

Coping Strategies of Public School Teachers in Addressing Professional Development Demands

Russel Rodel E. Emborgo and Jenyliza T. Uchang

College of Education, Central Mindanao University, Maramag, Bukidnon, Philippines

ABSTRACT

Background and Objective: Teachers play a crucial role in shaping curriculum and instruction, yet they often face challenges during their professional development. Addressing these challenges is vital for fostering their growth and enhancing their teaching effectiveness. This study explored the coping mechanisms of public school teachers in overcoming challenges during professional development. **Materials and Methods:** This study followed a qualitative case study research design and utilized six public school teachers from Malaybalay City, Bukidnon chosen through purposive sampling. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview and analyzed and interpreted using thematic analysis. **Results:** The findings of this study revealed key coping mechanisms, categorized into the following themes: (a) Time management and prioritization, (b) Resourcefulness, (c) Self-care and personal reflection, (d) Perseverance, (e) Seeking support and Collaboration, and (f) Faith in God. These strategies enabled teachers to navigate and endure the demands of professional growth. **Conclusion:** The study highlights the role of these coping strategies in enhancing teacher resilience and guiding supportive professional development programs. Further research is suggested to validate and expand the findings of this research study.

KEYWORDS

Coping mechanisms, professional development, public school teachers, thematic analysis

Copyright © 2025 Emborgo and Uchang. This is an open-access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

INTRODUCTION

The teacher is one of the most significant components in the teaching-learning process. Due to the changing nature and demands of the teaching profession, changes in this field are never-ending. The current state of teacher education emphasizes the importance of professional development initiatives in implementing efficient teaching and learning. Professional development is pivotal to enhancing teaching efficacy, fostering academic growth, and enriching professional practice. Activities such as pursuing advanced degrees, engaging in collaborative lesson planning, refining subject-matter expertise, and mastering classroom management serve as essential avenues for continuous professional growth. These efforts empower educators to adapt to evolving educational demands and contribute meaningfully to improved learner outcomes. Adapting changes in combating challenges for professional development and seeking coping mechanisms.



Continuous learning opportunities help teachers to address educational needs in the evolving educational landscape¹. The competence of teachers is a fundamental factor in ensuring the delivery of quality education. The study by Uchang² highlighted the instructional practices, challenges, and issues faced by 21st-century educators, ultimately emphasizing the necessity of sustained professional development support for teachers. As the teaching profession evolves to meet ever-changing demands, public school teachers frequently confront obstacles that impede their professional growth. These include overlapping responsibilities, limited time, financial difficulties, misalignment of attended professional development programs with their needs, and health-related concerns³. There are subthemes of overlapping responsibilities; Personal and professional responsibilities and physical and mental health problems for the health problems. Recognizing that teaching is a lifelong learning process⁴, emphasized the value of professional development programs, such as the teacher development program (TDP), in enhancing educators' knowledge, skills, and overall growth.

Professional development initiatives are recognized for their role in enhancing teaching practices, improving learner outcomes, and fostering lifelong learning among educators. Teachers in the Philippines follow a structured pattern in attaining professional growth through a ranking faculty position and incentives. In the study of van der Klink *et al.*⁵ providers and teachers, both benefitted from joining professional growth seminars. Workshop training should enhance and strengthening work performance, training sessions, and leadership mentoring⁶.

Moreover, teachers' commitment to professional development is linked to their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, including personal achievement, professional identity, work promotion, salary increase, and cultivating relationships with stakeholders⁷. It also includes important factors that motivate teachers to participate in professional development like self-interest and practical enhancement high salary, and years of teaching experience. Furthermore, in the Philippines, intrinsic motivation plays a crucial role in effective involvement and beneficial results in professional development initiatives. Teachers who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to utilize further knowledge and skills that positively influence their teaching practices and learner performance⁸. This shows that intrinsic motivation plays an important role in the life of teacher's professional development and its implications for classroom practices.

Despite their commitment and motivation, teachers in the Philippines continue to face significant challenges in their professional development. Hence, this study aimed to identify the coping mechanisms employed by secondary public school teachers as they navigate their professional development journeys. Understanding these strategies is essential to providing targeted support and creating more effective systems for teacher growth. By addressing this gap, the researcher recognizes the significance of conducting this study to contribute to promoting sustainable professional development practices that empower educators to overcome barriers and thrive in their roles.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area: This study was conducted in selected secondary schools within the Division of Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, in April, 2024. These schools were chosen based on the following criteria: (a) The overall percentage of secondary teachers who had completed their master's or doctoral degrees, (b) School performance on the Division Achievement Test (DAT), Regional Achievement Test (RAT), and National Achievement Test (NAT), and (c) The overall School-Based Management (SBM) rank.

Semi-structured method: This study used a qualitative case study research design to explore the coping mechanisms of public school teachers in their pursuit of professional development. It followed a semi-structured interview using the interview guide questions, which was content validated by the experts and utilized to gather data from the six public secondary school teachers in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon who were selected as research participants through purposive sampling.

Selection of participants: Participants were chosen for having common qualities which were the following: (a) A licensed professional teacher, (b) At least five years of teaching experience in the public school and completed a master's or doctoral degree in his/her field, (c) A distinguished in their career path as proficient, highly proficient or distinguished teachers, and (d) A rating of satisfactory, very satisfactory or outstanding on their previous Result-Based Performance Management System (RPMS) evaluation, and (e) Willing to participate and provide honest responses.

Data gathering procedure: This study follows a data-gathering procedure securing requirements first. It contains a letter of permission from the Schools Division Superintendent and School Principals allowing the researcher to conduct the study. Also, a provisional notice to proceed was obtained from the Institutional Ethics and Review Committee (IERC) ensuring that this study adhered to the ethical standards.

Data analysis: Data were then analyzed using thematic analysis. It has undergone (6) phases: familiarization of data, generation of initial codes, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and reporting findings⁹. The researcher ensured that prior notions on personal understanding of the cases were set aside to avoid biases and get a clear picture of the findings. The consistency of the themes was checked through the researchers' intercoder agreements. The final results were also verified and validated by the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed six major themes that encapsulate the coping mechanisms teachers employ in navigating professional development challenges. Time management and prioritization emerged as a key strategy, with teachers proactively organizing their schedules and tasks to accommodate professional growth activities. Resourcefulness was also evident, as participants demonstrated creativity in finding alternative professional development opportunities and managing financial constraints through budgeting and seeking assistance. Self-care and personal reflection were highlighted as essential practices for maintaining emotional and mental well-being, enabling teachers to sustain their efforts amidst demanding circumstances.

Perseverance played a significant role, with participants demonstrating determination and resilience in pursuing their professional goals despite various obstacles. Collaboration and colleague support further strengthened their ability to address challenges, as teachers relied on shared knowledge, guidance, and emotional encouragement within their professional networks. Lastly, faith in God provided emotional and spiritual strength, helping participants stay motivated and optimistic in their pursuit of personal and professional growth. These themes collectively underscore the resilience and adaptability of teachers in overcoming barriers to professional development.

The participants' insights and perspectives narrated by the participants highly demand the need to pursue professional development within the curriculum, themes are shown in Fig. 1.

The study revealed that public school teachers employ a diverse range of coping mechanisms with the narratives of public school teachers on their experiences in pursuit of professional development gathered from the semi-structured interviews, including time management and prioritization, resourcefulness, self-care and personal reflection, perseverance, seeking support and collaboration, and faith in God, to navigate the challenges they face in pursuing professional development.

Time management and prioritization are both personal and professional domain skills that contribute to productivity and success. The participants also highlighted the importance of knowing and adhering to priorities, both in personal and professional contexts. Mastering time management and prioritization is essential also for ensuring both personal well-being and professional success for teachers. Thus, the

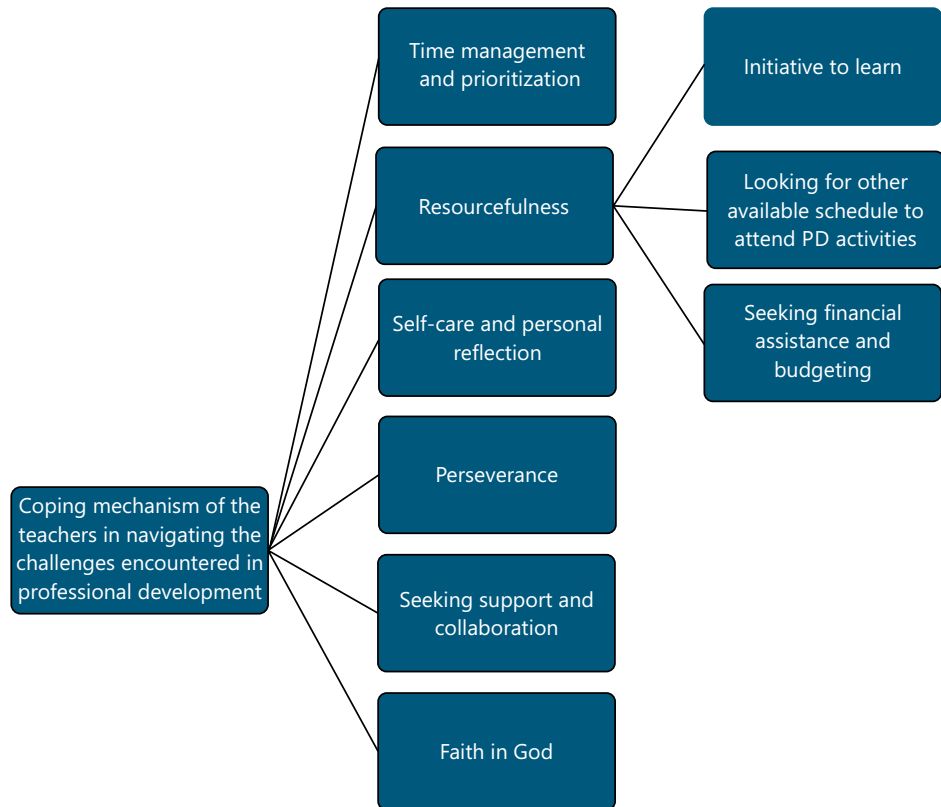


Fig. 1: Coping mechanisms of the teachers in navigating the challenges encountered in professional development

cultivation of time management and prioritization skills makes learners take control of their lives, maximize their productivity, and contribute positively to their communities. A participant who has been managing his time between work and family stated that;

“When it comes to work, I would make sure that I don’t bring work home. I learned my lesson after working in a private school, so, when I was in a public school, I decided not to bring work home because it was unfair to my family. So, what I do is whatever work I have, I do it here. So, when I go home, that’s for my family and also for other things. And then, on weekends, that’s when I focus on professional development... It’s just about time management... You don’t have a choice because you have to do it.” Participant 1 (P1).

Moreover, mastering time management skills allows every individual to accomplish tasks and activities promptly and efficiently¹⁰.

Resourcefulness helps individuals streamline their efforts by identifying the most effective and efficient ways to accomplish tasks. Teachers have to think and utilize inconvenient and uncommon means to extend their knowledge in skills. This is the response of Participant 2 (P2) who looked for avenues to attend seminars from private seminar providers:

“The nicest seminars that I have joined are organized by private institutions wherein they hire speakers that practitioners exposed to the field. They’re very hands-on on how they train us commonly about pedagogy and lesson delivery.”

One of the very scarce resources teachers have to always consider is their time and availability. The act of doing so does not only require good time management skills but also efficiency in literally finding schedules and avenues that will give them more options and chances. Participant 3 shared that professional development through online platforms can increase time resources because it can always be considered as an alternative. She says:

"There are a lot of schedules and avenues for professional development aside from face-to-face training. Taking these makes us productive."

In addition, due to many constraints teachers always face, especially time and money, they had to learn to make themselves learn how to be resourceful. They had to make the most out of the resources at hand, whether they were financial, human, or material. Not having much, let alone not having enough, makes them leverage existing resources efficiently and effectively to do what needs to be done and produce what needs to be submitted. Teachers would even apply for loans and tightly budget their salaries which might seem like a last resort for them just to keep going in their studies. Some participants unhesitatingly shared that:

"We can still go with it because we have an option to apply for loans." Participant 5 (P5).

"Just save little by little...you need to be thrifty." Participant 6 (P6).

The initiative to learn reflects a teacher's proactive approach to professional development by actively seeking knowledge and honing their skills, even without direct prompts or institutional support. This involves leveraging self-directed learning strategies, such as exploring online resources, reading educational literature, or experimenting with new teaching methods. Such initiative demonstrates resilience and a commitment to continuous improvement, enabling teachers to overcome barriers and adapt to evolving educational demands. This is what Participant 5 meant when she said:

"I always set aside time to watch educational webinars and read articles about new teaching strategies, even if it means doing it after school hours."

Teachers exhibit resourcefulness by identifying and participating in alternative professional development activities outside traditional avenues. This includes attending private seminars, enrolling in online workshops, or joining informal learning communities. These options often provide greater flexibility, allowing teachers to navigate constraints such as time and geographic limitations. By seeking diverse opportunities, educators broaden their perspectives and access relevant training that aligns with their specific needs. One of the participants expressed this sentiment, stating:

"When I couldn't attend the school-provided training, I found an online course that fit my schedule and addressed the skills I wanted to improve." (P2).

Financial constraints often challenge teachers in pursuing professional development, but resourceful educators address these barriers through strategic financial planning. This includes applying for loans, allocating a portion of their salaries for training, or finding cost-effective programs. By tight budgeting and prioritizing expenses, teachers ensure they can invest in growth opportunities. These efforts highlight their resilience and determination to overcome economic challenges in the pursuit of professional advancement. Participant 1 emphasized that:

"I applied for a small loan and carefully planned my expenses so I could afford to join this seminar. It's a worthwhile investment in my teaching."

The trait exhibited by the participants aligns with the Compensatory Model of Resilience¹¹ indicating their proactive problem-solving approach through resourcefulness remains steadfast.

The essential components of maintaining overall well-being and fostering personal growth are self-care and personal reflection. Participants recognized that there is a need to have personal time to reflect and heal themselves. Self-care is demonstrated by the participants through acknowledging the importance of taking time to relax, prioritize personal well-being, and avoid burnout. While personal reflection is evident with their understanding that they need to pause, reflect, and assess their mental and emotional states, especially in the middle of busy schedules and demanding environments. Thus, by finding balance and prioritizing self-care, individuals can ensure their overall well-being and foster personal and professional growth as stated by the participants:

"With all the hassle and bustle of this institution, I also need to find time for myself, for me to grow. Because, if you stay too long in that field, you will find it boring, unproductive, and what else... You have to find a way so that the work won't be boring, you need to pause for a moment, reflect for a moment." Participant (P3).

"I really stopped, that was also the time when I had my healing period. I really took care of my mental health during those seven years." (P2).

Furthermore, it aligns with the Reflective Practice Theory that posits engaging in reflective practices enables teachers to take a momentary pause amidst the chaotic nature of their responsibilities, allowing them to attain clarity regarding their thoughts, actions, and motivations¹². Thus, it helps them to effectively navigate through intricate and demanding situations both personally and professionally.

Perseverance motivates teachers to engage in lifelong learning, whether through attending workshops, pursuing advanced degrees, or collaborating with colleagues. Given the professional and personal challenges teachers encounter through their journey; determination, resilience, and the willingness to continue to strive are the traits that keep teachers pushing forward. Much more perseverance is essential for achieving professional development toward post-graduate studies. It is a long-term goal that requires sustained effort and dedication over time. Perseverance helps teachers to stay committed to their goals even when feel exhausted, unsubstantial, demotivated, and stressed. Perseverance provides the determination and persistence needed to overcome obstacles. This is what Participant 2 meant when she said:

"You've already managed to put yourself in that pursuit, just finish it because you have to do it anyway. It's not a contest of who finishes first, what is important is just for you to finish it. Just don't stop."

It truly is a variable trait to cope with such a demanding and challenging task in teachers' pursuit of professional development. Participants will even go to extreme measures to persevere for their goal. Participant 5 accentuated that:

"Just keep going. Pacing is not a hindrance. No sleeping... we should do that. We should have a strong determination to finish it because you already spent a lot for it"

Moreover, it paralleled the compensatory model of resilience¹¹ which suggests that one of the characteristics of resilience is having an active approach toward problem-solving.

Seeking support and collaboration provides teachers the avenue to tap into a wealth of shared knowledge and expertise. They can learn from the experiences and insights of their colleagues, gaining valuable perspectives that can help them overcome challenges and enhance their professional growth. Participant 3 and Participant 6 had benefited from this as they said:

“We can also ask for ideas from our colleagues, like when we have a cooperative observation... always talk to someone who’s capable of helping you. You can consider talking to someone who you know knows better than you. Someone who has more knowledge, more experience, and is productive. Someone who can be a role model for you, always talk to someone.” (P3).

“You’re going to listen up [to] those mentors who really pay attention to you, they can help you see what they see. They will guide you in doing such things.” (P6).

Apart from that, it also creates a network of emotional support. Teachers can share their concerns, frustrations, and successes with others who understand their unique professional journey. One of the participants testified it saying:

“I can cope with it in terms of, you know, sharing my problems with my colleagues, especially with my trusted friends. Colleagues are a very safe place because I can share my experiences with them.”(P3).

These experiences from the participants adhere to the Communities of Practice Theory which emphasizes collaborative engagement within the teaching-learning environment¹³. Accordingly, this practice provides a safe environment in which teachers can work together to overcome obstacles, share knowledge, and develop a dedication to lifelong learning.

During challenging times as such balancing work and professional development demands, belief in God can provide teachers with emotional and spiritual strength to keep going. This inner strength can help them persevere through obstacles and setbacks as they work towards their goals while fulfilling their obligations in school and at home. Faith in God provides guidance and direction in life. Praying is a way to seek spiritual guidance for help to make decisions and take steps towards achieving their goals. Even if things do not go according to plans, there is a greater purpose at work, there is strength in surrendering to divine will. Participant 5 reinforces her faith in God through prayers. She said:

“Let’s just not lose our connection with God because we cannot do anything if He will not give us good health. We just have to pray for Him to bless us in our way.”

This coping mechanism conforms to the Compensatory Model of Resilience that one of the characteristics of young adults is having a strong trust in faith towards a consistent optimistic view of life in facing challenges¹¹. The findings of the current study were also consistent with previous research, which revealed that praying, meditating, and self-diverting acts were more effective active coping techniques than maladaptive and avoidance tactics¹⁴. This section may be divided by subheadings. It should provide a concise and precise description of the experimental results, their interpretation as well as the experimental conclusions that can be drawn.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the coping mechanisms of public school teachers in pursuit of professional development. Public school teachers yearn to grow both personally and professionally. Their engagement in various professional development activities formed several practices such as involvement in continuous learning and professional engagement, consistency of application and integration of knowledge, and developing reflective practices. However, secondary public school teachers encounter various challenges in their pursuit of higher learning.

To navigate these challenges, teachers have adopted several coping mechanisms: time management and prioritization, resourcefulness, self-care and personal reflection, perseverance, seeking support and collaboration, and faith in God. These strategies enable teachers to balance their professional obligations, overcome personal difficulties, and persist in their lifelong learning journeys. These coping mechanisms are vital in helping teachers face challenges and achieve both professional growth and personal resilience.

SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

This study discovered the specific coping mechanisms that teachers employ to navigate the challenges in their professional development journey. These findings can be beneficial for teachers, administrators, and policymakers in creating supportive structures and practices that enhance professional growth. Additionally, this study will help researchers uncover critical areas linked to coping mechanisms faced by teachers that many have not explored, providing valuable insights into addressing professional development challenges.

REFERENCES

1. Osiesi, M.P., M.A. Ayanwale, O.D. Akomolafe, T.O. Olayiwola-Adedoja, S.O. Olatunbosun and S.O. Ariyo, 2024. Transforming classrooms: How professional development and teacher attitudes drive primary school teaching effectiveness. *Social Sci. Humanit. Open*, Vol. 10. 10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101099.
2. Uchang, J.T., 2022. Practices, issues and concerns on the delivery of instruction of 21st century mathematics teachers in rural areas. *Sci. Int.*, 34: 183-190.
3. Rama, M.P. and J.T. Uchang, 2024. Hurdles faced by secondary public school teachers in their professional development journey. *Int. J. Appl. Sci. Res.*, 7: 48-55.
4. Ancho, I.V. and G.S. Arrieta, 2021. Filipino teacher professional development in the new normal. *Educ. Self Dev.*, 16: 25-43.
5. van der Klink, M., Q. Kools, G. Avissar, S. White and T. Sakata, 2017. Professional development of teacher educators: What do they do? Findings from an explorative international study. *Prof. Dev. Educ.*, 43: 163-178.
6. Rodriguez, J. and K. Walters, 2017. The importance of training and development in employee performance and evaluation. *World Wide J. Multidiscip. Res. Dev.*, 3: 206-212.
7. Aquino, J.M.D., I.P. Palad and A.P. Simbre, 2022. Filipino teachers' aspiration on their personal and professional development. *Asia-Pac. J. Hum. Dev. Fam. Stud.*, 1: 101-114.
8. Khan, S. and A. Younas, 2021. Impact of intrinsic motivation on student's learning at elementary level. *Global Educ. Stud. Rev.*, 6: 174-187.
9. Braun, V. and V. Clarke, 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual. Res. Psychol.*, 3: 77-101.
10. Jackson, V.P., 2009. Time management: A realistic approach. *J. Am. Coll. Radiol.*, 6: 434-436.
11. Ledesma, J., 2014. Conceptual frameworks and research models on resilience in leadership. *Sage Open*, Vol. 4. 10.1177/2158244014545464.
12. Schön, D.A., 1983. *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. 11th Edn., Ashgate, Farnham, United Kingdom, ISBN: 9781857423198, Pages: 374.
13. Wenger, E., 1998. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, ISBN: 9780521430173, Pages: 318.
14. Rajesh, C., L. Ashok, C.R. Rao, V.G. Kamath and A. Kamath *et al.*, 2022. Psychological well-being and coping strategies among secondary school teachers: A cross-sectional study. *J. Educ. Health Promot.*, Vol. 11. 10.4103/jehp.jehp_1248_21.