



## UNVEILING THE HIDDEN CHALLENGES: NURTURING TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL GROWTH IN THE CURRENT EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE

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### Abstract:

This phenomenological study examined teachers' experiences during their professional development journey at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School. Data were gathered from ten (10) participants through in-depth interviews and ten (10) informants through focused group discussions. Analysis revealed nine key challenges: lack of time, learner behavior, limited resources, outdated materials, inadequate training, heavy workloads, rigid curriculum, technology use, and teacher resistance. Participants developed coping mechanisms, including enhancing digital literacy, setting goals, adapting to change, collaborating, managing time effectively, prioritizing urgency, and demonstrating a strong commitment to learning. Their insights emphasized that teaching is an evolving profession that requires continuous growth, a supportive environment, relevant training, adaptability, lifelong learning, and effective use of technology. Findings suggest that addressing teachers' professional development needs requires responsive and sustainable support systems. Educational leaders and policymakers must prioritize flexible, needs-based training programs, provide access to updated resources, and promote a culture of collaboration and innovation. Future research may consider conducting longitudinal studies to examine how teachers' development and coping strategies evolve.

**Keywords:** educational management, professional development, teachers, phenomenology, Philippines

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## 1. Introduction

*"You cannot give what you do not have."* (Greg Hiebert )

The statement above is more than what meets the eye as you read it. People who struggle to give love away often cannot do so because they lack it. You cannot give love to others if you do not have love within yourself. It is like teaching; you cannot share if you do not have something to share. You cannot give knowledge, wisdom, skills, and understanding when you do not possess them. This is where teachers' professional development comes into play.

Moreover, advancing professional learning is essential for effective teaching and learning, aligning with SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong opportunities for all. Continuous professional development for educators is essential in enhancing the quality of instruction, which in turn directly impacts students' learning outcomes. By shedding light on educators' systemic, institutional, and contextual challenges, this research highlights the need for policies and programs that genuinely support teacher capacity-building. In the Philippines, laws such as Republic Act No. 10533 and Republic Act No. 10912 and DepEd orders like DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017 supports teachers' ongoing professional growth, emphasizing the importance of high-quality education through well-prepared educators. DepEd's commitment to teacher development, as outlined in DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016 contributes to achieving SDG 4 by fostering a skilled teaching workforce that can meet the evolving needs of students and improve educational outcomes (Aldahdough *et al.*, 2023; Gordon, 2020).

Additionally, professional development for teachers yields improved and refined methods for effective practice. It highlights teachers' significant difficulties during the COVID-19 outbreak, particularly due to the health crisis affecting technology and access. There is a belief that emergency remote shifts in the context of education are quick. Plans and initiatives are developed as the epidemic continues to impact the teaching and learning process. Given the current social situation, there is an increased need for competent teachers. According to DepEd Order No. 12 s. 2020, to provide high-quality instruction, teachers must complete several training programs by 2020 or during the BE adoption (Adams, 2023; Candrasari *et al.*, 2023; Guenther, 2020).

Furthermore, it is observed that despite lockdowns and community quarantines, quality education must be maintained and provided, and the new normal should be considered in the development and implementation of new educational policies. Proposals for reconsidering education in the post-COVID-19 era's new normal are highly recommended. Additionally, the urgency of the concerns surrounding the impact and applicability of their CPD methods to teachers' standing makes the study necessary. The readings mentioned above are also incorporated into the Basic Education-Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) as part of the DepEd Professional Development Priorities for Teachers and School Leaders for School Year 2020-2023, as well as the Teacher Upskilling

and Reskilling (DepEd Order 12, s. 2020) and DepEd Memorandum No. 50, s. 2020, respectively (Alam & Asmawi, 2024; Carpenter *et al.*, 2022; Gupta, 2021).

Not only that, following the COVID-19 pandemic, all schools reopened, and everything appeared normal. However, as a public-school teacher, I cannot deny that there are evident learner changes and a higher demand for effective and efficient quality education. Today is the perfect time for us to recalibrate! Today marks a new normal we must face, carrying the diverse experiences, struggles, challenges, and lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly our teachers' professional growth. We use these experiences to make valuable adjustments and improvements, ultimately reaching our shared goal of providing quality education. Moreover, despite the significance of teachers' professional development needs in shaping the quality of education, there is a paucity of research on how these needs evolve in the future. While studies investigate the present and past professional development requirements of teachers, there is a need for research that looks ahead and anticipates how the educational landscape will change and impact these needs. As such, this study aims to bridge the research gap by examining teachers' future professional development needs.

Another point to consider is the continuous evolution of the educational landscape with ongoing technological advancements and shifts in the global economy. It is, therefore, crucial to anticipate how these changes affect the professional development needs of the 21st century. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies in education, and teachers must be adequately equipped with the knowledge, skills, and competencies to utilize these tools effectively. Additionally, teachers must be prepared to meet the diverse learning needs of students in a rapidly changing world where new and emerging technologies and societal challenges are reshaping education. Therefore, this study can inform policies and practices that enhance the quality of education globally by supporting teachers' professional development needs in the new normal.

## 2. Material and Methods

This study employed a qualitative-phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of teachers who continuously strive for professional growth amidst ongoing educational reforms, policy shifts, and institutional limitations. A qualitative approach was chosen to capture the complexity, depth, and context of these experiences, which are often not adequately conveyed through quantitative methods. By adopting phenomenology, the study sought to understand how teachers interpret their professional development journeys within a dynamic educational landscape (Cardano, 2020; Muzari *et al.*, 2022; Neubauer *et al.*, 2019; Van Manen, 2023).

The study involved 20 teachers from Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School. Ten participants underwent in-depth interviews (IDI) while the other ten took part in a focus group discussion (FGD). All participants responded to the same validated interview questions. Participants were selected based on specific inclusion criteria: current

employment at the school, experience teaching in K–12 settings, and involvement in remote or hybrid learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers with less than two years of experience or those unwilling to provide informed consent were excluded, ensuring the relevance and richness of insights gathered (Evans *et al.*, 2020; Umanailo, 2019).

Prior to data collection, ethical protocols were observed. A letter of permission was submitted to the school principal, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Rapport-building meetings were held to explain the study and assure confidentiality, including the use of pseudonyms and private interview settings. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw without penalty, and measures were in place to ensure voluntary participation and psychological safety throughout the study (Bowles, 2023; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2023; Gallagher, 2022; Kim *et al.*, 2022).

Data were collected using open-ended interview questions, validated by three experts in the field. The questions aimed to elicit reflective responses on participants' professional development experiences. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and returned to the participants for member checking to confirm accuracy. Participants could review, correct, or withdraw any part of their responses, enhancing the credibility of the data (Brown & Harris, 2021; Geverola *et al.*, 2022).

### 3. Design and Procedure

This study adopted a qualitative-phenomenological research design, specifically chosen to explore and articulate the intricate and subjective realities of teachers' lived experiences. Through this lens, the study sought to delve deeply into how educators perceive, interpret, and respond to their professional growth amidst a rapidly evolving educational environment. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, allowing for rich narrative accounts that reveal personal insights, emotions, values, and meanings constructed by participants in response to their professional challenges and developmental efforts (Evans *et al.*, 2020).

Before commencing data collection, the researcher obtained formal approval from the school principal to ensure proper coordination and adherence to institutional protocols. A semi-structured interview guide was meticulously designed and subjected to a validation process by three domain experts. Their suggestions were incorporated to enhance the clarity, cultural relevance, and appropriateness of the interview items. In-depth interviews were deemed the most suitable method as they provide a comprehensive avenue for participants to articulate their experiences in a safe and private space, while also encouraging openness in sharing complex emotions and insights that may otherwise remain unspoken (Bowles, 2023; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2023; Killion & Roy, 2020).

To promote ethical conduct and foster trust, the researcher held pre-interview orientation meetings with the participants. During these sessions, the purpose, procedures, and scope of the research were explained thoroughly. Informed consent was

obtained in writing, and participants were reassured of their autonomy, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Interviews were conducted in quiet and distraction-free settings, usually the participants' own classrooms. All sessions were audio-recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim, and returned to the participants for verification. Pseudonyms were employed throughout the data management process to preserve anonymity. Open-ended and flexible questioning techniques were used to maintain a natural flow of dialogue while allowing the researcher to probe deeply into emergent themes and personal reflections (Brown *et al.*, 2023; Gallagher, 2022; Kim *et al.*, 2022).

Empathy and active listening were central to the interview process. The researcher created a supportive environment where participants could express themselves without judgment. During and after each interview, the participants were invited to review their transcripts, remove or revise any statements, and verify the accuracy of field notes. These member-checking procedures were vital in ensuring the authenticity of the data while strengthening the transparency and ethical robustness of the process. These steps also facilitated participant empowerment and affirmed their agency in the research process (Brown & Harris, 2021; Geverola *et al.*, 2022; Koh & Sin, 2020).

The data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step phenomenological method, which ensured a systematic and rigorous approach to thematic analysis. The process began with multiple readings of all transcripts to gain a holistic understanding. From this immersion, significant statements were identified, extracted, and recorded alongside their original context. Meanings were then formulated from these statements, and any researcher's assumptions were bracketed to minimize bias. These meanings were organized into theme clusters, and from these, an exhaustive narrative description of the phenomenon was developed. The final structure of the findings was reviewed and refined in consultation with experts, with feedback from participants integrated through member checking. Peer debriefing and external audit strategies were employed to further ensure the credibility and integrity of the findings (Praveena & Sasikumar, 2021).

Throughout the research process, trustworthiness was established through adherence to the four fundamental criteria: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. The researcher documented methodological decisions, participant profiles, and analytical processes in detail to provide transparency and allow future replication or scrutiny. Themes and interpretations were grounded firmly in participant narratives, ensuring that the data reflected authentic lived experiences. Measures were taken to ensure that the results could be transferred to similar educational contexts by richly describing participant demographics and situational settings. Confirmability was reinforced through cross-checking, reflexivity, and member validation, eliminating the imposition of personal biases on the data (Pietilä *et al.*, 2020).

Ethical considerations were a guiding force throughout the research. Participants voluntarily joined the study with full understanding of its aims and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. All data were handled in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, and participant identities were protected

through careful data management. Potential psychological or emotional risks were mitigated by ensuring the interview setting was safe and participants were emotionally ready. At the same time, the study offered potential benefits such as professional reflection, validation of lived experiences, and opportunities for growth and institutional support through research-based recommendations (Newman *et al.*, 2021; Talafian *et al.*, 2023).

To ensure research integrity, plagiarism, fabrication, and falsification were strictly avoided. All referenced works were properly cited, and originality was verified using plagiarism detection tools. All data presented reflected the genuine responses of participants without distortion. Any potential conflicts of interest were disclosed transparently, and the researcher complied with the ethical protocols of the RMMC Ethics and Review Committee, including securing all required permissions and institutional approvals (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2023; Kafaei *et al.*, 2022; Elsevier, 2023).

Authorship was aligned with the ICMJE standards, granted only to those who made substantial contributions to the conception, design, implementation, analysis, or interpretation of the study. The research was conducted as part of a graduate thesis under the RMMC Graduate School, where it underwent iterative revisions based on adviser and ethics committee feedback. This ensured accountability, scholarly rigor, and ethical responsibility throughout the research lifecycle.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

This part provides a comprehensive discussion based on the themes that emerged from the data analysis of this qualitative study. The primary aim of this research was to describe teachers' experiences in addressing their professional development needs within the current educational landscape. By examining these individual lived experiences, the study sought to offer a deeper understanding of the factors that influenced their professional growth in their pursuit of advancement.

**Table 1:** Challenges encountered by teachers in dealing with their professional development growth in the current educational landscape

Clustered Themes	Emergent Themes
Limited time for accomplishing tasks. Very tight schedule and urgent submission of reports. Lack of time to dedicate to learning new teaching methods.	<b>Lack of Time</b>
Different attitudes and behavior of learners. Managing a large class size. Handling students' engagement when conducting online classes.	<b>Behavior of Learners</b>
Lack of financial resources. Limited to no available resources, like lesson plans and reference books.	<b>Limited Resources</b>
Outdated textbook teaching materials can hinder teaching methods. Use of outdated teaching methods and instructional materials that were no longer effective in engaging my students.	<b>Outdated Reference Materials</b>
Absence of seminars and training about today's educational landscape.	

Leave little to no room for self-improvement and professional development. Lack of new knowledge and strategies for the changing scope of teaching. Difficulty in using 21st-century approaches, strategies and interventions.	<b>Inadequate Trainings</b>
Finding time for personal development due to numerous responsibilities and so many tasks and reports. The demands of daily teaching and limited resources. Limited time for professional development due to heavy workloads.	<b>Heavy Workloads</b>
Inflexibility of the curriculum that limits the methods or approaches. Restriction to explore applications of learning in some competencies. Rigid curriculum guidelines that hinder creativity	<b>Rigid Curriculum</b>
Struggled with incorporating technology into my lessons effectively. Challenged to effectively integrate technology in the lesson delivery. Rapid integration of technology into the curriculum. Adapting to the technological trend in education.	<b>Tech Hurdles</b>
Resistance of colleagues to change. Reluctance from some to embrace innovative teaching methods. Continuous adaptation was challenging.	<b>Resistance of Teachers</b>

Table 1 presents the findings of this study that illuminate the multifaceted challenges that teachers face in fostering their professional growth within the evolving landscape of education. The emergent themes generated constraints not only hinder the continuous learning and upskilling of educators but also affect the quality of instruction and the overall learning experience of students. Despite the growing emphasis on 21st-century skills and learner-centered approaches, teachers are frequently burdened by systemic issues that limit their capacity to adapt and grow.

The data revealed that a significant number of teachers face the challenge of a lack of time to pursue professional development due to tight schedules and administrative duties. This mirrors findings from previous studies highlighting time constraints as one of the most common barriers preventing teachers from engaging in further learning or instructional improvement. Teachers are often inundated with workloads that prioritize compliance over growth-oriented tasks, leaving little time for reflection or advancement (Angtud *et al.*, 2023; Castroverde & Acala, 2021; Hartshorne *et al.*, 2020).

The behavior of learners, particularly in large or online classes, emerged as another notable challenge. Many teachers struggle with maintaining engagement and managing discipline in the classroom, especially when faced with behavioral issues that affect instructional flow. Research has shown that such difficulties are magnified in post-pandemic settings where socio-emotional issues among learners have increased, demanding new pedagogical strategies from educators (Ayton, 2023; Churchill *et al.*, 2024; Holdsworth & Thomas, 2021).

Limited and inaccessible resources, including financial constraints and a shortage of instructional materials, also inhibit professional growth. Teachers who lack access to updated learning materials and support tools are less likely to implement effective pedagogical innovations. This aligns with global findings that resource inadequacies widen disparities in professional development, particularly in rural and underfunded schools (Dastgir & Fakhar-Ul-Zaman, 2023; Hossain, 2024; Ling, 2024; Paran *et al.*, 2024).

Closely related is the reliance on outdated reference materials and teaching methods, which hinders classroom engagement and the delivery of relevant content. Studies have indicated that without modernization of instructional tools, educators are less prepared to meet the demands of 21st-century learners (Sparks, 2019; Lim & Kim, 2021; DepEd, 2023). This situation further underscores the need for updated curriculum guides and continuous material development (Bozkurt *et al.*, 2022; Khoa *et al.*, 2023; Mahon *et al.*, 2022; Muzari *et al.*, 2022; Parsons, 2024).

The theme of inadequate training illustrates that many educators are left to adapt independently to evolving educational trends without formal guidance. The absence of targeted seminars and workshops tailored to current educational shifts results in professional stagnation. Research indicates that meaningful teacher development hinges on continuous, context-based, and collaborative training opportunities (Brown *et al.*, 2023; Khoa *et al.*, 2023; Malbas *et al.*, 2023; Nadeem, 2024; Perez, 2022).

A majority also cited heavy workloads as a deterrent to professional growth. The piling up of tasks and administrative responsibilities leaves limited space for development-oriented activities. This concern echoes global literature that notes how excessive workloads compromise teacher well-being and hinder engagement in continuous learning (Brown & Harris, 2021; Geverola *et al.*, 2022; Koh & Sin, 2020; Nelson, 2020; Praveena & Sasikumar, 2021).

The rigid curriculum imposed by educational systems was seen to restrict teacher creativity and adaptability. Teachers expressed frustration over inflexible guidelines that do not consider the contextual realities of their classrooms. Research supports that rigid policy structures discourage experimentation and professional agency, leading to surface-level implementation of reforms (Paran *et al.*, 2024; Scherer *et al.*, 2020).

Another significant challenge noted was technology integration. Teachers, especially those in low-resource areas, struggle to keep up with rapid tech shifts in education. Many lack both the training and infrastructure to use digital tools effectively. This is consistent with findings that technological hurdles are a primary barrier to equitable access to quality teaching practices, especially in developing countries (Mahon *et al.*, 2022; Muzari *et al.*, 2022; Parsons, 2024).

Lastly, resistance from fellow educators posed a barrier to shared growth. Some teachers reported encountering reluctance from colleagues to adopt new strategies or embrace change. This phenomenon, known as resistance to innovation, has been observed in environments where there is a lack of collaborative culture or insufficient change management (Nelson, 2020; Praveena & Sasikumar, 2021; Scherer *et al.*, 2020).



**Table 2:** Coping mechanisms of teachers in dealing with their professional development

Clustered Themes	Emergent Themes
Being digitally literate involves using ICT-based instructions. Enhance digital literacy through peer collaboration.	<b>Improve Digital Literacy</b>
Setting clear goals for professional development. Reflect on responsibilities as a teacher. Prioritizing what needs to be accomplished by balancing daily responsibilities as a teacher.	<b>Setting of Goals</b>
Seeking new strategies. Making more adaptable and innovative actions. Exploration of new and free seminars and orientations. Develop a sense of volunteerism to improve professionally. Seeking out professional development opportunities.	<b>Being Adaptable and Innovative</b>
Technical assistance from others and a support system through SLAC. Assistance from co-teachers and support systems like mentorship programs and peer networks. Building a supportive network of like-minded educators. Collaborating with technologically inclined colleagues. Asking for help from my technologically inclined co-teachers.	<b>Engage Collaborative Learning Communities</b>
Immediately, and probably working overtime to catch up with the school's requirements. Develop a sense of urgency when complying with reports.	<b>Practice Response Efficiency</b>
Balance daily responsibilities through effective time management. Give specific time slots and allocate specific times for professional development. Allocating an hour a day for professional development.	<b>Work on Effective Time Management</b>
Constantly learning new tools and techniques. Dedicated to learn new teaching methods or integrating technology effectively.	<b>Add up Dedication to Learn</b>

Table 2 shows that teachers actively engage in improving their digital literacy as a means to cope with the evolving demands of professional development. They adopt ICT-based strategies and participate in peer collaborations to enhance their technological skills. This aligns with global perspectives recognizing digital literacy as essential in navigating modern classrooms, especially in contexts where digital integration is rapid and sometimes abrupt. Teachers' willingness to collaborate and self-learn signifies their proactive attitude toward instructional innovation (Nguyen *et al.*, 2024; Rebecchi *et al.*, 2024; Tondeur *et al.*, 2021).

Another coping mechanism identified is the setting of goals; teachers establish clear professional targets, reflect on their roles, and align their goals with their responsibilities. This approach not only guides their personal growth but also fosters self-discipline. The significance of goal setting in teacher development is widely documented, with studies emphasizing its contribution to improved motivation, accountability, and sustained engagement in learning (Clark & Johnson, 2021; Williams & Thomas, 2020).

Teachers also exhibit a strong inclination to be adaptable and innovative, seeking out new strategies, attending free training sessions, and voluntarily engaging in self-

improvement activities. This reflects a professional disposition toward lifelong learning and resilience in the face of limited institutional support. Research highlights that adaptability is a crucial trait for educators in the 21st century, especially when dealing with rapidly changing curricular demands and pedagogical expectations (Saka & Celik, 2024; Wei, 2024; Youngs *et al.*, 2023).

The study further reveals that many teachers find strength in collaborative learning communities, including SLAC sessions, mentoring relationships, and peer-based support. These networks serve as platforms for shared learning and problem-solving, which are vital for sustained professional growth. Literature underscores the effectiveness of collaborative professional learning models, noting their role in building collective efficacy and enhancing teaching quality (Sabol, 2022; Vaughn, 2023).

Practicing response efficiency is also a noted coping strategy. Teachers manage to meet deadlines and institutional demands through urgency and overtime work, indicating their commitment to both compliance and excellence. Although this shows resilience, studies caution against burnout and advocate for more balanced systems that allow teachers to thrive without compromising well-being (Alam & Asmawi, 2024; Carpenter *et al.*, 2022; Gupta, 2021).

In relation to time challenges, teachers practice effective time management by consciously allocating portions of their day to focus on professional growth. Structured time use for learning supports the development of new skills while ensuring teaching responsibilities are not compromised. Time management as a strategy is shown to increase productivity and reduce stress among teachers, especially in demanding contexts (Angtud *et al.*, 2023; Castroverde & Acala, 2021; Hartshorne *et al.*, 2020).

Lastly, a notable finding is teachers' dedication to learning, expressed through continuous acquisition of new tools and the integration of emerging pedagogical techniques. This intrinsic motivation for learning illustrates their commitment to excellence despite systemic barriers. Such dedication reflects a growth mindset, which is a key driver of transformative professional practice (Ayton, 2023; Churchill *et al.*, 2024; Holdsworth & Thomas, 2021).

**Table 3:** Insights of teachers in dealing with their professional development and growth in the current educational landscape

Clustered Themes	Emergent Themes
Traditional teaching is teacher-centered, while today, it is learner-centred. Notably different from teaching in the past, particularly regarding the rapid evolution of technology.	<b>Recognize Teaching Evolution</b>
The need to be updated with 21st-century skills to cope with the learners. Needs to know the strengths and weaknesses for improvement in teaching. A way of improving oneself to become more realistic. Made a teacher become more flexible and pupil-centered.	<b>Acknowledge Continuous Professional Growth</b>

Needs Collaboration with my co-teachers. Must work hand in hand in our professional growth. Creating a culture of collaboration and innovation. By leveraging support systems, setting clear goals, and advocating for systemic changes, creating a supportive environment. Supportive environment that encourages experimentation and innovation. Needs perseverance and professional support.	<b>Require Supportive Environment</b>
Attending seminars can improve the pedagogical approach. Provision of training prioritizing teachers. Needs support from the higher office for training and like. Tailored professional development training that provides personalized professional development opportunities. Continuous professional development is needed. Opportunities for professional development and offering greater flexibility in the curriculum.	<b>Provision of Trainings</b>
Must continually adapt to rapid changes in educational trends. Importance of flexibility in responding to the evolving needs of the learners. Adaptive to new trends, methodologies, and learners' needs, which requires continuous learning and improvement.	<b>Confirm Change Adaptability</b>
Boosts confidence and effectiveness in delivering tasks in the teaching-learning experiences. A need to implement flexible policies that allow for more personalized learning paths. Actively engaged learners in the learning process foster deeper understanding.	<b>Commitment To Lifelong Learning</b>
Learning today has become more accessible because of technology Fast evolution of technology and educational trends.	<b>Acceptance on Utilization of Technology</b>

Table 3 presents the teachers' reflections that revealed a keen awareness of the evolution of teaching, particularly the shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered paradigms. Many acknowledged that teaching today is significantly different from the past due to the accelerated integration of technology and changing pedagogical expectations. Research supports this observation, indicating that traditional models are being replaced by flexible, learner-driven approaches responsive to the needs of digital-age students (Baker & Greene, 2020; Dastgir & Fakhar-Ul-Zaman, 2023; Hossain, 2024).

Teachers also expressed the importance of acknowledging continuous professional growth, noting that self-improvement requires knowing one's strengths and weaknesses, developing adaptability, and being more pupil-centered. This aligns with research emphasizing the reflective practitioner model, which encourages ongoing self-evaluation and goal setting as pathways to effective professional development (Aldahdough *et al.*, 2023; Zabak *et al.*, 2023).

The insights also emphasized the need for supportive environments, including collaboration with colleagues, access to mentorship, and system-wide backing for teacher development. Creating such professional communities encourages innovation and shared accountability, essential factors in sustaining long-term educational reform.

Collaborative cultures are widely endorsed in literature as foundational for teacher growth, especially when peer learning and distributed leadership are present (Bowles, 2023; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2023; Killion & Roy, 2020).

Furthermore, the provision of training emerged as a fundamental insight. Teachers articulated the necessity of tailored, continuous, and context-relevant training programs supported by the higher education authorities. These reflections resonate with global recommendations that advocate for professional development systems offering flexibility, personalized support, and alignment with current pedagogical and technological shifts (Brown & Harris, 2021; Geverola *et al.*, 2022; Koh & Sin, 2020).

A strong theme of change adaptability was also evident, with teachers recognizing the need to stay responsive to evolving educational trends and learner needs. This adaptive mindset is essential for modern educators as they navigate uncertainty, changing student profiles, and diverse teaching environments. Studies highlight that flexibility, resilience, and innovation are core competencies in the post-pandemic educational landscape (Li & Akram, 2023; Miramon *et al.*, 2024; Olweny *et al.*, 2021).

Moreover, the teachers' commitment to lifelong learning reflects their desire to improve both teaching delivery and learner outcomes. Lifelong learning fosters professional confidence, facilitates deeper student engagement, and enhances instructional effectiveness. The literature stresses that when teachers continuously learn, they are better equipped to design inclusive and effective classroom environments (Mahon *et al.*, 2022; Muzari *et al.*, 2022; Parsons, 2024).

Lastly, teachers expressed acceptance of the utilization of technology as a tool for accessibility and innovation. They acknowledged that today's learning is more accessible and dynamic due to rapid technological progress. Embracing digital tools for instruction and development mirrors findings that digital technology expands opportunities for collaboration, differentiation, and teacher autonomy (Nelson, 2020; Praveena & Sasikumar, 2021; Scherer *et al.*, 2020).

## 5. Implications for Practice and Future Research

This study highlights the intricate dynamics that influence teachers' professional development amid evolving educational demands. Key challenges—such as limited time, learner behavior, inadequate training, outdated resources, and technological barriers—interact with enablers like collaboration, digital literacy, adaptability, and institutional support. The findings offer targeted recommendations for stakeholders, including school leaders, policymakers, and professional development providers.

To enhance teacher growth, schools must institutionalize time-efficient development practices, integrate behavior management and socio-emotional learning into training, and ensure access to updated resources and infrastructure. Cost-effective strategies, like online modules, grants, and community partnerships—can address funding and access issues. Promoting flexible curriculum delivery, investing in digital

competency training, and creating supportive environments further enable sustainable professional growth.

At the system level, structured and needs-based development programs, including Learning Action Cells and mentoring systems, should be prioritized. Teachers should be encouraged to set personal goals, engage in collaborative learning communities, and cultivate lifelong learning habits. Workload management and streamlined administrative tasks can also mitigate burnout and improve engagement.

Future research should explore the contextual and systemic roots of professional development barriers, especially in resource-constrained and rural settings. Investigations should assess the alignment between training content and teachers' real-world needs, as well as the effectiveness of localized, teacher-led models. Longitudinal and comparative studies on digital delivery methods, follow-up support, and teacher motivation will deepen understanding of professional learning efficacy. Further examination of professional learning communities, mentoring structures, and the role of digital platforms is also critical. These insights will support the design of scalable, inclusive, and responsive systems that foster continuous teacher development.

## **6. Concluding Remarks**

Teachers hold a profound and far-reaching influence on both the individual lives of students and the broader future of society. As the primary architects of learning, they shape the minds, values, and aspirations of the next generation, our future leaders, thinkers, and changemakers. Investing in their professional growth is not a matter of choice; it is a national imperative rooted in the understanding that the quality of education can never exceed the quality of its teachers. Equipping educators with the necessary tools, knowledge, and support enables them to remain responsive to the shifting landscape of education, lead innovation in pedagogy, inspire student engagement, and foster inclusive, holistic learning environments. This involves more than sporadic training; it requires sustained access to relevant, needs-based programs focused on technology integration, classroom management, differentiated instruction, curriculum design, and socio-emotional learning. To realize this vision, educational institutions must implement policies that allocate dedicated time for professional development, mitigate administrative overload, and offer ongoing support for skill enhancement and instructional creativity. These are not merely organizational adjustments but structural commitments to teacher empowerment and educational transformation.

Furthermore, to institutionalize continuous growth, we must establish future-focused strategies, including increased public and private investment in teacher development, strategic partnerships for shared resources, and the adoption of modern learning tools and technologies. Active teacher participation in curriculum review committees ensures that instructional content remains dynamic, relevant, and responsive to the diverse needs of learners. Embedded support systems such as Learning Action Cell

(LAC) sessions, mentorship programs, and professional learning communities must become integral to the culture of every school, fostering collaboration, reflective practice, and mutual growth. Individualized professional development plans, active engagement in research and educational conferences, and meaningful recognition of teaching excellence will inspire a culture of lifelong learning. These are not luxuries but foundational pillars of a thriving education system. Ultimately, when we invest in the growth of our teachers, we invest in the future of our nation. By creating an environment that champions continuous improvement and upholds professional excellence, we empower educators to rise to the complex demands of 21st-century learning and, in doing so, guide generations of learners toward a more enlightened, equitable, and resilient future.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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