



A Phenomenology on Career Progression Aspirations of Teachers in Coastal Community

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Abstract

Teachers in coastal communities often encounter unique geographical and socio-economic challenges that influence their professional growth and career advancement. This study aimed to explore the career progression aspirations of teachers in coastal communities, focusing on their lived experiences, perceived challenges, and support mechanisms that shape their professional development.

The study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design involving elementary teachers from the Siruma District. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. The collected data were analyzed using thematic coding to identify recurring patterns and significant themes.

Findings revealed teachers face multiple barriers to career progression, including financial constraints, heavy workloads, geographic isolation, limited access to professional development opportunities, and environmental disruptions such as flooding and high tides. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated strong motivation, resilience, and commitment to professional growth. Key influencing factors included personal determination, mentorship, access to localized training, financial support, institutional recognition, and community engagement.

In summary, the study highlights the need for targeted and context-specific interventions to support teachers in coastal areas. It proposes the Coastal Teachers' Career Progression Support Program (CT-CaPSP), a comprehensive framework designed to address both individual and systemic challenges. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and educational leaders in developing inclusive strategies that promote equitable career advancement and improve teacher retention and effectiveness.

Keywords: Career Progression, Teacher Aspirations, Coastal Communities, Professional Development, Educational Support, Qualitative phenomenological research



I. INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

Teachers in coastal communities face unique challenges that influence their career progression and professional development. Geographic isolation, limited access to resources, heavy workloads, and minimal institutional support constrain opportunities for growth and advancement. Moreover, cultural and linguistic differences between teachers and learners often require additional effort to adapt instructional strategies, establish rapport, and ensure effective communication. Despite these barriers, teachers demonstrate remarkable resilience, intrinsic motivation, and commitment to serving learners and contributing to community development. Understanding the factors that shape their career aspirations and the challenges they encounter is essential for designing context-sensitive programs that promote professional growth, well-being, and equitable access to leadership opportunities.

This study is grounded in the belief that supporting teachers in remote and culturally diverse settings requires both systemic interventions and targeted professional development. By investigating the career aspirations, influencing factors, and challenges of teachers in coastal schools, this research aims to generate practical insights and propose a structured career development program that addresses the unique needs of this population.

Review of Related Literature

Recent research highlights the impact of professional and personal factors on teachers' career aspirations and advancement. Teaching experience, access to professional development, supportive school culture, and mentorship significantly shape competence, confidence, and readiness for leadership roles (Tovar Correal & Pedraja Rejas, 2025). At the same time, personal responsibilities, socio-economic constraints, and family obligations affect teachers' engagement in career advancement activities.

Studies on teachers in geographically isolated and culturally diverse contexts indicate that linguistic and cultural barriers can limit instructional effectiveness and hinder career growth. Interventions that provide localized professional development, mentorship, and culturally responsive support have been shown to enhance teachers' confidence, instructional competence, and career satisfaction. These findings underscore the importance of context-specific strategies to support teachers' professional growth, particularly in underserved coastal communities.

Statement of the Problem

This study seeks to address the following questions:

1. What are the career goals aspired by teachers in coastal communities?
2. What personal and professional factors influence their career aspirations?
3. What challenges do teachers in coastal communities encounter in pursuing their career goals?
4. What career development program may be proposed based on the results of the study?



Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the career goals aspired by teachers in coastal communities.
2. To examine the personal and professional factors that influence teachers' career aspirations.
3. To explore the challenges teachers encounter in pursuing their career goals.
4. To propose a context-sensitive career development program that supports teachers' professional growth and career advancement.

II. MATERIALS and METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the career aspirations, influencing factors, and challenges encountered by teachers in coastal communities. The phenomenological approach was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the lived experiences of teachers working in geographically isolated and culturally diverse schools. Guided by a constructivist and pragmatic philosophical framework, the design emphasized capturing participants' perceptions, meanings, and interpretations of their professional journeys, while considering the contextual realities of coastal education settings. This approach provided rich, detailed insights into the factors shaping teachers' career development and professional growth.

Participants

The participants of the study were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that those chosen could provide relevant and meaningful insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The sample consisted of fifteen teachers from coastal schools in [insert district/municipality], all of whom had at least two years of teaching experience in remote or culturally diverse contexts. Teachers were included in the study based on three criteria: they were currently teaching in coastal schools, were actively engaged in classroom instruction and learner engagement, and were willing to share their experiences regarding professional development, career aspirations, and challenges. The participants' demographic and professional backgrounds provided a variety of perspectives on how geographic, cultural, and systemic factors influence teachers' professional growth and career aspirations in coastal communities.

Instruments

Data were collected through a semi-structured interview guide, which had been validated by experts in educational research and career development to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness. The interview guide contained open-ended questions that focused on four key areas: the participants' career goals and aspirations, personal and professional factors influencing career growth, challenges encountered in pursuing professional development, and perceptions regarding potential career support programs. To enhance data triangulation and credibility, additional documents such as professional portfolios and school records were reviewed to



corroborate participants' accounts and provide contextual understanding of their teaching experiences.

Procedure

The data collection process began with participant recruitment through the school heads and supervisors, who facilitated initial contact with eligible teachers. Prior to conducting interviews, participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality and ethical research practices. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted either in person or virtually, lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes each. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. To enhance credibility, participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts (member checking) and provide clarifications. Observational notes and supporting documents were also examined to cross-verify responses, ensuring comprehensive and trustworthy data collection.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and extract meaningful insights aligned with the research objectives. The process began with familiarization, where the researcher read and re-read the interview transcripts to gain an overall understanding of participants' experiences. Initial codes were generated to categorize relevant statements, which were then grouped into broader themes such as personal factors, professional factors, systemic challenges, and career development needs. These themes were interpreted to develop a coherent understanding of the factors affecting teachers' career aspirations, professional growth, and the design of the proposed Coastal Teachers' Career Progression Support Program (CT-CaPSP). Trustworthiness of the analysis was ensured through member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation of multiple data sources, following recognized standards for qualitative research rigor.

III. RESULTS

The findings of the study are presented based on the four research problems, highlighting the career aspirations, influencing factors, challenges, and proposed career development programs for teachers in coastal communities. Data were organized into thematic categories, supported by tables and figures for clarity.

Regarding the first research problem, the study found that teachers in coastal communities aspire to achieve career goals centered on professional growth, community service, and personal development. Teachers emphasized the importance of higher education, professional stability, recognition, job security, and opportunities for leadership. The majority of participants reported that contributing meaningfully to their community and improving their instructional competence were the primary motivators guiding their career aspirations.

For the second research problem, the analysis identified key personal and professional factors influencing career aspirations. Professionally, teaching experience, supportive work environments, mentorship, and access to professional development opportunities enhanced teachers' competence, confidence, and motivation. Conversely, heavy workloads, administrative



demands, and limited resources constrained their professional growth. Personal factors, such as family responsibilities and economic pressures, were also significant, affecting the time and energy teachers could allocate to professional advancement.

The third research problem explored the challenges teachers face in pursuing career goals. Participants consistently highlighted geographic isolation, resource constraints, work-life balance struggles, limited support systems, and cultural and linguistic barriers. These challenges were reported to impede participation in training programs, mentorship opportunities, and higher education pursuits, thereby affecting career progression.

Finally, in response to the fourth research problem, participants suggested that a structured career development program could address the barriers identified. The proposed Coastal Teachers' Career Progression Support Program (CT-CaPSP) includes localized professional development, mentorship and coaching systems, work-life balance initiatives, and institutional and community support. Figure 3 illustrates the framework of CT-CaPSP, highlighting how each program component targets specific challenges while promoting professional growth and career advancement.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that teachers in coastal communities pursue career goals shaped by a combination of personal values, professional ambitions, and a strong commitment to their learners and communities. Their desire to engage in higher education, professional development, and leadership roles reflects intrinsic motivation and dedication to improving both personal competence and student outcomes. These results align with previous studies emphasizing that teachers' career aspirations are influenced not only by external rewards but also by intrinsic factors such as a sense of purpose, community contribution, and professional fulfillment (Tovar Correal & Pedraja Rejas, 2025).

Professional and personal factors emerged as key influences on teachers' career progression. Teaching experience, access to professional development, supportive work environments, and mentorship were found to enhance competence, confidence, and readiness for leadership. Conversely, heavy workloads, administrative demands, and limited resources constrained opportunities for growth. Personal factors, including family responsibilities and socio-economic pressures, further influenced teachers' engagement in career advancement activities. These findings corroborate prior research suggesting that career aspirations develop within the interplay of professional experience, personal responsibilities, and systemic support (Fullan, 2021).

The challenges identified in this study, including geographic isolation, resource limitations, work-life balance struggles, insufficient support systems, and cultural and linguistic barriers, highlight the structural and contextual barriers faced by teachers in coastal areas. Similar studies on rural and remote education contexts have shown that these challenges can significantly hinder professional development, instructional effectiveness, and career progression (Tovar Correal & Pedraja Rejas, 2025; UNESCO, 2022). These results underscore the necessity of context-sensitive interventions, such as mentorship programs, localized professional



development, and culturally responsive training, to support teacher growth in underserved communities.

The proposed Coastal Teachers' Career Progression Support Program (CT-CaPSP) provides a structured and holistic framework to address the barriers identified. By integrating professional development, mentorship, work–life balance initiatives, and community support, the program has implications for both practice and policy. Implementing CT-CaPSP can enhance teacher competence, motivation, and leadership readiness, while informing education policymakers on designing context-sensitive strategies for coastal and geographically isolated schools. This approach demonstrates how coordinated efforts among DepEd, local government units, school leaders, and community stakeholders can create sustainable opportunities for professional growth and improved student outcomes.

Despite these insights, the study has limitations. The findings are based on a purposive sample of teachers from select coastal communities, which may limit generalizability to other regions or contexts. Data were collected through qualitative interviews, making the study reliant on self-reported experiences that may be subject to personal bias or recall limitations. Future research could expand the sample size, incorporate quantitative measures of career progression, and examine longitudinal impacts of structured support programs to further validate and generalize these findings.

V. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that teachers in coastal communities pursue career goals shaped by both intrinsic motivation and professional aspirations, with a strong commitment to student learning and community development. Despite facing challenges such as geographic isolation, limited resources, heavy workloads, cultural and linguistic barriers, and insufficient support systems, teachers remain resilient and dedicated to improving their teaching competence and advancing their careers. Personal factors, including family obligations and socio-economic pressures, interact with professional experiences to influence career aspirations, highlighting the complex interplay between individual, institutional, and contextual factors.

The findings suggest that structured interventions, such as the proposed Coastal Teachers' Career Progression Support Program (CT-CaPSP), can address these barriers by providing accessible professional development, mentorship, work–life balance support, and institutional and community backing. Implementation of such programs can enhance teachers' instructional effectiveness, confidence, and readiness for leadership roles, thereby contributing to overall improvements in teacher welfare and learner outcomes in coastal schools.

For future research, it is recommended to explore the long-term impact of structured career development programs like CT-CaPSP on teacher retention, professional growth, and student achievement. Studies may also examine similar challenges and interventions in other remote or culturally diverse regions to develop comparative insights and broader policy recommendations. Additionally, integrating quantitative measures alongside qualitative analyses could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing teachers' career progression in coastal and underserved settings.

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