions in Nigeria on the effect of promotion on job satisfaction, which showed that promotion positively influences job satisfaction and the attainment of organizational goals.

However, a study conducted in the Bono region of Ghana revealed that teachers experienced challenges during promotion, such as inconsistent and late dissemination of promotion details, long application process, excessive requirements, and delayed release of promotion results. These challenges affect not only their productivity but also their psychological, social, and emotional welfare [4]. Furthermore, an APA's 2024 Work in America survey revealed that almost 23% of American workers are dissatisfied with their growth and development opportunities, and the lack of advancement opportunities is a leading reason why Americans leave their jobs [5].

On the other hand, a study conducted among public sector universities in Pakistan revealed that promotion is crucial for faculty members as it provides self-satisfaction, recognition, autonomy, and power. Additionally, the absence of career advancement could negatively impact their potential performance [6]. Meanwhile, another study in Indonesia highlighted that career promotions can lead to positive employee performance [7], which can benefit the students and the department. This is backed up by a study conducted [8], which employed the multiple linear regression methodology to examine the correlation between Mercu Buana University academic staff performance, work satisfaction, job promotions, and salary. The results showed that Mercu Buana University's academic staff performed better when they were promoted and were satisfied with their jobs.

While the international studies provide valuable insights into career progression and job satisfaction, little is known about how these issues manifest among seasoned teachers in the context of the Philippines, particularly in the Schools Division of Digos City. [9]. Although, Section 5 of Article XIV of the Constitution states that the state shall strengthen teachers' rights to professional advancement and ensure that teaching will attract and retain its rightful share of the best available talents through adequate remuneration and other means of job satisfaction and fulfillment, from 2022-2023, only 3415 positions have been filled out of the 46,000 vacant positions in the Department of Education [10] which implies possible gaps in the promotion process of DepEd. Furthermore, a study [11] revealed that the rigorous standards and requirements for promotion, which they mostly lack, limit the career advancement of teachers.

Despite years of dedicated service, many teachers in Digos City in both public elementary and secondary levels, as the majority of teachers who have been in their careers for a short period are the ones who are rapidly promoted. Hence, there is a need to explore the lived experiences of unpromoted seasoned teachers on the challenges of career stagnation, their coping mechanisms, and the support they need.

Furthermore, this study will offer valuable insights that school leaders can use to develop programs to address the challenges of seasoned teachers who experience career stagnation. Also, it can be used as a reference for crafting or revising teachers' professional development and career progression policies. Additionally, the findings may help teachers implement personal interventions, especially in areas that can be addressed individually. The results of this study can also help teachers coping mechanism in dealing with emotions such as being demotivated as stated in the theory of Vroom the Expectancy Theory and Coping Theory by Lazarus. Moreover, the results of this research will be a foundation for future researchers exploring career stagnation and seasoned teachers. Additionally, this paper will be presented in various forums or published online for a wider dissemination of the results.

## 1.2 Theoretical Lens

This study was viewed through the following lenses: **Expectancy Theory** by Vroom [12], and **Coping Theory** by Lazarus and Folkman [13,14].

Expectancy Theory by Victor Vroom asserts that an individual's decision to act in a certain way is influenced by their expectations of the outcome. This theory underscores the role of individual effort in shaping behavior, suggesting that people are more likely to engage in tasks when they believe their efforts will lead to the desired performance and subsequent rewards. The theory is based on three fundamental elements: expectancy (the belief that effort leads to success), instrumentality (the belief that success leads to rewards), and valence (the value placed on the rewards).

In the context of this study, the theory states that teachers may become demotivated if they feel that their efforts will not result in a promotion (expectancy) if they see no apparent connection between career rewards and performance (instrumentality), or if they value promotion highly (valence) but cannot see a way to get it. Hence, the lack of promotions after long years of service might diminish their expectancy that their hard work and dedication will result in advancement, lowering their motivation and job satisfaction.

Another theoretical framework applicable to this study is the Coping Theory proposed by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984. In this approach, coping is defined as using cognitive and behavioral strategies to effectively manage, withstand, or alleviate internal and external stressors and conflicts encountered by an individual. The theory asserts that many action sequences frequently overlap during coping, creating a link between coping experiences. Coping strategies can be categorized according to their focus on various elements of a stressful circumstance. Problem-focused coping denotes an intentional attempt to alter the interactions between an individual and their environment, leading to stress or negative emotions. Furthermore, they might build connections with internal components and effort to alleviate an unpleasant emotional state or alter the interpretation of the problematic situation (emotion-focused coping).

In the context of this study, seasoned teachers feeling stuck in their careers could use problem-focused coping strategies by pursuing further education or certifications to improve their promotion opportunities. However, if they encounter challenges, they might resort to emotion-focused coping, which involves accepting the situation, seeking support from colleagues, or detaching emotionally from their career goals.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

1. What are the challenges of unpromoted seasoned teachers on career stagnation?
2. How do unpromoted seasoned teachers cope with the challenges of career stagnation?
3. What forms of support do they need from the school administrators or the Department of Education?

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Challenges of Unpromoted Seasoned Teachers**

Teachers have contributed significantly to change, shaping the young generation with their knowledge, skills, experience, and dedication to teaching. However, many teachers remain unpromoted even if they have already been in the service for a long time, which can affect them in both their personal and professional lives. The absence of career advancement could negatively impact their potential performance and can lead an individual to experience career stagnation [6].

Promotion is a shift that elevates employees' authority and responsibilities to higher positions within the organization, resulting in an improvement in their commitments, rights, status, and income [15]. Furthermore, it is the reassignment of an employee to a position that offers greater compensation, benefits, or status than the previous role [16]. Job promotion significantly influences organizational performance [17]. Consequently, employee advancement inside organizations should adhere to established promotion policies and procedures.

Meanwhile, Yeboah & Kuranchie [4] revealed that teachers in the Bono region of Ghana experienced challenges during promotion, such as inconsistent and late dissemination of promotion details, long application process, excessive requirements, and delayed release of promotion results. These

challenges affect not only their productivity but also their psychological, social, and emotional welfare. Furthermore, a quantitative study conducted by Oplatka and Beck [18] found that career stagnation significantly adversely affects motivation [19]. This is supported by the study of Winoto et al., [20] which revealed that advancement and promotion positively impacted job motivation. In addition, Siagian and Kurniawati [21] assert that motivation is a psychological state that stimulates, activates, and directs an individual's behavior, attitudes, and actions, consistently linked to the attainment of both organizational and personal objectives. Motivation comprises a collection of attitudes and beliefs that drive individuals to attain specific goals aligned with their personal goals [22].

Moreover, as employees encounter more career stagnation, they generally report diminished job satisfaction, less commitment to their organization, and a decline in motivation to execute their responsibilities [23]. In the Philippines, a study among public school teachers in Tacloban City revealed that teachers who experienced career stagnation due to a lack of financial capability, low educational qualifications, work pressure, promotion anxiety, lack of support, and career decisions [24]. Another study by Cruz [25] revealed that the rigorous standards and requirements for promotion, which they mostly lack, limit the career advancement of teachers. According to Garba and Idris [26], opportunities for promotion should be given at the right time to competent employees. Hence, it is an issue when teachers who have been in the service for many years have not yet been promoted.

## **2.2 Coping Mechanisms to Address Career Stagnation Challenges**

In a study of Pagayanan [9], participants discussed healthy coping strategies for the various obstacles to job growth stagnating they had faced. They all felt that the most effective way to show how they felt about the experiences was to accept them and make resolutions. For administrators to permit them to proceed with the professional promotion process, participants also give it their all every day.

On the other hand, Shabbir et al., [27] highlight that a seasoned teacher's coping method is to feel secure in her current position and not feel the need to grow and reach her full potential. When it comes to their current circumstances (Teacher I), the majority of teachers feel complacent. Furthermore, certain educators are constrained by the prioritization of tasks that must be completed, even in cases where making an uncontrollable life decision is involved [28]. Furthermore, the psychological fulfillment component of one's life can be used to gauge completeness. Teachers can support their happiness in accepting their current situation by practicing contentment [29]. Numerous books and articles have demonstrated how contentment with one's life and job can lead to happiness within oneself [30].

Furthermore, some teachers acknowledge that they have acquired professional maturity and are old enough for advancement. A happy and loving home is built on strong family values. A family's values, priorities, structures, and customs are influenced by these common ideas [31]. According to every responder in a Shin, Babic, and Sulis [32] survey, the family was the primary cause of their professional stagnation. They contend that obligations to one's family come first and should always take precedence. Spending time with their family is their first priority. It will take a significant amount of time to complete the rigorous and demanding requirements required for professional growth in order to be qualified [33]. The study of Tantawy [34] also revealed that an increase in responsibility correlated with a better rank.

Additionally, this internal drive acts as a buffer against outside obstacles to professional advancement. Having a positive influence on the lives of the children is already a strong foundation, and whether they get promoted or not, they will continue to do their absolute best as teachers while grinning. According to the research of Delos Reyes [35], when people smile, it affects how they interpret happy events and creates an environment that defines various roles in social interaction.

## **2.3 Support Needed by Unpromoted Seasoned Teachers**

Self-gratification and an individual's sense of confidence and job happiness all rise with empowerment. In addition to facilitating goal accomplishment and coping, empowerment also helps foster a favorable organizational atmosphere and opens the door for constructive communication among team members and between them and their surroundings [36]. Increasing knowledge is a key component of

teacher empowerment since it provides professional authority, insights, and intelligent behavior. A teacher who engages in a process of professional and personal development, mostly in the classroom, is considered empowered. Moreover, proactive and self-assured educators go above and beyond the call of duty to spark new ideas, revitalize existing ones, and advance the school's success. Teachers can be empowered by their principals to grow, become less reliant, and be more receptive to personal and organizational regeneration. A teacher will feel more empowered and be able to carry out her duties more independently if she participates in the definition of the school's goals and policies as well as in its decision-making [37].

Furthermore, career development is the main tool that educational institutions can use to support teachers in their ongoing professional development so that they can guarantee that their tasks will be fulfilled. It is a broad range of formal education, advanced professional learning, or specialized training meant to assist educators—administrators, teachers, and others—in enhancing their professional efficacy, competency, and expertise. It is crucial because it guarantees that a professional will remain competent in their field, which is a lifelong process that requires success throughout the course of a career. Individuals can monitor their progress and find the best possibilities to advance their careers and meet their goals by creating a career development plan [38].

On the other hand, Zamir [39] discovered in her study, "A Teaching Career: Mobility and Stagnation," that the primary factor contributing to career stagnation is the character of the interactions that teachers have with other members of the teaching staff and with school administrators. The factors, according to the participants, are specifically related to the members' lack of faith in the principle, their lack of cooperation, and their lack of goodwill. Overwhelming workloads and a lack of challenges were also mentioned. The majority of respondents cited interpersonal disputes between educators and administrators as a barrier to their careers. Furthermore, to improve the quality of one's career and end career stagnation, Abele, Volmer, and Spurk's [40] study recommends anti-discrimination strategies, career counseling, mentoring, anti-mobbing/anti-bullying interventions, and self-efficacy and self-management training. Moreover, Cruz [41] suggests that the Department of Education keeps coming up with ideas for enhancing the impartial and fair teacher ranking system, starting with the requirements filing and ending with the selection procedure. Additionally, as part of its human resource management duties, School Human Resource Management (SHRM) ought to inspire and encourage educators to pursue professional growth.

Although teaching is a fulfilling profession, being stuck in your position and experiencing career stagnation affects the teacher in different ways that may also affect their way of life either personally or professionally. Furthermore, with these challenges, specific ways or coping mechanisms should be personally applied by these unpromoted seasoned teachers to manage their struggles and challenges and help them cope. Despite these ways, they also need support to alleviate the gaps or downsides that career stagnation has brought to their lives which can be given by the people around them who can encourage them with their goals and aspirations as they continue their career journeys.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study utilized qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research is used to get a comprehensive understanding of human behavior, experience, attitudes, intentions, and motivations by observing and interpreting people's thoughts and feelings. It is a type of research in which the researcher prioritizes the participants' views [42]. Meanwhile, the phenomenological approach is a form of qualitative research that highlights the study of an individual's lived experiences within the world [43]. This design is considered to be most applicable for the study since it is an open-structured approach that is useful in investigating the personal experiences of unpromoted seasoned teachers on career stagnation. The study's findings were derived from the perspectives and understanding of the participants.

### **3.2 Research Participants**

The participants of the study were 7 public school teachers of Digos City, Davao del Sur. In selecting the participants of the study, the following inclusion criteria were followed: They must be 40 years old and above and have rendered a minimum of 7 years in the Department of Education. This is anchored on the criteria mentioned by Sivasakthi Rajammal and Muthumanickam [44] that seasoned teachers are those who are above 40 years old, and those who have been in the service for 7 years are already seasoned teachers [45]. Moreover, they must be teaching under the Schools Division of Digos City. Excluded as participants were those public school teachers who were below 40 years old and had not been in the service for a minimum of 5 years. Private school teachers and public school teachers outside the Schools Division of Digos City were excluded as participants of the study. Furthermore, School Heads and Educational Program Supervisors were not chosen as participants since the focus of the study was public school teachers.

### **3.3 Sampling**

The study utilized purposive and convenience sampling in selecting the participants. Oliver [46] defined purposeful sampling as a form of non-probability sampling, in which the decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample will be chosen by the researcher based upon a variety of criteria which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research. Furthermore, the convenience sampling technique entails gathering participants wherever they can be found, usually wherever it is convenient [47]. In this study, seven (7) participants participated in the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) which is what was suggested by Boyd [48] and Creswell, W. and Creswell, D. [49] to reach the saturation level. The participants' availability, willingness, and ability to communicate were considered during the interview and were conducted in a comfortable manner.

### **3.4 Data Sources**

The data gathered from this study were taken from Key Informants Interviews (KIIs) and reading from related literature. Using KII was appropriate because it represented the kind of people directly related to the phenomenon being studied. Furthermore, they are knowledgeable, have experience, and can provide insight and data which cannot be sourced from other methods hence, the use of KII was an appropriate tool [50]. It also adheres to the following criteria: knowledgeability, credibility, impartiality, and willingness to respond [51].

On the other hand, the participants were given time to decide whether to participate in the study or decline. If they agree to participate, they will be interviewed virtually through Google Meet or face-to-face depending on their preference. All interviews were recorded which lasted for 40-50 minutes and were transcribed after. Moreover, related literature was used as additional data sources which give details on prior research studies that were relevant to the topic.

### **3.4 Collection of Data**

To ensure the observance of research protocols the researchers submitted a permission letter to conduct the study to the office of the Schools Division Superintendent, Department of Education. Another letter was to the District Supervisors and School Heads of the participants. Upon the approval and confirmation, the researcher immediately secured the informed consent, containing the rights, conditions, advantages, and ways in which the study was conducted, and was signed by the identified participants of KII. They were given one week to respond to the consent. The researcher conducted the interviews using the KII Protocol and all interviews were recorded with the approval of the participants.

### 3.5 Analysis and Interpretation of Data

In analyzing the data, Colaizzi's 1978 method was used following its seven steps. First, after transcribing the interviews, the researchers read the transcripts several times to fully comprehend and get the general point of the participants' responses. Second, the researchers then selected significant phrases and statements from the transcript that collectively conveyed the experience's overall meaning. Each participant's statement was written separately and placed in a table with columns containing the participants' pseudonyms, corresponding transcript numbers, and line numbers. Then, it was shared for checking to acquire clarity of thoughts. Third, the researchers formulated a meaning for each significant statement. This ensured no biases and what was written was what the participants meant. Fourth, the researchers identified the theme clusters and the emergent themes. Fifth, the results were written based on the identified emergent themes and provided exhaustive descriptions of the participants' lived experiences. Sixth, the fundamental structure of the results was checked for redundant themes. Lastly, verification of the results from the participants was done. A copy of the results was given to the participants to compare and validate if the results were truly what the participants had shared. The participants were given a validation form to sign if they agreed with the descriptive results.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Challenges

While some younger generations were being rapidly promoted, unpromoted teachers, such as those who have been in the service for quite a long year already, have shared their challenges with career stagnation, specifically the *inability to pursue further education, limited training opportunities, and rigid requirements, and emotional impact.*

#### Theme 1: Inability to Pursue Further Education

Pursuing further education is an excellent choice to be quickly promoted in one's position, especially in the teaching profession. This is supported by Zuilieta et al. [52], who asserted that a graduate degree is required for career advancement in many fields, which is also true in the institution. However, the participants have shared that not all teachers can continue schooling or earn a master's degree unit because an individual needs to be financially capable to sustain the tuition fees and other related expenses. Financial limitations present a significant barrier, and a lack of financial resources can lead to career stagnation [9].

*"I haven't obtained my master's degree yet, which is one of the requirements to be promoted right away, because further education is expensive." (K11, p1, L 15-16)*

*"One struggle why I am still a teacher 1 is due to the lack of professional development and also priorities in life. Earning a master's degree is expensive and as for me I have other priorities like my family" (K13, p. 1, L7-9).*

Although many graduate students believe that undertaking graduate studies is a gratifying and enriching endeavor, some contend that it can be complex and even contradictory sometimes [53]. A participant has pointed out that it would be challenging to balance work and studies if ever due to the demands of work and the possible requirements to earn a master's degree, for professionals like teachers, accountants, and engineers, pursuing positions that offer improved pay, benefits, and opportunities for advancement is essential. Achieving these objectives becomes easier when individuals commit to furthering their education in specific disciplines [54].

*"Aside from the cost of going back to school, it's also not easy to study while working." (K12, p. 1, L 12)*

*"One challenge is lack of professional development and my priorities in life because I already have a family so it would be hard for me to accept another commitment if I enroll for MA." (K14, p. 1, L 7-8)*

## Theme 2: Limited Training Opportunities and Rigid Requirements

One edge of being promoted when a teacher cannot pursue a master's degree is the training and workshops they have attended. Although the institution has provided training and seminars, some participants have shared that they only have limited chances to participate in some training. According to Papa [55], limited opportunities for career advancement create obstacles, resulting in insufficient chances for upward mobility and apparent issues with vertical progression in their careers. Furthermore, some have highlighted the rigid requirements of promotion compared to a reclassification, where you must submit different documents and undergo interviews. Several educators retired at the Teacher I level despite having over twenty years of service. This is due to the detailed and time-intensive documentation required to complete the process [56].

*"The challenge was I didn't really have much training or attend seminars. That's why now, I make an effort to participate in any seminars available because training is one of the things that can help with promotion, especially if you haven't had the chance to pursue further studies." (KI2, p 1, L 47-49).*

*"As for me my personal reason is I already have a high step increment in which being promoted shall only be useless. Also, the requirements are not that easy to compile and complete." (KI6, p. 1, L 7-8)*

*"It's not easy to go through the promotion process, especially if you're not applying for a reclassification." (KI7, p. 1, L 9-10)*

This is supported by Yeboah & Kuranchie [4], which revealed that teachers experienced challenges during promotion, such as inconsistent and late dissemination of promotion details, long application process, excessive requirements, and delayed release of promotion results. On the other hand, Cruz [11] revealed that the rigorous standards and requirements for promotion, which they mostly lack, limit the career advancement of teachers.

## Theme 3: Emotional Impact

In a profession like teaching, where you have to be committed to different roles, a lack of career growth can also affect the emotional aspect of teachers. During the interviews, the participants expressed their feelings about being frustrated, demotivated, and discouraged. According to Ebrahimi et al., [25], as employees encounter more career stagnation, they generally report diminished job satisfaction, less commitment to their organization, and a decline in motivation to execute their responsibilities.

*"I frequently experience a mix of frustration and fatigue. Certain elements of the education system occasionally conflict with the motivations that led me to pursue teaching, leaving me feeling somewhat disconnected." (KI6, p. 1, 10-12)*

*"I sometimes feel frustrated and there is some kind of decreased in confidence within me which affects my emotional state." (KI5, p. 1. L 21-22)*

Furthermore, another participant has also shared her dismay about her situation: she has been in the service for 10 years already but has not yet been promoted.

*"Sometimes I feel discouraged about it knowing that I have been in the service for many years now." (KI3, p.1, L 16-17)*

According to Garba and Idris [28], opportunities for promotion should be given at the right time to competent employees, which the participants still need to achieve despite their length of service in the institution. However, despite these emotions, the participants have voiced out that they are still doing their best to teach their students since it is their job, although it has been revealed by Yasmeen et al. [18], that job promotion significantly influences organizational performance

*"Although my salary is much lower compared to the teachers who have been promoted. But I just make do with whatever salary I receive. However, in my duties to my students, I continue to fulfill them." (K11, p. 2, L 39-41)*

*"For me, as an unpromoted teacher, I still do my best to perform my duty as a classroom teacher." (K14, p. 1, L 22)*

According to Expectancy Theory by Victory Vroom asserts that an individual's decision to act in a certain way is influenced by their expectations of the outcome. This theory underscores the role of individual effort in shaping behavior, suggesting that people are more likely to engage in tasks when they believe their efforts will lead to the desired performance and subsequent rewards.

## **Coping Mechanisms**

Despite the challenges that the unpromoted seasoned teachers experienced, they have managed and revealed different strategies to cope with them, specifically *engagement in professional development, constructive perspective, and maintain work-life balance.*

### **Theme 1: Engagement in Professional Development**

Most teachers have shared that one of their coping mechanisms to cope with their career stagnation is engaging in professional development training and seminars. These trainings and seminars allow teachers to not only acquire certificates to be used in their future applications for promotion but also widen their knowledge as teachers. Banik and Saha [57] state that professional development keeps teachers' knowledge current, enhances teaching quality and provides various promotional opportunities.

*"If there are seminars, I strive to participate because opportunities like that can help with promotion, especially if you haven't pursued further studies. Aside from that, it also updates our knowledge in teaching" (K17, p. 2, L 38-40)*

*"Even though my salary is not enough to sustain both my personal and professional endeavors I looked to some ways that get to continuously educate myself through joining some group of teachers online." (K15, p. 2, 38-40)*

Other participants have also stated that pursuing their master's degree is one strategy to cope with the challenges of career stagnation. They have shared that although they regret not pursuing graduate school earlier, they have valid reasons why it happened. Nevertheless, they have expressed that it will never be too late to pursue and seek professional growth.

*"Although I have some regrets about not being able to earn my master's degree right away because I already have a family that needs to be fed, right now I am almost done with my graduate studies." (K12, p. 1 L 15-17)*

According to Valencia [58], seasoned individuals engage in graduate studies to further their personal growth, improve their skill sets, and investigate new career paths. For many, their life and work experiences were seen as strengths rather than hindrances. Hence, age is not a hindrance to pursuing further studies and continuously striving for personal and professional development.

## Theme 2: Constructive Perspective

The participants have found a way to cope with their situation through an optimistic disposition and staying positive about their current circumstances. Moreover, the participants also shared that they remain committed to their work and teach with positivity regardless of being unpromoted. A positive mindset is associated with increased motivation and better performance in both personal and work environments. Individuals who think positively tend to set and accomplish goals more frequently, resulting in tremendous success [59].

*"I stay positive with regards to my position and just enjoy life to the fullest because time will come, I will be promoted with in position" (K13, p. 2, L 33-35)*

*"One thing I do is I always maintain a positive outlook in life and in teaching, and trust that it will come eventually" (K11, p. 2, L 53-54)*

On the other hand, participants have also shared that instead of dwelling on their current professional state, they have redirected themselves to other things that are also worth being proud of. They pointed out that being promoted is not the only thing that can measure success in any career or profession; just being connected to your students and celebrating small wins in life can create a sense of fulfillment.

*"Ultimately, I find fulfillment in small wins with my students and prioritize what keeps me passionate about teaching" (K17, p. 2, L 64-65)*

*"One strategy would be shifting focus to personal growth instead of seeing career stagnation as a purely negative experience." (K14, p. 1, L 25-26)*

While others find ways of coping by pursuing their graduate studies, other participants have been managing their situation through contentment. Shabbir et al., [29] supports this, highlighting that a seasoned teacher's coping method is to feel secure in her current position and not feel the need to grow and reach her full potential. However, through their continued efforts and divine providence, they are not closing the possibility of being lifted from their current position one day.

*"For me, it's contentment. But as a person, sometimes I also dream that someday I will be promoted, if it is allowed by our God." (K11, p. 2, L 30-31)*

*"I remind myself of why I became a teacher and become contented with I have as of this moment." (K16, p. 2, L 56-57)*

According to Cordaro et al. [31], teachers can support their happiness by accepting their current situation by practicing contentment. This means being content can significantly affect how a person accepts and perceives different situations in their personal or professional life. In addition, numerous books and articles have demonstrated how contentment with one's life and job can lead to happiness within oneself [32]. Hence, if an individual is content, he or she will eventually still be happy with his or her life choices.

Moreover, this was also supported by the theory of Lazarus in 1984 which was the Coping Theory. In this approach, coping is defined as using cognitive and behavioral strategies to effectively manage, withstand, or alleviate internal and external stressors and conflicts encountered by an individual. The theory asserts that many action sequences frequently overlap during coping, creating a link between coping experiences.

### **Theme 3: Maintain Work-Life-Balance**

Another central coping strategy the participants mentioned is maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Piryani and Gow [60] posited that educators with an improved work-life balance experienced greater job satisfaction and reduced burnout levels. Despite the demands of a teaching career and the absence of their career advancement, some teachers have shared that it is an essential mechanism for not just those teachers who have the same situation but all teachers who have been dedicating themselves to the service of our education to have an effective management between work and personal life which can be attained through self-reflection and assessment.

*"Balancing personal and professional goals when career advancement feels limited is tough, but I focus on growing within my role. I set personal goals like improving my teaching and learning new skills, while also making time for self-care to avoid burnout." (KI6, p. 2, L 61-63)*

*What I do is assess and reflect on my situations, which is very important for me very helpful (KI4, p. 2, L 32)*

On the other hand, some participants have also expressed that they ensure their well-being is not compromised. Moreover, others have also sought support from their families and other people around them who significantly influence their lives. According to Mo [61], educators who experience high well-being can enhance professional development opportunities, boost students' academic performance and mental health, and foster supportive learning environments within schools.

*"As a married professional teacher. I really need to balance my personal and professional goals through maintaining a healthy well-being." (KI5, p.2, L 37-38)*

*"I just make sure to enjoy my teaching journey because what's really important is being happy so that both your personal and professional life won't be affected." (KI7, p. 1, L 26-27)*

*"Talking with friends, family, or fellow teachers who understand what I'm going through helps me stay grounded." (KI6, p. 2, L 55-56)*

### **SUPPORT NEEDED**

With the various coping mechanisms teachers employ to overcome their career stagnation, they have also shared the support they need, specifically *leadership support, and better opportunities for professional growth.*

### **Theme 1: Leadership Support**

Leaders play a significant role in empowering teachers to improve and seek continuous development. Also, empowering teachers to act [62], encouraging teachers' hearts, and communicating a bigger picture enhances teacher effectiveness [63] [64]. One of the supports mentioned by the participants is the role of leaders as someone who encourages their teachers and influences them in ways that benefit their personal and professional lives. Moreover, they would also appreciate it if their leaders pushed them to grow by providing training opportunities. Principals supporting professional development positively influence teacher job satisfaction [65]. This implies that when principals enhance their efforts to promote professional development, teachers have a corresponding rise in job satisfaction.

*"It would be better for school heads to encourage teachers to pursue further studies while they are still young and motivate them to apply for promotion." (K11, p. 2, L 65-66)*

*"I believe when the leader knows how to influence his/her subordinates to upskill and reskill, they will likely submit themselves to any forms of training and seminar." (K15, p. 2, L 48-50)*

Some participants have also said that leaders should be able to see their teachers' efforts and achievements, which will boost their confidence and make them feel valued despite career stagnation. Fratkin [66] supports this, asserting that school leaders should routinely offer verbal praise or a physical gesture of appreciation whenever they provide teachers with tangible incentives.

*"School leaders should give the seasoned teachers credit for every attainment they had achieved through incentives or recognition." (K15, p. 3, L 58-59)*

## **Theme 2: Better Opportunities for Professional Growth**

Another support the participants have expressed is that they hope the school or the institution can reasonably allow teachers to participate in different training or workshops to serve as an edge for professional development. Moreover, they have also shared that leaders and colleagues can provide technical assistance and feedback regarding their future career development plans. According to Bozkus and Bayrak [67], school leaders should ensure that educators utilize plans for their professional growth.

*"They should provide more opportunities for teachers to participate in professional development activities, like attending seminars because not everyone can afford further studies to qualify for reclassification. Promotion often requires achievements and certificates, so focusing on those areas is essential." (K17, p. 2, L 42-45)*

*"Provide regular training and workshops, along with feedback sessions where teachers can express their thoughts and receive assistance, particularly with meeting promotion requirements." (K11, p3, L 70-72)*

*"Teachers who have been in service for a long time should be included in training sessions to earn certificates to support their promotion applications. Additionally, colleagues can guide unpromoted teachers or provide technical assistance, especially in completing the requirements. (K12, p. 2, L 62-64)*

Gale [68] noted that providing help can lead to fresh insights and various viewpoints. It offers an opportunity to learn from someone with more excellent expertise, broadening our skill set and ultimately enhancing our effectiveness and achievements. Furthermore, an individual could gain insights from others, acquire information from different sources, be introduced to new connections, and receive help addressing challenges [69]. Hence, schools should develop a culture where teachers like the unpromoted seasoned teachers are being helped and assisted. This shall foster collaboration among teachers and develop a harmonious school community. Zamir [41] also posited that the primary factor contributing to career stagnation is the character of teachers' interactions with other members of the teaching staff and with school administrators.

## **CONCLUSION**

Inability to pursue further education, limited professional development, and emotional impact were the primary responses of the participants when asked about the challenges they have experienced on career stagnation. On the other hand, through their challenges, they have developed coping mechanisms such as engagement to professional development, acceptance and contentment, and maintaining a work-life-balance. Meanwhile, the support they need from the school administrators includes leadership support

and opportunities for professional growth. Therefore, school administrators and policymakers should be able to provide sufficient programs that shall address the challenges experienced by the unpromoted seasoned teachers and those who are at risk of career stagnation.

## **CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL**

The research conducted ensured adherence to ethical standards such as voluntary participation, privacy, confidentiality, written consent process, recruitment, risks, benefits, harm, fabrication, falsification, conflict of interest (COI), deception, permission from organization/location, and authorship.

## **DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)**

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of this manuscript.

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## **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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