

## **BY THEIR OWN VOLITION: UNDERSTANDING THE PERSONA OF DECENNIUM SEASONED EDUCATORS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the Philippines, promotions for veteran teachers are included in the section 1 of Magna Carta for Public School Teachers or Republic Act 4670. Nonetheless, roadblocks are still present, somehow gluing seasoned educators in the entry-level position for their whole career. This study in the qualitative tradition aimed to describe and understand the lived experiences of public-school teachers in one school division in Laguna, Philippines who have rendered more than twenty years and above in the service, yet remain in a Teacher I entry-level position. Framed with transcendental phenomenology, the study covered 10 purposively sampled educators through field notes and in-depth interviews. After intensive analysis of data, five textural themes surfaced. Specifically, theme 1 encompassed the impediments on seeking work progressions, theme 2 covered passion over promotion while the downfall of stagnation was the emerging idea in theme 3. Meanwhile, theme 4 dwelt on capacitating seasoned educators whereas retirement plans was the focus of theme 5. Digging deeper in the context of the phenomenon, five structural themes transpired. Theme 6 specified how work advancement is viewed as a personal decision. Theme 7 included a student-focused mindset while theme 8 covered hurdling through challenges. Implementing guiding tools cored in theme 9 while theme 10 highlighted move towards actualization. As a whole, the results implicate that the participants cling to their personal compass of choice, still giving their best despite staying in a position which seems to be stagnant from an outsider's perspectives, yet full of meanings and experiences worth treasuring.

**Keywords:** Public School Teachers, Seasoned Educators, Career Development.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the decades, initiatives are launched to alleviate the quality of education worldwide, and undoubtedly, teachers are inarguably the paramount in raising the bar concerning these issues. In the Philippines, being an educator entails a huge responsibility both to the students they oath to educate as well as to the paperwork they are expected to submit in a scheduled time. Faced with difficulties concerning school facilities, students' attitudes, school management, and other unexpected hitches, educators continue to stay true to their profession for years, spending decades of their lives to the teaching profession. Equipped with experience, seasoned educators, or those teachers who spent decades and more in fulfilling their job of teaching students who will soon be the future of the country, can be valued by promoting them into a higher rank, as emphasized in the section 1 of Magna Carta for Public School Teachers or Republic Act 4670. However, not all educators are given the opportunity to have career advancements because of various factors. ACT Teachers Party-list representative, Antonio

Tinio, enumerated few of the said reasons as he mentioned Department of Education's (DepEd) slow process when it comes to matters of promotion and the department's numerous requirements imposed on teachers that result into the retirement of some teachers with only an entry level or Teacher I position (Cruz, 2018). On the other hand, in a recent interview, DepEd Secretary Leonor Briones, acknowledged the problem in education regarding teaching quality in which she proposed a solution in the form of adding ranks for teachers. In that way, teachers who had been in the service for long years will be motivated to stay in the profession because steady promotions are going to be ensured (Cortez, 2019). As of 2017, the Department of Education in the Philippines recorded a number of 687,229 population of teachers in which majority of the said population lies under the entry level position, while only a percentage of 7.3 constitutes those who are in the Master Teacher positions (Cruz, 2018). The given statistics implies that a huge number of educators remain as Teacher I over the course of their careers. Certainly, the provisions and guidelines of DepEd when it comes to the process of promotion among public school teachers is a factor to consider, which, as a result, affects the educators' motivation and satisfaction on their jobs.

Thus, it deserves to accentuate that a promotion in the teaching profession, just like in any field, is associated with salary increase as well as an increase in motivation to continue nurturing the minds of the young people, a turning point in the lives of educators, and if promotion does not happen despite the long years dedicated by teachers in the service, they have to withstand the challenges brought about by the changing policies within the education department. Upon reviewing the existing literature and studies, several gaps were identified. There were few researches focused on the life stories of decennium seasoned educators, therefore, it is for this reason that this study was brought to fore to undertake a deeper understanding in order to provide clearer insights on the turning points or fallbacks they have as educators. The researcher conducted this study to initiate policy dialogue and reforms that support attractive and sustainable career pathways for teachers.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Teachers' Perception on Empowerment and Promotion**

Avidov-Ungar and Arviv-Elyashiv (2018) described the relationship between teachers' professional role, their sense of empowerment, and their attitudes toward managerial promotion or career development following the implementation of educational reforms. The study examined the attitudes of teachers in one of four professional roles toward managerial promotion which include their desire for future promotion and sense of organizational fairness. These were compared with their sense of empowerment including feeling respected, professional growth, influence, autonomy, self-efficacy, and decision making while controlling for their demographic and professional backgrounds.

The findings showed that four-fifths of teachers were interested in pursuing managerial promotion and they perceived the promotion process as moderately fair. The greater teachers' sense of empowerment, the greater their desire for future promotion and their belief in the fairness of the promotional process. Teachers currently holding a leadership position expressed the strongest sense of empowerment. The study presented a multivariate model to predict teachers' attitudes to managerial promotion on the basis of their professional role and sense of empowerment. The findings have implications for educational policymaking, particularly where there is a national focus on increasing school autonomy.

## **Problems Encountered by Teachers Relative to Performance**

Nemenzo (2018) discussed the extent of problems encountered by teachers in relation to their performance in terms of Individual Performance and Review Form (IPCRF). The schools covered by this study were the central schools of the 3rd Congressional District of DepEd Negros Oriental Division. There were 193 elementary school teachers who participated as respondents in the survey. Results revealed that majority of the teachers have been in the teaching profession for more than ten years. Majority of them are bachelor's degree holders only. Teachers experienced a moderate extent of problem in the functional daily lesson plans preparation, very high extent of problem in the unavailability of personal laptops for academic purposes, and high extent of problem in the following areas: insufficient number of computer units in schools for ICT integration; large class size; damaged/obsolete computer units; unsupportive parents; absenteeism; conceptualizing classroom rules written in the English language; observance of classroom rules; bullying; work; uninterested students; lying; littering; students' care giving; and dirty shoe cover contamination. There is a significant, inverse, and weak relationship that existed between the functional daily lesson plan preparation and the performance in IPCRF of the teachers. A significant, inverse and weak relationship existed between the number of teaching years and teachers' problems in classroom management. The performance of teachers is on the satisfactory level.

## **A Viewpoint on Mobility and Stagnation in Teaching**

The definition of "career" has undergone various alterations. In the past, people believed that a career was a sequence of promotions in an organizational ladder, but over time, this definition has changed to "all of one's work-related experiences". With that, Zamir (2019) examined teachers' attitudes towards the term 'career' and the factors influencing their perception of mobility and stagnation in teaching. The study utilized an open-ended questionnaire among eighteen (18) women teachers. Findings showed that most teachers only see teaching as a career in the declarative sense of the word. It also presented a distressing picture of teachers who have determined their position within the school organization and display complacency and over-confidence in their professionalism and are mainly concerned with the fact of belonging and their acceptance by the school administration and staff. This has clear implications for damage to the teaching-learning process and the increasing desire of teachers to take an early retirement.

## **Employees' Level of Moral**

A company's work force is one of its greatest resources. Without employees, companies would not be able to implement strategies or realize growth. This research study determined the employees' level of morale with respect to bank's style of supervision and in terms of other determinants such as nature of work, salaries/wages and benefits/incentives, placement and promotion and communication channels. Results revealed that most of the workforces of the bank are in the early phase of their career and there are only few middle-aged employees because most of the employees in this age category are already promoted. The level of morale is high in terms of bank's style of supervision and in terms of other employee morale determinants (Ilagan and Javier, 2015). In the education field, despite the challenges faced by teachers throughout the years they spend teaching students, the love for the profession they do is what keeps them going. As a matter of fact, in Schonmann's (2009) article about the dimensions of the self-professional identity of veteran theatre teachers, he highlighted how one

of the participants shared in the interview how that participant is willing to spend more years, even forever, in the school, if it is possible.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The researcher structured this paper with transcendental phenomenology expanded by Moustakas (1994) which was carried by Creswell (2016) explaining that it focuses more on a description of the lived experiences of the participants rather than the researcher's interpretations. The researcher employed the procedures, which included the identification of a phenomenon of the study. Then, the bracketing of responses was conducted. Followed by the collection of the data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon. Furthermore, the data were analyzed by reducing the respondents' responses into significant statements and then combining them into cluster themes. Moreover, a textual description of what the participants experienced and a structural description of how they experienced it in terms of the condition, situations, context were also included. Lastly, an analysis of the combination of the textual and structural descriptions was done to convey an overall essence of the experience. The participants of the study composed of one (1) Public High School teacher of Aplaya National High School, one (1) Public Elementary School Teacher of Santa Rosa Elementary School Central 1 and eight (8) from Balibago Integrated High School.

The participants were selected through purposeful criterion sampling. A purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. Although there are several different purposeful sampling strategies, criterion sampling appears to be used most commonly in implementation research and selected based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study. It involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The number of participants is recommended by Polkinghorne (1989) as cited by Creswell (2016) suggesting that researchers need to interview 5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon, which in this study centered on decennium seasoned educators. Specifically, there will be five (5) teachers who rendered 23-28 years in service, two (4) who rendered 32-34 years in service, and one (1) who rendered 41 years in service. Inclusion criteria in choosing the participants included (1) at least twenty (20) years in service or more; (2) in a Teacher 1 entry level position and (3) teacher-participant from the selected public elementary and secondary schools in the Division of Santa Rosa City.

To provide and gather more informative and relative evaluations, descriptive method was used. This method included the observation and interview protocol guide. The interview was done using an interview guide which contained basic information of the participants and the list of questions asked to them. The researcher employed a semi-structured interview guide that followed with Creswell's (2016) procedures for conducting phenomenological research, which was derived from Moustakas' (1994) approach. Also, the researcher used a preliminary interview to know who were suited as the participants of this study. Semi-structured interview was used by the researcher to gather information using the participants' own knowledge and perceptions. The researcher believed that the use of an in-depth semi-structured interview would help in exploring and understanding the lived experiences of a decennium seasoned educator of the Department of Education in relation to the study. Through the use of the interview guide, the researcher, who served as the primary instrument in qualitative study, was able to take note of the responses of the participants and organize thoughts on items such as headings, information about starting the interview, concluding ideas, information on ending

the interview, and thanking the participants. The researcher went through a number of procedures to gather the data for this study by collecting the data and information about the research study. First, the researcher secured a consent from the Dean of the Graduate School of UPHSL to conduct the study in his chosen locale and participants. Second, he coordinated with the City Schools Division Superintendent and school heads of the Department of Education, Schools Division of Santa Rosa City who supervised the participating teacher-participants was also sought. Through proper communication, the researcher established access and rapport with the participants in order to procure rich, extensive, and quality data. The researcher conducted the study through the use of in-depth interview via google meet platform and direct home visitation. Before composing the overall “essence” of the phenomenon under study, the researcher conducted another meeting with the participants to verify the verbatim accounts they shared during the interview and after the research report was written, the essence of the study was shown to the participants. To ensure that the validity of the study’s essence was obtained, the researcher let the participants examined and if needed corrected their responses with freedom. By means of this, it can be noted that the research credibility was established. Creswell (2016) suggested several validation strategies for qualitative study. This includes theme clustering/cluster of meanings, textural and structural descriptions, presentation of overall essence and verification of responses to determine the establishment of its credibility.

For the treatment and analysis of data, the researcher followed the Moustakas’ (1994) approach since it is systematic in terms of the data analysis, procedures, and guidelines for assembling the textural and structural descriptions. Explicitly, the researcher followed the steps of transcendental phenomenology which includes identifying the phenomenon to study, setting aside his experiences, and collecting data from the ten (10) Public School decennium seasoned teachers who experienced the phenomenon. Furthermore, analyzing the data by reducing the information into significant statements or quotes and then combining them into themes was performed. Next, a textural description of the experiences (what the participants experienced) and a structural description of their experiences (how they experienced it in terms of the conditions, situations, or context) were developed. Finally, the textural and structural descriptions were combined which conveyed the overall essence of the participants’ experiences in social media dependency. Providing the essence of the lived experience is the overall aim of transcendental phenomenology (Creswell, 2016). To establish research rigor, verification, validation and validity were applied (Meadows & Morse, 2001). The researcher achieved verification through in-depth literature readings, sticking to the phenomenological method of inquiry, suspending past experiences, keeping research notes and journals, utilizing a sufficient sample of participants (Polkinghorne, 1989 as cited by Creswell, 2016), and conducting multiple interviews, as well as clarifying the responses of the participants, until data were refined. Validation was reached through multiple data collection (observation, casual interview, in-depth interviews), and data analysis utilizing Moustakas’ approach. To attain validity, the researcher presented the study to competent researchers for external review to establish trustworthiness of the research work.

## RESULTS

In this section presented the structured elements of bracketing, horizontalization, textural and structural descriptions and overall essence as well as the verification of the lived experiences of the participants as decennium seasoned educators by their own volition. To follow is the **bracketing** element of this paper where the researcher expressed what impelled her in materializing this study.

**Table 1**  
**The Horizontalization of Data**

<b>Sample Significant statements extracted from the transcriptions</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preference to live as a simple teacher</li> <li>• Chooses family duties over promotion</li> <li>• Happiness in work equals job satisfaction</li> <li>• Teaching patience and good manners to aid in the students' 21st century skills</li> <li>• Family situations impede desired career progression</li> <li>• Imparting knowledge to students empowers them as educators</li> <li>• Lack of post graduate degrees and master units impede promotional opportunities</li> <li>• Becomes demotivated in seeking promotions when faced with self-realizations</li> <li>• Teaching as passion and as a source of income</li> <li>• Need for technical support</li> <li>• The longer the experience, the more knowledge and lessons learnt</li> <li>• Needing technical support in complying with promotional guidelines</li> <li>• They still seek to get promoted to a teacher II or teacher III position before retirement</li> <li>• They see their love for teaching and its accompanying challenges as a motivation to remain in the profession</li> <li>• Promotion plans are put aback when it coincides with family responsibilities and health concerns</li> <li>• Their preferences make their days meaningful that leads to job contentment</li> <li>• Imparting patience and good character to students motivate them to continue working</li> <li>• Motivational factors made them stronger with their profession</li> <li>• Educating students makes them happy and satisfied</li> <li>• They find post-graduate degree requirement for work advancement as a mismatch to their old age</li> <li>• Staying in the entry-level position for many years made them demotivated to continue pursuing their goal</li> <li>• Focusing on their student-development encourages mobility</li> <li>• Teacher's induction program serves as a guiding tool</li> <li>• Staying in a job for many years does not guarantee promotion</li> <li>• Providing technical assistance can aid in desired career progressions</li> <li>• It pushes them to continue applying for promotion</li> </ul>	

**Table 2**  
**10 Clusters Categorized into Textural and Structural Themes**

<b>Textural Themes</b>	
Theme 1: Impediments on seeking work progressions	
Theme 2: Passion over Promotion	
Theme 3: Downfall of stagnation	
Theme 4: Capacitating seasoned educators	
Theme 5: Retirement Plans	
<b>Structural Themes</b>	
Theme 6: Work advancement as a personal volition	
Theme 7: Student-focused mindset	
Theme 8: Hurdling through challenges	
Theme 9: Implementing guiding tools	
Theme 10: Move towards actualization	

**DISCUSSION**

This qualitative-phenomenological study looked into the lived experiences of public-school teachers in the Division of Santa Rosa City who rendered more than twenty years and above in the service yet in a Teacher I entry-level position.

## **1. As to the lived experience of decennium seasoned educators as Teacher 1 by their own volition**

**Theme 1: Impediments on seeking work progressions.** Obstructions on desired career path is inevitable in every job, as it is with the situations faced by these decennium seasoned educators who stayed in entry level position for their entire career. While some of the respondents see their preference to live a life as a simple teacher as the determining factor of their volition to remain as Teacher 1, most of the respondents are glued by their family responsibilities. Likewise, their contentment on their present situation supersedes any desire to seek further career progression, as reflected by their answers with thoughts of contentment and happiness with fellow co-workers and on the presence of their students. Service orientation is also seen to play a role as respondents seek to focus on the act of teaching itself, rather than climbing into a higher hierarchy of work level.

**Theme 2: Passion over promotion.** This theme encompasses queries that answers specific characteristics that decennium-seasoned educators impart to enhance 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, as well as the motivational factors that convinced them to stay in their position, and also to what empowers and encourages their mobility in the profession. Based on their responses, it was revealed that it was due to their dedication in teaching and the recognition they are receiving from their students.

**Theme 3: Downfall of stagnation.** The statements of respondents made it clear that even though they are contented with their job as educators, there are still the perceived implications, advantages and disadvantages of staying in the entry-level position for decades. The most prevailing answers are the negative cognitive implications of such occurrence and the state of impasse regarding the desired career goals of the participants. Most of the respondents reported feeling stress, anxious, and demotivated every time their application gets turned down and every time they receive the same feedback in their every try. Most notably, there is also a feeling of jealousy whenever someone from their rank gets promoted who possess the same experiences and quality as them.

**Theme 4: Capacitating seasoned educators.** Induction programs and technical assistance are ways to capacitate seasoned educators in enhancing their professional development and can aid in their application for promotions. The need for technical support is reiterated by most respondents as most processes, both in promotion application and teaching itself, now require technical skills that are not provided before in trainings. Similarly, the need for proper orientation amongst seasoned educators are eyed by most respondents so that they can gain more awareness on what the changes in the organization are and to the position they are currently in. To add is the statements of the respondents to prioritize them in trainings and webinars that will address appropriate guidelines when seeking promotions. Most notably, one of the participants stated a need to create a special program designed for decennium seasoned educators like them, in order to fully capacitate them with the new demands in the field.

**Theme 5: Retirement plans.** Almost at the ending years of their career, teacher-participants shared their perceived plans for their career, thus the major theme for this cluster. In that sense, the response of the participants revolved around two possibilities – to continue teaching while waiting for retirement or to continue seeking for promotion to achieve a Teacher II or Teacher III promotion before retirement.

## **2. As to how teacher-participants face challenges of being decennium seasoned educator as Teacher 1 by their own volition.**

**Theme 6: Work advancement as a personal volition.** It is by these decennium seasoned educators' personal preference that they chose to remain in their Teacher 1 position for many years. This is evident on how they stated various life commitments they view as priority over seeking promotion, most recurring answers are motherhood responsibilities. Likewise, the occurrence of unanticipated events pushed the participants to make adjustments in their professional lives, with which their career progressions became the primary casualty. Therefore, under this specific theme are the justifications provided by the participants on how specific determining factors helped them in staying in their current position, how the underlying causes affected their priorities concerning personal reasons over promotions, and on how did their preferences help them overcome factors that affected their decision on staying on entry-level position. In that sense, priorities in life and adjusting to unanticipated circumstance were identified as the prevailing reasons for the participants' volition on the matter.

**Theme 7: Student-focused mindset.** Having a student-focused mindset means prioritizing the welfare of the students under the guidance of the participants, with which these decennium seasoned educators view as a major motivator in their profession, particularly as a major mobilizing factor that empowers them to remain in their position in the field as Teacher 1. As such, most of the answers made by the participants lead to two ends – the goals to be seen as a role model by their students and imparting knowledge on the learners.

**Theme 8: Hurdling through challenges.** Facing challenges is inevitable, yet, coming from the responses of the participants, staying in the entry-level position for many years is a humbling experience that enable them to hurdle through challenges concerning their career, especially those that focus on progressions. Specifically, since advancement to Teacher II position requires master units, some participants did their best to achieve post-graduate degree despite their age and other life responsibilities, which even though sometimes leads to disappointments, the participants specified that a positive mindset helped them get through the disadvantages and blockages they faced. In a sense, the participants were able to hurdle through challenges by pursuing advanced degrees and keeping a positive mindset.

**Theme 9: Implementing guiding tools.** Guiding tools, particularly induction programs and technical assistance, will be of big help to decennium seasoned educator participants as they face the demands of lengthy requirements for promotion, as well as the demands for the current teaching system. As such, these induction programs and technical assistance are seen by the participants as an aid in their personal and professional growth, and as an assistance in properly dealing with promotional requirements.

**Theme 10: Move towards actualization.** As decennium seasoned educators who are in the entry level position for most years of their career, the participants are still expressing their persistence in trying to apply for a promotion, and are still taking steps towards their career actualization. Most notably, participants are aiming for a teacher II or teacher III promotion before retirement, if not, they reiterated their desire for continuous excellence in teaching.



## CONCLUSIONS

The lived experience of decennium seasoned educators as Teacher 1 by their own volition cover impediments seeking work progressions, passion over promotion, downfall of stagnation, capacitating seasoned educators, and retirement plans. The participants coping mechanisms include work advancement as a personal volition, student-focused mindset, hurdling through challenges, implementing guiding tools, and move towards self-actualization.

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