

## Exploring the gains and gaps in DepEd professional development programs: A systematic review

Serillano, Raquel L. ✉

Central Bicol State University of Agriculture, Philippines ([raquel.serillano@cbsua.edu.ph](mailto:raquel.serillano@cbsua.edu.ph))

Toraldo, Sarah Mediatix P.

Central Bicol State University of Agriculture, Philippines ([sptoraldo@up.edu.ph](mailto:sptoraldo@up.edu.ph))

Gavino, Marianne A.

Central Bicol State University of Agriculture, Philippines ([marianne.arojado@deped.gov.ph](mailto:marianne.arojado@deped.gov.ph))

Pajarillo, Jovert G.

Central Bicol State University of Agriculture, Philippines ([jovert.pajarillo@deped.gov.ph](mailto:jovert.pajarillo@deped.gov.ph))

Roxas, Imari Meryl S.

Central Bicol State University of Agriculture, Philippines ([imarimeryl.roxas@cbsua.edu.ph](mailto:imarimeryl.roxas@cbsua.edu.ph))

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### **Abstract**

The professional development of teachers has shifted from being regarded as an optional add-on to a key part of educational quality. It prepares teachers to effectively adapt to changing learning environments, meet diverse student needs, and build self-efficacy and job satisfaction—factors that directly enhance student outcomes and education quality. In institutional planning, PD becomes a strategic, shared investment that boosts individual skills and increases overall efficiency. Educational institutions, therefore, both have the opportunity and responsibility, along with international and local mandates, to promote teachers' PD. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has put policies and guidelines in place for teacher PD, conducting 22 programs between 2013 and 2023. This review examines the progress and gaps in these initiatives, identifies coping strategies and best practices, and offers recommendations to bridge the gaps. Results show a significant shift from fragmented, short-term seminars to a unified skill-based framework, with notable improvements in centralized quality assurance, clearer policy guidance, increased teacher confidence, institutionalized collaborative learning, and greater access to digital tools. However, ongoing challenges remain in program content, implementation, and structural support, particularly in maintaining continuity and coherence throughout a teacher's career. These gaps underline that PD is not just a technical issue but also a human, organizational, and cultural challenge. The paper thus concludes that effective PD must be tailored to context, collaborative, and ongoing, fostering reflective practice, professional identity, and shared responsibility for student success.

**Keywords:** DepEd programs, professional development, DepEd PD programs, teacher professional development, gains and gaps in DepEd PD programs

## Exploring the gains and gaps in DepEd professional development programs: A systematic review

### 1. Introduction

Teacher professional development initiatives and strategies are carried out to further capacitate teachers in classroom delivery and instruction. This involves learning activities that lead to modifications in pedagogy and improvement in learner outcomes, (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017 in Romorosa and Uchang 2025) highlighting training, seminars, workshops, and graduate studies (Ancho and Arrieta, 2019), as well as classroom and school research, which does not only improve teachers' pedagogical strategies and practices, but also allow them professional and personal growth (Ulla, 2018). This has been shown to equate quality teachers to quality education (Romorosa and Uchang, 2025). Within the realm of effective institutional planning, enabling teachers to grow professionally can be viewed as a strategic shared investment that improves both individual skills and the institution's efficiency. Through opportunities for learning and development, the institution enhances the learning process.

With teacher and teaching quality as critical variables in determining the learning experiences and outcomes of learners in a continuously changing educational landscape (Romel and Jibat, 2021; Syafril et al., 2021, Steadman and Ellis, 2021 in Ambon et al., 2024), institutions must ensure that teachers receive continuous professional development to improve learning outcomes (Ocampo and Lucasan, 2019 in Romorosa and Uchang 2025) and ultimately, the quality of education. In addition to keeping teacher expertise up to date, professional development also facilitates the development of an innovative and continuous improvement culture in institutions, as well as in teaching practices, enabling teachers to successfully adapt to changing learning environments and meet the requirements of students from various contexts (Razak et al., 2015, Clifford-Swain, 2021 in Ambon et al., 2024).

The importance of ongoing professional development of teachers and its role in achieving quality education (Wabule, 2016, Myunda, 2022, Halim et al., 2022 in Ambon et al., 2024; Romorosa and Uchang, 2025), self-efficacy in teachers, improved work satisfaction, and ultimately, successful learning outcomes for students (Bahriadi et al., 2022, Shah et al., 2015, Waheed and Mirwan, 2022 in Ambon et al., 2024) aligns with the initiative of the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP). As the training and development arm of the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines, it was established in 2016 with a comprehensive program designed to improve the skills and knowledge of teachers and school leaders (2023). Its Professional Development Framework offers specific programs on quality teaching and master classes, in addition to regular teacher induction programs (TIP) and preservice education with the Teacher Education Council (TEC) and the in-service training (INSET) programs for teachers and school staff, designed to help teachers with subject content knowledge and teaching methods for the learning outcomes of students.

These programs, along with other initiatives, policies, and guidelines, were anchored both in international documents and local legal mandates. As one of the 193 United Nations (UN) member states committed to achieving 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with various areas of focus including education, the Philippines signed the new UN Philippines Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2024-2028 in 2023. This framework outlines the UN's plan to support the country towards sustainable development and progress in achieving the SDGs by 2030. Quality Education, as the fourth SDG, after all, comprises targets including the substantial increase in the supply of qualified teachers through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries. Moreover, one of the key areas of its focus is human capital development, which includes teachers and learners.

The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (RA 10533) and the Professionalization Act of 1994 (RA 7836) were also institutionalized through Orders for the Philippines Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) and the Expanded Career Progression (ECPS) in 2025. These mandates prioritize quality, relevant, and holistic education,

as well as continuous improvement and professional development of teachers. This is also to meet enhanced curriculum standards, with a focus on twenty-first-century skills. DepEd has also implemented various policies and guidelines not only on curriculum development but also in teacher professional development. Anchored in the active championing of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills within the education system in the country alone, the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) found 22 professional development (PD) programs conducted from 2013 to 2023, engaging 5,578 teachers in the basic education unit across various regions and grade levels in the country (2024).

According to the report, these PD programs demonstrated comprehensive efforts to improve teachers' capacity to teach 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, but their implementation had its challenges. Aside from inadequate planning and preparation, limited technological support, and low teacher participation, it included recurring issues such as infrastructure and resource limitations, resistance to change, inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, time constraints, and excessive academic load. An analysis of PD initiatives for Filipino teachers also found that limited resources, and inadequate monitoring systems hinder program effectiveness, which can be analyzed through content focus, active learning, and sustained duration (Hubahib et al., 2024).

Sustained duration as a characteristic of PD program effectiveness was also supported by another study on the impact of PD program on teachers' innovation and excellence. It concluded that sustained change requires alignment between teachers, administrators, and policy (Herrero and Despi, 2025). After all, the study was situated within broader institutional frameworks and points toward the importance of systemic support, that schools are complex systems, and that PD program impacts extend beyond individual teachers to the entire learning environment. Moreover, the Teacher Education Council's (TEC) Executive Director stated that to promote continuous professional development and learning, there is a need to, "create a system that supports teachers throughout their careers" (Jocson, 2025). This reveals that there is no system yet.

With this, our paper aims to look into PD programs implemented in the Philippines and explore the gaps and gains in the program implementation, as well as the best practices and coping mechanisms, and thereby, propose recommendations, not only to address the gaps and contribute to the development of more effective and responsive PD initiatives but also toward creating a sustainable system that support teachers throughout their careers.

## 2. Methodology

The method used for the systematic review is particularly rigorous and well-defined to minimize bias and provide a comprehensive synthesis of existing articles. This includes the study design, the inclusion/exclusion criteria, the step-by-step account of the conduct of the review, and the analytical techniques used with the data. The process involves literature identification, screening, eligibility review, and the inclusion of articles. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) was used as a reporting guideline to ensure the quality, accuracy, and completeness of the review, thus allowing researchers to assess its strengths and weaknesses and thoroughly understand the review processes and findings.

**Literature Identification** - The process of identifying relevant literature gave the review and the researchers access to existing knowledge, frameworks, and research in education in the Philippines in the context of professional development. It helped the researchers understand the current trends and gaps, as well as the future direction of DepEd Professional Development programs. It also ensured that the study was not only built on existing scholarship but also contributed to it by proposing recommendations to improve its implementation. The review gathered relevant studies from published articles in the last 10 years for recency in developing perspectives and ideas. The first step in the literature search was determining the major databases and resources for finding academic journals and other scholarly literature across various disciplines. The second step was the conduct of a comprehensive literature search. The study looked into academic databases such as Google Scholar, Academia, Mendeley, and ResearchGate and conducted a comprehensive search on the focus of the study, using keywords and phrases such as, "DepEd Professional Development Programs", "Trends on DepEd Professional Development

Programs”, “Gaps on DepEd Professional Development Programs”, and “Future direction of DepEd Professional Development Programs”. There are about 198 studies generated through database search and from other additional sources. The identified literature from the databases was filtered, removing 86 duplicate studies based on their titles. The remaining 112 studies were recorded, including details such as author, year, title, and abstract, for further evaluation and screening. After the screening, 36 related studies were included on the systematic review.

**Screening Process** - The initial screening of potentially related literature was based on the title and abstract of the studies. Aside from duplications, non-peer-reviewed, non-English texts and studies with unavailable full text were removed. The included studies are those that respond to the objectives of the review to optimize its external and internal validity, improve its feasibility, and minimize ethical concerns. No particular regional limitations applied. The topic being studied has a national scope with a focus on the Department of Education in the Philippines.

**Eligibility Review** - The eligibility criteria are the specific characteristics that determine the inclusions and exclusions in the review of existing studies. This is to filter and ensure that the studies and other units of analysis are relevant to the research objectives and that the results will be meaningful and applicable. The authors evaluated the design and the conduct of the review to identify potential sources of systematic errors. It was done to determine how much trust can be placed on the results of the study to critically appraise individual studies included in the analysis. Thus, related articles were generated, examined, and included using suitable procedures. Transparency and veracity of information were also observed. The inclusion/exclusion criteria using a structured approach were presented in Table 1, and the summary of search results was indicated on the PRISMA flow diagram in Figure 1.

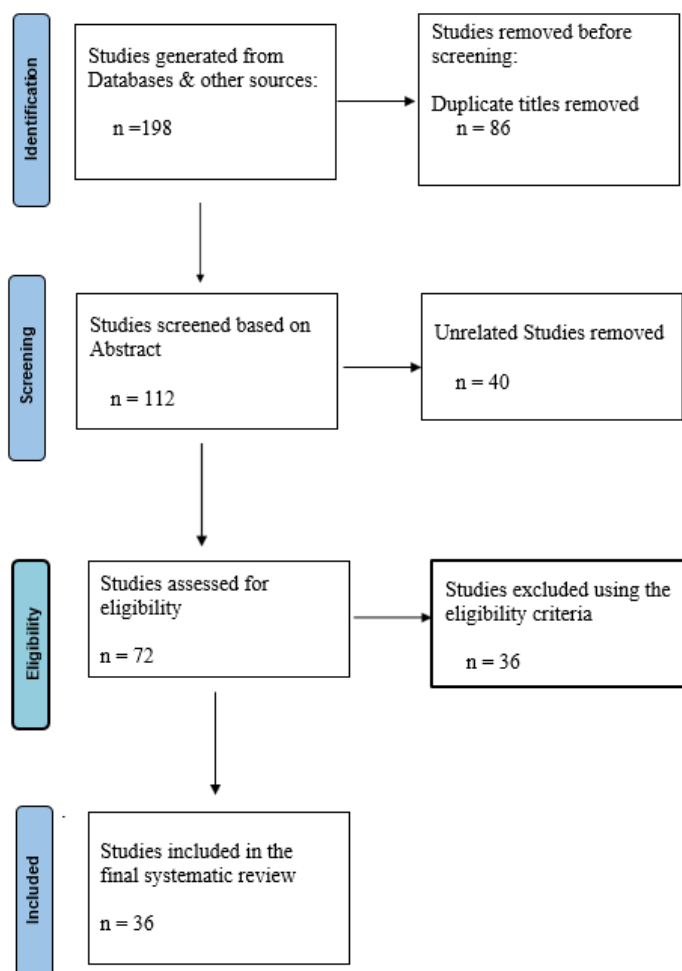
**Table 1.** *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria on the Selection of Studies for the Review.*

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer-reviewed journal articles</li> <li>• Systematic Reviews</li> <li>• Conference Proceedings</li> <li>• Theses and Dissertations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letters to the Editors</li> <li>• Inaccessible full text documents</li> <li>• Duplicate Publications</li> <li>• Irrelevant and unrelated studies</li> </ul>
Publication Date	Studies published in the last 10 years	Studies published earlier than 2015
Language	Studies published in English	Studies published in Other Languages
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studies relevant to the review's objectives.</li> <li>• Studies with methodological rigor, validated data and analysis.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studies not related to review's objectives.</li> <li>• Studies with unvalidated results.</li> </ul>
Ethical Considerations	Studies with Sensitivity Analysis and observed ethical transparency	Studies lacking ethical considerations

### 3. Results and Discussion

The Department of Education’s (DepEd) legal mandates for professional development (PD) for teachers are based on key legal and policy frameworks such as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (RA 10533) and the Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994 (RA 7836). These were institutionalized through orders for the Philippines Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) (DO 42, s. 2017), the transformed National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP), and the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS) (EO 174, DO 24, s. 2025). The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, for one, mandates not only quality, relevant, and holistic education but also requires the continuous improvement and professional development of teachers to meet enhanced curriculum standards, with a focus on twenty-first-century skills needed in this growing globalized world. The Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994 (RA 7836), on the other hand, strengthens teaching regulation and supervision and supports Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Search Results



DepEd Order No. 001, s. 2020 outlines guidelines for recognizing PD programs which are linked to curriculum and career stages; DepEd Order No. 174, s. 2022 establishes the Expanded Career Progression System (ECP) for advancement based on standards and DepEd Order No. 011, s. 2019 or Implementation of the NEAP Transformation streamlines PD, making it, “programmatically, accountable, and linked to career growth”. The core mandates and processes for PD include the Continuous Professional Development (CPD), the Expanded Career Progression (ECP), and the School-Based Management (SBM). CPD is essential for teachers to gain new skills and is aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST); ECP supports promotion, higher pay, and career satisfaction by developing competencies against standards (PPST, PPSSH, PPSS); SBM mandates school-level PD planning and is embedded in School Improvement Plans (SIPs), to tackle local needs. The NEAP then leads the framework through programs (Regular, Subject Content, Master Classes) to help teachers through career stages (Beginning to Distinguished). NEAP, along with DepEd offices, is accredited by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) to ensure quality CPD.

Additionally, the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers in the Philippines, along with the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 emphasizes the importance of ongoing professional development for teachers (Republic Act No. 4670, 1966; Apales, 2023). The law not only provides guidelines and provisions for their professional development, but also mandates and outlines DepEd’s responsibilities in institutionalizing and implementing programs and initiatives that support and enhance the skills and competencies of teachers, ensuring they adapt to up-to-date pedagogical practices (Republic Act No. 4670, 1966). In recent years, the Department of

Education has recognized the need for Filipino learners to, “develop a wide range of relevant competencies for successfully thriving in a volatile, uncertain, changing, and dynamic (VUCAD) environment”, and thus has, “been actively championing the integration and promotion of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills within the education system in the country” (Prudente et al, 2024). To achieve this goal, the department has implemented various policies and guidelines revolving around curriculum development and teacher professional development (2024).

***Gains in the Implementation of DepEd PD Programs*** - In the context of the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd), the implementation of Professional Development (PD) programs—primarily managed by the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP)—has led to several significant gains. These gains and improvements are aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) and the transition to the MATATAG Curriculum.

#### *Structural and Policy Alignment*

The structural and policy alignment of the Department of Education’s (DepEd) Professional Development (PD) programs reflects a transition from fragmented, short-term seminars to a unified, competency-based system. This transformation is anchored in several key policy frameworks that ensure teacher growth is programmatic, accountable, and directly linked to career advancement. The most significant structural gain is the centralization of quality assurance under the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP). Under DepEd Order No. 011, s. 2019, NEAP was transformed into the primary body responsible for coordinating and certifying all PD programs. This policy ended the "siloed" approach where different bureaus offered overlapping training. Now, only "Tatak NEAP" (NEAP-certified) programs are recognized for professional credit, ensuring that all training meets a high national standard (Department of Education, 2019). Moreover, policy alignment has successfully integrated the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) as the mandatory framework for all training. This shift, formalized by DepEd Order No. 042, s. 2017, requires that PD programs address specific "strands" of teaching excellence, such as content knowledge, learning environment, and diversity of learners. By mapping every training to these standards, DepEd ensures that PD is no longer generic but is instead a targeted intervention designed to move teachers through defined career stages—from Beginning to Distinguished (DepEd, 2017; Prudente et al., 2024).

This alignment is further solidified by the link between professional growth and the Expanded Career Progression (ECP) system, institutionalized through DepEd Order No. 024, s. 2025. This policy structurally relates PD participation to teacher's promotion and salary. Under this framework is the Merit-Based Advancement and New Ranks. Merit-Based Advancement is a promotion which is now tied to the attainment of prescribed competencies rather than just years of service, while New Ranks refers to the creation of ranks such as Teacher IV to VII and Master Teacher V which allows expert teachers to remain in the classroom while receiving pay and status comparable to school administrators (DepEd, 2025). Unlike previous years where promotion was often hindered by limited vacancies, the current policy framework allows teachers to advance through newly created ranks (Teacher IV to VII) based on demonstrated competencies and PD completion. This "policy glue" ensures that a teacher’s development is no longer an isolated event but a continuous journey integrated into the Results-based Performance Management System (RPMS).

Ultimately, structural reforms allowed the "just-in-time" training alignment with the MATATAG Curriculum. By using the established NEAP network, DepEd can rapidly deploy specific "Master Classes" designed to upskill teachers in the new curriculum’s focus on foundational literacy and numeracy. This ensures that pedagogical training is not just a theoretical exercise but is directly applied to the current national curriculum's instructional needs (DepEd, 2023; Villaver et al., 2024) as well as learner outcomes.

#### *Enhanced Teacher Efficacy, Competency, and Agency*

The implementation of Department of Education (DepEd) Professional Development (PD) programs has significantly improved teacher efficacy and competency by shifting the focus from passive attendance to the active

mastery of 21st-century instructional strategies. After all, the NEAP PD framework emphasizes induction, career progression, and competency-based training rather than attendance alone and an analysis of PD initiatives found that focusing on 21st-century strategies improved instructional quality, teacher efficacy, and classroom engagement (Hubahib, Jr. et al., 2024). Central to this gain is the development of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK), which has empowered educators to move beyond basic computer literacy toward a sophisticated integration of digital tools that enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Valencia & Hernandez, 2024). This increase in technical proficiency is complemented by a deeper mastery of the MATATAG Curriculum, where targeted "Master Classes" have equipped teachers with the specialized skills needed to facilitate critical thinking and foundational literacy. As educators successfully transition from a congested curriculum to one focused on depth and mastery, their perceived efficacy—the belief in their ability to positively impact student performance—has shown measurable improvement (Villaver et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the institutionalization of Action Research (AR) as a core component of professional growth has transformed teachers into reflective practitioners and autonomous problem-solvers. By engaging in the systematic cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, teachers are now more capable of addressing localized classroom challenges, such as reading interventions or behavioral management, using evidence-based solutions (Prudente et al., 2024). This research-oriented mindset, combined with an enhanced ability to perform data-driven instructional decision-making, ensures that teaching practices are not only standards-aligned but also responsive to the unique needs of every learner. Consequently, the professionalization of these competencies has fostered a more resilient and efficacious teaching force capable of meeting the rigorous demands of the modern Philippine education system (Department of Education, 2024).

#### *Institutionalization of Collaborative Learning*

The institutionalization of collaborative learning through Learning Action Cells (LACs) and mentoring frameworks has also emerged as a cornerstone of sustainable professional development within DepEd. By shifting the locus of learning from centralized seminars to the school level, the department has fostered a "community of practice" where teachers engage in continuous peer-to-peer coaching and collaborative problem-solving. According to DepEd Order No. 035, s. 2016, which remains the foundational policy for this initiative, LACs serve as a vital venue for teachers to support one another in implementing the curriculum and improving instructional classroom practices (Department of Education [DepEd], 2016). Recent studies highlight that this collaborative model has significantly improved the quality of lesson planning and assessment strategies, as teachers can contextualize their learning within their specific school environments (Montud, 2025).

This collaborative culture is further strengthened by a robust Coaching and Mentoring framework that bridges the gap between seasoned educators and new hires. The induction of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) has provided a standardized language for these interactions, allowing Master Teachers to provide more targeted, evidence-based feedback during classroom observations and post-conference sessions (Prudente et al., 2024). This structural shift has moved the profession away from isolated teaching toward a collective responsibility for learner outcomes. As teachers collaboratively analyze student data and share "best-fit" interventions, their collective efficacy increases, leading to more resilient school cultures capable of adapting to systemic changes like the MATATAG Curriculum rollout (Villaver et al., 2024).

#### *Digital Transformation and Accessibility*

The digital transformation of DepEd Professional Development (PD) programs has shifted the landscape from exclusive, site-based training to a flexible, technology-driven ecosystem that ensures equitable access for all educators. This gain is largely attributed to the expansion of the NEAP Professional Development Learning Management System (PD-LMS) and the "Digital Rise" Program, which have bridged the geographic gap between urban centers and "last-mile" schools. Recent policy directives, such as the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program Act (R.A. 12028), have even institutionalized "free access" to these platforms, allowing teachers to engage with training modules without incurring data charges (Department of Education [DepEd], 2025).

This structural change ensures that professional growth is no longer a privilege of those near regional offices but a standard right for every teacher.

Moreover, the integration of advanced digital tools like Google Education Plus has moved PD beyond basic literacy toward a culture of high-level productivity and innovation. Through partnerships formalized in early 2025, over one million teaching and non-teaching personnel gained access to advanced collaboration tools, including AI-powered teaching assistants and automated grading systems (DepEd, 2025). This "digital upskilling" is not merely about using software but is strategically linked to the 5-Point Reform Agenda, which prioritizes the modernization of education management and governance. As teachers become more proficient in these digital spaces, the department has observed a significant gain in "digital maturity," where educators are now capable of blending physical and virtual instructional methods to meet the diverse needs of 21st-century learners (ResearchGate, 2025; Villaver et al., 2024).

***Gaps in the Implementation of DepEd's PD Programs*** - Gaps and challenges exist in DepEd's professional development (PD) programs despite efforts to improve them. This paper classified these issues under four categories: 1.) Ineffective PD Content and Delivery, 2.) Limited Teacher-Related and Support Factors, 3.) Curriculum Structural Constraints, and 4.) Inadequate Technology Integration.

#### *Ineffective PD Content and Delivery*

In the Philippine Education System, a common criticism is the lack of context-specificity and the prevalence of a "one-size-fits-all" model for in-service training, which fails to adequately address the diverse needs and competency gaps of teachers across different regions, grade levels, and subject areas (Prudente et al., 2024; Cruz, 2020). Also, the delivery models become ineffective because of the traditional "cascade training model" (where central office trainers train regional trainers who then train division trainers, and so on). This is critiqued for its potential to dilute content and reduce fidelity of implementation at the school level (DepEd, 2016; Cruz, 2020). Teachers, meanwhile, report that the professional development programs offered are not directly aligned with their current instructional needs, subject specialization, or specific classroom challenges, leading to low motivation and limited applicability of learning (Morales & Matriano, 2023).

#### *Limited Teacher-Related and Support Factors*

The inconsistent or insufficient support from school leaders and a lack of adequate coaching and mentorship for teachers, particularly for novice teachers, compromise the application of newly acquired skills in the classroom (Cruz, 2020; Morales, 2023). On the other hand, there are some teachers who exhibit a lack of motivation or resistance to adopting new practices, especially when the training is perceived as irrelevant, outdated, or generic (Ulla, 2018; Cruz & Hernandez, 2023). Unfortunately, the combined stress from heavy workload and the pressure to engage in PD activities sometimes leads to health issues and burnout among teachers (Pasiague & Maguate, 2023).

#### *Curriculum Structural Constraints*

Heavy workload and time constraints are consistently reported as the biggest hurdle brought about by the curriculum structure. Teachers face an excessive burden of non-teaching and ancillary tasks, administrative duties, and overlapping responsibilities, which severely limit the time available for them to engage in sustained PD activities, conduct action research, or participate in school-based Learning Action Cells (LACs) (Prudente et al., 2024; Pasiague & Maguate, 2023). While the Learning Action Cell (LAC) framework is a recognized model for collaborative, job-embedded PD, its implementation is often inconsistent, with many schools failing to hold the recommended monthly sessions due to time and workload pressures (Morales & Matriano, 2023; Cruz, 2020). Likewise, there is a continuous challenge in establishing a robust system for monitoring, evaluation, and quality assurance that effectively links PD outcomes to changes in teaching practices and improvements in student learning outcomes (Prudente et al., 2024). Moreover, Inadequate resources, including limited or poor internet access

(especially for online PD), limited budget utilization for training, and financial constraints for teachers (in terms of cost/travel for non-DepEd PD), hinder participation and effectiveness (Prudente et al., 2024; DepEd, 2016).

#### *Inadequate Technology Integration*

Technology integration, particularly in the Philippine context, has been a central focus of DepEd policies like the Digital Rise Program and the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), which explicitly include the use of ICT. However, the implementation gaps in the Department of Education (DepEd) Professional Development (PD) programs for technology integration often arise from the disconnect between well-intentioned policy and the challenging realities on the ground. These challenges include Infrastructural issues, Pedagogical gaps, and Programmatic failures. The implementation of PD Programs often fails due to persistent infrastructural issues. Many schools, especially those in geographically isolated and disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs), lack functional, up-to-date hardware. The student-to-computer ratio remains high, hindering regular student practice (Rosales (2021); Espinosa et al. (2025)). Unreliable or non-existent internet access and power outages in remote areas make the use of online PD platforms (like the DLMS) and digital tools in the classroom unfeasible. Baticulon et al. (2020). Schools often lack trained technical staff and funds for maintenance. Equipment breaks down and remains unusable, effectively wasting prior investments (Baticulon et al 2020).

The Pedagogical Gap in the implementation of DepEd PD Programs arises when the learned skills are not being applied or are inapplicable to teaching strategies. While DepEd PD aims for technology integration, the training frequently stops at basic digital literacy, leaving a significant gap in translating technical skills into improved teaching practices. PD often focuses on basic proficiency (e.g., using MS Office, Google Meet) rather than developing Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK)—how to use technology to fundamentally improve how a specific subject is taught Rosales (2021); Moreover, older teachers (sexagenarians) and those with low initial digital literacy face unique physical and psychological limitations in adapting to rapid shifts toward online PD and digital platforms, creating a significant age-related skills gap. Toquero (2020).

Programmatic failures include a lack of follow-up and mentorship. PD is often conducted as one-off workshops or short events. There is inadequate provision for ongoing, job-embedded support, coaching, and peer mentoring required for mastery and sustained change. Ertmer (2005); The "Cascade Model" was found to be inefficient. Relying heavily on the cascade training model (from national trainers down to school-level trainers) frequently results in the "watered-down quality" of content and reduced fidelity of implementation. De Dios (2016). Also, the heavy workloads of Teachers limit their time and capacity to fully engage in continuous PD, reflect on new practices, and redesign lessons to integrate technology effectively. Prudente et al. (2024)

***Coping Mechanisms and Best Practices*** - Teachers in the Department of Education (DepEd) employ a range of behavioral, psychological, and collaborative strategies to cope with challenges in Professional Development (PD) programs, which often stem from heavy administrative workload, time constraints, and misalignment of training. As a Department, DepEd addresses challenges by implementing tailored interventions and support networks. Key strategies include enhancing professional development programs, addressing funding gaps, supporting teachers, and promoting a culture of lifelong learning.

#### *Alternative and Innovative PD Programs*

Several studies show that teachers are more likely to engage in programs and interventions on professional development when these have “direct positive impact on their students’ learning” (Dicediqui et al., 2023; Resto & Loquia, 2018 in Prudente et al., 2024). With this, some PD content and delivery become ineffective when they are delivered in the “one-size-fits-all” approaches, and thus perceived as irrelevant to teachers’ classroom needs, students’ learning, and the realities in the classroom. Teachers deal with this by actively seeking out and participating in alternative, relevant PD outside DepEd mandates, such as non-DepEd seminars, online courses, and graduate studies. They also conduct instructional research to gain deep subject knowledge and find effective teaching methods lacking in the PD (Agcaoili & Ocampo, 2023; Jomoad et al., 2021) When PD is generic, teachers

cope by localizing and contextualizing the lessons and materials to meet the specific cultural and learning needs of their diverse students. This involves refining the content from the training to make it practical (Ghani et al., 2014; Zhou, 2018).

#### *Support and Collaboration Among Teachers*

The effectiveness of Professional Development (PD) is heavily reliant on the support structure surrounding the teachers—including resources, administrative backing, and personal factors like resilience. When these factors are limited, Filipino teachers adopt proactive and highly social coping mechanisms. The most consistently cited coping mechanism is seeking support and collaboration. Teachers rely on colleagues, peers, and mentors to fill resource gaps, share best practices, and gain emotional encouragement. The Learning Action Cell (LAC) structure is a formal manifestation of this coping strategy (De Courcy et al. 2022; Siena, 2022). In recognition of the department's limitation with mass trainings using the cascade method, which does not guarantee professional development, DepEd released DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016, which institutionalized this structure (Siena, 2022). The policy aimed to improve the teaching-learning process that will lead to improved learning outcomes; nurture successful teachers; help teachers support each other towards ongoing improvement of content and pedagogical knowledge, practice, skills, and attitudes; and foster professional collaboration among school heads, teachers, and the community (2022).

Through the LAC, engaging with colleagues and the school community is not just for work, but for social interaction and emotional debriefing, which alleviates stress and maintains a positive outlook despite poor administrative support. (Jomoad et al., 2021). Teachers also engaged in activities that maintain physical, mental, and emotional health (e.g., exercise, hobbies, mindfulness, or spiritual practice) to mitigate the burnout caused by high demands and poor support (Butron, 2021). When PD requires resources (materials, equipment, facilities) that are not provided by the division or school, teachers find ways to create or improvise them. Teachers demonstrate creativity in finding alternative resources, often relying on personal funds or developing improvised and localized materials to bridge the gap between training theory and classroom necessity (Malinao & Miano, 2025). Possessing the values of perseverance and commitment to Profession, teachers draw strength from an innate sense of duty and a strong commitment to their students, allowing them to persevere and absorb the pressure despite limited institutional support (Talidong & Toquero 2020). Teachers practice teamwork by engaging in group efforts to collectively interpret and apply the PD content. This is crucial when the PD delivery is purely theoretical, allowing teachers to practice and refine skills in a safe environment. They provide practical advice, shared teaching materials, and mutual assistance. This peer network serves as a more relevant and sustained form of professional development (Abellana et al., 2023).

#### *Modification and Localization of Curriculum Content*

Curriculum structural constraints in the Department of Education (DepEd) PD programs refer to systemic limitations like misaligned training to curriculum needs, frequent curriculum changes (e.g., K-12, MATATAG), and issues with curriculum content knowledge gaps. Teachers must cope when the PD provided does not adequately prepare them for the demands of the actual curriculum they must implement. Teachers actively take steps to modify and localize the curriculum on their own when the PD content is too generic, or the new curriculum materials are abstract or insufficient. Teachers actively modify the curriculum content and teaching strategies learned in PD to be relevant and aligned with the local context, culture, and the specific needs of their students. This bridges the gap between generic national training and classroom realities (Ghani et al. 2014). The lack of ready-made teaching guides and instructional materials for new or changing curricula urges teachers to demonstrate resourcefulness by creating their own materials and innovating teaching approaches. (Malinao & Miano, 2025). A strong, supportive alliance to distribute the cognitive load of understanding and implementing new curriculum mandates is also a good coping mechanism. This shared responsibility helps manage the stress of constant change. (Talidong & Toquero, 2020). Teachers draw on their commitment to the profession and their students as the primary motivators to persevere through the difficulty of implementing poorly supported

curriculum changes. (Tizon, 2020). Accepting the reality of curriculum changes and limited PD quality, and then using flexible coping mechanisms to quickly adapt teaching methods, rather than resisting the mandatory structure. (Gupta, 2022).

#### *Self-Directed Learning, Peer/Community Collaboration, and Instructional Adaptation*

Coping mechanisms for inadequate technology integration in Department of Education (DepEd) Professional Development (PD) programs generally fall into three categories: Self-Directed Learning, Peer/Community Collaboration, and Instructional Adaptation. These strategies are employed by teachers to bridge the gap between insufficient institutional support and the necessity of using technology in 21st-century classrooms. Self-Directed Learning strategies are individual efforts driven by the teacher's motivation to overcome personal and institutional barriers. Teachers actively seek and utilize free, accessible online resources like YouTube tutorials, webinars, and open-source educational software (e.g., Canva, Google Workspace tools) to develop ICT skills neglected in formal PD. Alpuerto (2022) found that teachers' coping mechanisms included self-training and support, utilizing external resources to compensate for internal gaps. Maintaining a positive outlook, focusing on their passion for teaching, and a sense of duty fulfillment to push past technological difficulties and stress. Robosa et al. (2021) noted that public school teachers cope by cultivating good communication and understanding, and drawing on passion and duty fulfillment.

Peer and Collaborative Strategies mechanisms involve leveraging the school and community ecosystem for support and knowledge sharing. It is advantageous to seek help from tech-savvy colleagues, ICT coordinators, or younger teachers for hands-on guidance, troubleshooting, and learning specific applications. Alpuerto (2022) identified collaboration with colleagues and knowledgeable others as a core coping mechanism for ICT integration challenges. Moreover, utilizing SLAC sessions for contextualized, hands-on practice, sharing of best practices, and collective problem-solving among immediate peers, making up for generic DepEd training was found to be effective. The use of School-based Learning Action Cell for professional development and technology sharing is a common practice highlighted as an intervention strategy in various studies (Antiola & Ferenal, 2024). Studies consistently recommend that school administrators provide resource allocation, infrastructure support, and continuous professional development as solutions to teacher challenges.

Instructional Adaptation Strategies involve modifying teaching methods to mize reliance on non-existent or unreliable technology. Creating and employing print-based modules, traditional visual aids, and face-to-face activities when internet connectivity or school equipment fails is still a basic yet effective strategy. The need for adaptation is an underlying theme in findings that reveal poor internet connectivity, lack of devices, and inadequate school resources as major barriers. Creative Integration of available tools by using the few available technologies like a personal smartphone, a single functioning projector, or basic office software in innovative ways rather than attempting to use the complex, high-tech tools covered in inadequate training is also one way of addressing inadequate technology integration. Educators have their innovative strategies and commitment to deliver quality education through technology, even with limited resources.

#### **4. Recommendations to Address the Gaps in Program Implementation**

To enable optimal engagement and derive maximum benefits for teachers, education officials, and school leaders need to consider implementing several key strategies. First, consider establishing a robust training needs assessment system that strategically identifies areas requiring improvement for teachers within each school. This assessment would not only guide teachers on which professional development (PD) programs to attend but also ensure that the PD initiatives align with specific school needs. Second, although DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017 acknowledges the importance of 21st-century skills within Domain 1, encompassing the 4Cs of learning and innovation skills, as well as Domain 7, which underscores the life and career skills expected from teachers, it does not provide specific strategies or methodologies for educators to effectively achieve and incorporate these expected standards into their teaching practices. Hence, providing specific strategies or methodologies for educators is

deemed important. It is also crucial to integrate engagement in professional development as an integral part of the teacher's workload and schedule. This integration not only emphasizes the importance of continuous learning but also ensures that teachers have dedicated time for their professional growth.

Furthermore, advocating for and allocating sufficient resources to support teacher participation in PD programs is essential. These resources could include funding, time allocation, and access to relevant materials and resources. As per DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2021 and titled "Multi-Year Implementing Guidelines on the Allocation and Utilization of the Human Resource Development Fund for Teachers and School Leaders," it is indicated that among the permissible expenses, coverage includes board and lodging for participants, along with their transportation costs and per diem. However, the findings of this study reveal that teachers have reported personally bearing the expenses associated with transportation and per diem when attending PD programs. It is of utmost importance, therefore, to reinforce support mechanisms and allocate adequate resources to facilitate teachers' participation in PD initiatives.

Lastly, there should be a clear priority on teacher PD activities that directly contribute to enhancing student learning outcomes. This prioritization ensures that PD initiatives are directly linked to improving the quality of education in the classroom. According to RA 10533, the NEAP will provide the subjects for PD programs. And according to DepEd Order No. 1, s. 2020 and DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, some topics are being prioritized including 21st-century skills. DepEd's policies regarding professional development (PD) programs are well-structured and comprehensive. Nonetheless, the review reveals disparities in the evaluation approaches employed by different schools and divisions, despite DepEd's clear designation of the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP) as the entity responsible for monitoring and evaluating these programs at the national level. It is essential to emphasize that the content discussed in these PD programs should be contextually relevant to the needs of local teachers and students. Therefore, while NEAP is responsible for shaping the national agenda for PD topics, it needs to consider maintaining flexibility to cater to the specific requirements and circumstances of teachers and students at the local level. In this scenario, it becomes crucial for the NEAP to undertake research to identify the specific needs and requirements at the local level regarding a particular topic intended for inclusion in the PD programs.

Recognizing the significant impact of professional development on teacher quality, program developers and policymakers should consider specific actions. First, they need to critically review the prevailing one-size-fits-all approach to in-service teacher training, which often characterizes many existing PD programs. Instead, a more tailored and flexible approach should be adopted. For instance, instructional coaching can be implemented where a trained teacher expert works closely with another teacher in improving his practices by adapting specific teaching approaches. Recent literature suggests that instructional coaching can yield beneficial effects on both teachers and learners, particularly in teacher self-efficacy, improved student achievement and enhanced teacher retention (*Flatt, 2020; Jacobs et al., 2018*). PD activities should adhere to a bottom-up approach to allow teachers to plan their professional development and address specific needs and challenges in their classrooms, making the professional development more relevant and effective (*Ousseini, 2018; Wyatt & Ager, 2017*). Furthermore, a focus on PD programs that utilize a multi-tiered approach to develop intermediate and specialized teaching competencies, particularly in areas where learners are facing significant learning gaps and poor performance, is imperative. Revisiting the design of teacher workloads to incorporate PD activities as part of noncontact or discretionary time can help teachers balance their responsibilities effectively. Lastly, expanding access to quality PD programs ensures that a broader spectrum of educators can benefit from these initiatives, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of education across schools and districts.

## 5. Conclusion

This systematic review reveals that professional development in the Department of Education has progressed from isolated activities toward more structured, standards-based, and career-linked systems. The transition toward competency-driven frameworks, strengthened institutional mechanisms, and alignment with curriculum reforms

reflects a growing recognition that teacher development is not an optional add-on but a central element of educational quality. Gains are evident in clearer policy direction, improved access to training, stronger collaborative professional cultures, and increasing teacher confidence in implementing new pedagogies and curricula. However, alongside these achievements remain persistent and systemic gaps. Implementation continues to be uneven, with issues such as limited resources, technological constraints, workload demands, and inconsistent monitoring reducing the impact of professional development programs. Opportunities for advancement exist, but not all teachers experience them equitably. Systems and structures are present, yet mechanisms that ensure continuity, coherence, and sustained support across the entire span of a teacher's career are still emerging. These gaps highlight that professional development is not only a technical concern but also a human, organizational, and cultural one.

The review suggests that professional development works best when it is context-responsive, teacher-centered, collaborative, and sustained over time. Teachers thrive not only when they are trained, but when they are supported, mentored, trusted, and provided with opportunities to apply new learning in authentic classroom contexts. Professional development becomes transformative when it moves beyond compliance and credits, and instead nurtures reflective practice, professional identity, and collective responsibility for learner success. The findings therefore, point to a clear imperative: professional development must be designed as a continuous, career-long journey rather than episodic training events. Systems need to coordinate policy, school leadership, resources, and teacher agency so that gains are not fragmented but cumulative. The presence of structural frameworks is encouraging, but the real test lies in how these translate into everyday classroom realities and improved learning outcomes for all students.

In conclusion, although DepEd's Professional Development (PD) programs are vision-driven and aligned with policies, their implementation remains fragmented and inconsistent. A comprehensive, coherent, and life-long PD system that aligns with professional standards, is based on collaborative and ongoing learning models, ensures digital inclusion, and prioritizes teacher well-being is essential. Such a system is crucial for strengthening teacher competence, improving instructional quality, and ultimately enhancing student learning outcomes in the Philippines. Such is the system that not only supports teachers throughout their careers, but throughout their lives and their students'.

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