

Understanding the Professional Development Journeys of Social Studies Teachers: A Phenomenological Exploration

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ABSTRACT

Teacher professional development played a pivotal role in enhancing instructional quality and student learning outcomes. This study, titled *Understanding the Professional Development Journeys of Social Studies Teachers: A Phenomenological Exploration*, investigated the lived experiences of Social Studies educators as they navigated professional growth, challenges, and opportunities in their careers. Grounded in a phenomenological approach, the research captured the perspectives of educators through in-depth qualitative analysis, unveiling the transformative impact of professional development initiatives on pedagogical strategies, adaptability to educational reforms, and overall teaching efficacy. The findings highlighted key themes, including engagement in diverse training programs, institutional support, and the integration of innovative teaching methodologies. Teachers expressed that participation in inquiry-based learning workshops, culturally responsive pedagogy training, and alternative learning systems significantly enhanced their instructional practices. However, challenges such as limited access to specialized training and misalignment with subject-specific needs persisted. Despite these hurdles, the study revealed the resilience and commitment of Social Studies educators in refining their craft and fostering dynamic classroom environments. The implications of this research underscored the necessity for targeted professional development programs tailored to the evolving needs of Social Studies teachers. By addressing institutional gaps and leveraging collaborative learning communities, educational policymakers and administrators may create a sustainable framework for teacher growth. This study contributed to the discourse on teacher professionalization and offered insights into the continuous improvement of instructional practices in Social Studies education.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Social Studies teachers embarked on complex professional development journeys filled with both challenges and moments of growth. These experiences often remained untold, yet they shaped how educators adapted to changes, enhanced their instructional practices, and responded to student needs. In their pursuit of effective teaching strategies, many teachers navigated evolving education landscapes without adequate support. Their lived experiences offered deep insights into how professional development unfolded in real-world classroom contexts.

Globally, teacher professional development had been regarded as a critical component of improving educational quality and student achievement. However, many educators faced obstacles such as financial limitations, lack of time, and weak institutional support (OECD, 2019). In developing countries, these constraints were magnified, resulting in unequal access to professional training and inconsistent teaching quality (UNESCO, 2023). As education systems evolved, the need for accessible and context-sensitive professional development became even more urgent (Guskey, 2021).

In the Philippines, teacher development initiatives such as Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, in-service training (INSET), and scholarships were implemented to improve teacher competencies (DepEd, 2017). Nevertheless, many teachers struggled with outdated instructional approaches, limited access to high-quality training, and weak mentoring systems (PIDS, 2022). Professional development offerings were often generic and failed to address subject-specific needs, particularly for Social Studies educators (PIDS, 2022). These issues highlighted the need for tailored training programs grounded in the actual classroom experiences of teachers.

At the local level, Social Studies teachers in rural and underprivileged areas encountered even more severe barriers to professional growth. They managed large class sizes, lacked access to modern pedagogies, and had insufficient teaching materials (Sagun-Ongtangco, 2021). In conflict-affected regions such as Mindanao, teachers prioritized school safety and basic classroom survival over professional development (Ogena & Berbosco, 2019). Moreover, educators working in alternative learning systems found it difficult to access training programs that matched their unique instructional contexts (Acosta & Acosta, 2020).

Despite the recognized need for teacher development, limited research explored the personal and professional journeys of Social Studies teachers. Most existing studies focused on measuring the outcomes of training programs rather than capturing how teachers experienced their growth over time (Avalos, 2011). The lack of qualitative, phenomenological investigations left a gap in understanding the human and institutional dynamics that shaped teacher development (Vagle, 2018). Bridging this gap required listening to teachers' voices to uncover how their aspirations and struggles intertwined with systemic challenges.

This study aimed to shed light on how Social Studies teachers navigated their development journeys within their unique institutional contexts. It sought to uncover not only the catalysts for growth but also the barriers they had overcome and the strategies they employed. Findings from this research would inform more responsive and relevant professional development frameworks for educators (Kennedy, 2016). Ultimately, this study intended to contribute to closing the gap between teacher training policies and the lived realities of those they were meant to serve.

Theoretical Lens

This study draws from four key theories: Knowles' Adult Learning Theory, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, and Lave and Wenger's Situated Learning Theory. Together, these provide a lens through which to understand the self-directed, socially situated, and reflective nature of teacher development.

These four theories—Adult Learning Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, Transformative Learning Theory, and Situated Learning Theory—serve as essential lenses through which the lived experiences of Social Studies teachers can be better understood. When viewed through a phenomenological lens, particularly within the framework of Transcendental Phenomenology, these theories illuminate how teachers make sense of their professional development journeys. They underscore the subjective nature of learning as a deeply personal and reflective process, shaped by internal motivation, social interaction, transformative insight, and real-world contexts. By grounding the study in these theories, this research recognizes that professional development is not only a process of skill acquisition, but also a lived experience that unfolds uniquely within each teacher's lifeworld.

Research Questions

The goal of this study was to explore and understand how Social Studies teachers developed professionally through a phenomenological lens. Specifically, it attempted to address the following research questions:

1. What is the lifeworld of social studies teachers when engaging in professional development?
2. What are the contexts that shape the lived experiences of Social Studies teachers in professional development?
3. How do Social Studies teachers view themselves in the future regarding professional development?

Significance of the Study

This research informs policymakers, school leaders, and PD providers by highlighting how systemic and personal factors affect teacher growth. It underscores the importance of responsive PD design and elevates the voices of educators as co-constructors of their development.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature emphasizes that the **lifeworld** of Social Studies teachers is shaped by their **subjective personal experiences**, deeply influenced by **professional development (PD)**. Scholars like Husserl (1931) and Heidegger (1962) define this as the **lived reality** of individuals, while van Manen (1990) points out its impact on **professional identity**. Social Studies educators, working across multiple disciplines, require PD that reflects these complexities (Kennedy, 2016).

Effective PD, as noted by Desimone (2009), should include **content focus, active learning, coherence, and sustained collaboration**. However, many Social Studies teachers experience **isolation in their PD journey** due to **limited institutional support** (Pascua & Tarrayo, 2021). National initiatives often fall short, as **programs are neither continuous nor highly applicable** (Luz, 2020), prompting teachers to pursue **self-directed learning and informal networks** (Magno, 2021).

Various **contexts** influence PD engagement, including **institutional support, financial resources, geographical location, and cultural expectations** (Schleicher, 2018). Teachers in **rural areas** face **logistical barriers** (Magno, 2021), while **technology's potential** is hampered by **poor infrastructure and connectivity** (OECD, 2019). Culturally, teachers are expected to be **self-sufficient learners**, though transformative learning requires **critical reflection and mentorship** (Mezirow, 1991).

Teachers' **future perspectives** on PD depend on **career aspirations and relevant opportunities**. PD is a **route to career progress and professional aptitude** (Mizell, 2010). Educators who find PD **useful and directly related** to teaching are more motivated (Bautista et al., 2017), while those facing **theoretical and rigid sessions** develop **negative attitudes** (Kennedy, 2016). Despite this, many remain optimistic, driven by **reflective practice and collaboration** (Mezirow, 1991).

In synthesis, while Social Studies teachers understand the value of PD, their **access remains constrained by systemic limitations**. Their **professional growth is often self-driven**, and **contextual factors**—both personal and institutional—greatly affect their ability to engage in meaningful PD. The chapter highlights a critical need for **rigorous, relevant, and inclusive PD programs** that **address instructional needs and foster transformative learning**.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used transcendental phenomenology, focusing on teachers' subjective interpretations and bracketing the researcher's biases through epoche.

Participants and Locale

Ten Social Studies teachers from four public secondary schools in Lutayan, Sultan Kudarat was purposively selected. All had three or more years of teaching experience and active participation in PD.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used. Questions were validated by experts, and interviews were recorded with consent. Member checking and reflexivity ensured accuracy and authenticity.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach. Themes were derived from verbatim transcripts and organized to reflect the essence of participant experiences.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Emerging Themes on the Lifeworld of Social Studies Teachers Engaging in Professional Development

Six emerging themes were identified depicting the lived experience of the Social Studies teachers in the professional development journey through in-depth analysis and interpretation of data. They are: Participating in Different Professional Development Activities, Reporting Transformative and Innovative Features of PD, Completing an Emotional and Reflective PD Journey, Applying PD Impact into classroom practices, Seeing Value in Meaningful and Contextual PD Content, and Faced with Barriers to PD Engagement. In short, these themes offer a rich insight into the views from teachers, internal causes stopping them achieving their full potential, and allow for a determination of their dedication toward the ability to grow professionally (Desimone, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al. (2017); OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2023).

Emerging Theme 1: Engaging in Diverse Professional Development Activities

As a social studies educator, social studies teachers engage in a variety of professional development activities that include training workshops, training programs, and conferences on culturally responsive teaching, inquiry-based learning, as well as modern instructional strategies. They go on to refine their instructional approaches and use contemporary teaching methodologies.

PD is clearly known to have had an effect on all ten participants, especially in terms of familiarizing oneself with alternative learning systems, critical media literacy and student-centered methodologies incorporated in the teaching styles. Regional and national training of exposure to modern educational trends, and training programs helped them with the trend of bringing modern techniques of pedagogic into their classrooms.

This is in line with Desimone (2009), and Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) argued that participation in heterogeneous PD programs improves the teachers' adaptability and instruction. In addition, the idea of self-directed and experience-based learning resonated with the Adult Learning Theory of Knowle's (1980), therefore adults can learn from being in direct control and also from their experiences.

Keeping these insights in mind, schools must also take the chance to broaden access to localized and specialized PD programs. Financial support and flexible scheduling can offer the chance of institutional support to the teachers to grow both professionally and in the aspect of instructional competencies.

Emerging Theme 2: Noticing Transformative and Innovative PD Features

It highlighted transformational aspects of PD including the work towards culturally inclusion and inquiry-based approaches in teaching. The majority observed that the PD sessions on fact check, media bias analysis a citizenship education had greatly widened their understanding in the present Social Studies instruction.

The impact of innovative PD methodologies on their teaching practices was perceived by nine out of ten participants. During training, they had hands-on, student-centered learning experiences that gave them practical use for creating fun classroom environments. As opposed to traditional lecture-based training, interactive discussions and case studies had a longer lasting effect than just the lecture-based training.

This aligns with Kennedy (2016) who suggested that immersive and transformative PD experiences give teachers the tools to teach student center learning. Mezirow's (1991) Transformative Learning Theory further added that PD can play a significant role in the professional growth of teachers where they undergo paradigm shifts, due to critical reflection.

For maximum result of transforming PD, schools should promote training programs aiming at interactive real-world applications. This author argues that Social Studies teachers facilitate experiential and reflective learning experiences that contribute to both the short- and long-term professional development of these teachers.

Theme 3: Experiencing an Emotional and Reflective PD Journey

The PD was emotionally enriching and intellectually stimulating as the teachers expressed. However, they faced challenges like time constraints, financial limitations and applicability problems, yet they maintained their enthusiasm to make the use of new strategies and continue thinking back their learning experiences.

All the participants stressed that the role of self-reflection was integral to their PD journey. This helped them to reflect on instructional strengths, weaknesses and ways to bring in the learned concept in their classroom settings through strategizing.

These findings also can be aligned with Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory and Boud et al. (2013) who suggested that structured self-reflection leads to better long-term retention and adaptability. Apparently, professional growth is actually made via active participation in professional communities, and this is supported by Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory.

Structuring post PD mentorship programs, peer discussions and reflection sessions within the institution can help to develop a culture of continuous reflection. As Social Studies teachers embarking on these kinds of endeavors can find ways to maximize the payoff from their professional learning experiences.

Emerging Theme 4: Implementing PD Impact in Classroom Practices

PD participation was reported to have led to substantial improvements in the instructional methods used by teachers, especially in student centered methods such as inquiry-based instruction, gamification, debates, critical media literacy activities.

Eight out of ten said that PD on culturally responsive and interactive teaching strategies had a great impact in lesson planning and classroom engagement techniques. According to teachers, they began leaving behind lecture based traditional teaching environment in favor of a discussion based and real-world application-based methods.

As Guskey (2002) stressed, teachers who are committed to PD implementation had higher student engagement and retention rates (Chapter 2). Opfer and Pedder (2011) also argued that school policies should underpin PD so that classroom integration is in fact effective.

If classrooms are to be made lasting, then PD is needed for ongoing coaching, lesson demonstrations, and group lesson planning. These support systems can be used to sustain the implementation of PD insights into Social Studies teachers' teaching practices.

Emerging Theme 5: Valuing Meaningful and Contextual PD Content

PD content was discussed to be contextually relevant and practically applicable to the particular teaching environment of the respective teacher. They preferred the programs dealing with real world challenges that occur in many classrooms, as opposed to the generic theoretical sessions.

Further PD content was discussed to be contextually relevant and practically applicable to the special teaching environment of the respective teacher. The programs which dealt with the challenges in the real world that are prevalent in many of the classrooms were the ones which they preferred rather than the generic theoretical sessions.

These findings are consistent with Shulman (1987) that, subject specific PD, has been shown to improve instructional effectiveness. In addition, Timperley et al. (2007) reported that PD is more implemented by teachers when it specifically addresses their classroom realities.

Social Studies teachers' need to undertake the training programs have to be matched with the training programs customized to their instructional need to guarantee meaningful PD engagement. By offering localized, culturally relevant methodologies, maximum effectiveness and applicability of PD sessions is possible.

Emerging Theme 6: Encountering Barriers in PD Engagement

While teachers identified multiple challenges preventing them from attending PD, such as heavy workloads and administrative responsibilities, lack of financial resources for PD participation and access to specialized PD programs, and a lack of localized PD opportunities which aligned with Social Studies curricula, these challenges were felt only superficially.

All participants acknowledged that these obstacles often blocked PD engagement that amounted to anything. However, their attempts to keep up with professional growth were affected by these challenges and they found other means to pursue it like online courses, peer collaboration, and self-research.

These are also in line with Opfer & Pedder (2011), who argued that institutional constraints often constrain teachers to participate in PD. Kennedy (2014) also highlighted that PD has to contend with financial and time related barriers to provide an accessible option.

These barriers can be mitigated by looking at flexible PD model such as online learning, government-funded initiative, hybrid training programs among many other things. These structural issues can help more teachers have access to continuous learning opportunities.

Emerging Themes on Contextual Factors Shaping Social Studies Teachers' PD Experiences

Through in-depth data analysis and interpretation, five emerging themes were identified, reflecting the contextual factors that shape Social Studies teachers' professional development (PD) experiences. These themes are: Institutional and Organizational Contexts, Workload and Scheduling Constraints, Financial Constraints, Relevance and Accessibility of PD Programs, and Goal-Driven PD Engagement. Each theme provides valuable insights into how various external and internal factors influence teachers' participation in professional learning opportunities, highlighting areas for improvement and support.

Emerging Theme 1: Institutional and Organizational Contexts

The institutional and organizational environment was considered to have a strong impact on teachers' engagement in professional development (PD), as they were highlighted. Their ability to participate in and benefit from training programs is directly related to the school policies, administrative support and access to structured PD opportunities.

Seven out of ten participants drew attention to the fact that supportive school leadership along with the well-defined PD frameworks inspired them to participate in continuous learning. However, some pointed out other obstacles including bureaucratic constraints, lack of funding and lack of institutional encouragement to their PD engagement. Some teachers signaled that whilst there were available PD opportunities, these were not always directed to their particular instructional needs and thus it was tough to put ideas in place.

This finding is comparable to what Opfer and Pedder (2011) painted that organizational culture and school policies had a strong impact on teachers' professional learning. Also, Desimone (2009) noted that PD programs have the most impact when schools provide structured, ongoing and contextually relevant training opportunities.

Institutions should, therefore, put a greater emphasis in structured PD initiatives that supplement teachers' subjects areas. Support can be given for PD participation through creating clear policy, allocating money for training, and creating a culture of professional learning.

Emerging Theme 2: Workload and Scheduling Constraints

The major barrier to teachers' PD participation was heavy workloads and scheduling conflicts. Teaching responsibilities, administrative tasks and extracurricular commitments took such time away from them that they rarely had a chance to seek out professional learning opportunities.

Eight out of ten participants described problems balancing the instructional duties along with PD attendance, namely when the PD sessions took place during school hours or involved long travels. Some also said that last minute schedule change, as well as lack of substitute teachers, had limited their abilities to participate in different kinds of external PD activities.

This is in agreement with Kennedy (2014), who discovered that time constraints was one of the most valuable hindrances for the tradition of teachers with continuous professional development. Avalos (2011) made a similar point, that schools should also provide flexible PD in the form of online courses or after school workshops because of teachers' high demands schedule.

The result of which is highlight the need for more flexible as well as accessible PD model that can be aligned to teachers' busy schedule. For that reason, blended learning approaches in the school should be implemented, asynchronous training modules should be created and days off for professional growth should be designated so that teachers can participate actively in professional growth without compromising their instructional responsibilities.

Emerging Theme 3: Financial Constraints

A second barrier to the engagement in PD was financial limitations. Registration fees, travel expenses, material costs, were major obstacles cited by many teachers in relation to being able to attend specialized PD programs, national conferences and certification courses.

As school funding for the training was either insufficient or non-existent, seven out of the ten participants were often forced to bear personal expenses for PD. Still, many teachers complained of having received often in more limited measure financial support to the detriment of shared Social Studies teachers of their opportunities to develop professionally.

This is in line with what Borko highlighted in 2004, that financial constraints often determine what teachers can access a to high quality PD opportunities. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) also noted that school systems needed to devote specific budgets for teacher development so training will be available for all.

The findings suggest that schools and education departments should either seek alternative funding sources such as government grants, sponsorships and public private partnerships or look for alternative ways of funding the costs of PD as it stands. Other ways of preventing financial barriers from blocking teachers' paths to valuable professional learning can be put into practice through implementing scholarship programs and travel stipends.

Emerging Theme 4: Relevance and Accessibility of PD Programs

The teachers highlighted that availability and relevance of PD content impacted their willingness to join training to a great extent. Some of them comment on the fact that there were PD opportunities available, but they were left wanting because they were too general, outdated, or even not applicable to Social Studies instruction.

Out of ten, six are frustrated with PD programs that are lacking direct classroom application with a generic teaching strategy that does not address their specific needs. Accessibility was also noted as a challenge as others pointed that high quality PD programs were held in far off places.

These findings are consistent with Shulman (1987), who stressed that programs such as PD must be specifically framed to take into account teachers' content areas. Similarly, Timperley et al. (2007) state that teachers are more likely to participate in PD if it addresses the realities of their teaching environment directly.

The findings point towards the necessity of the development of targeted, subject-specific PD programs designed specifically for the purpose of alleviating Social Studies instruction specific challenges. Local, tailor-made PD terms, such as on-site opportunity in the schools and from virtual training platform, should be considered by schools and education agencies so that teachers may gain access to good quality learning experiences.

Emerging Theme 5: Goal-Driven PD Engagement

Teachers' participation in PD was also influenced by their own personal goals, career goals, and intrinsic motivation to further their professional growth. PD opportunities were sought by many teachers to enhance their effectiveness in teaching; for others, the training was for helping them meet certification and provide them an ample opportunity for career advancement.

Eight out of ten participants stated that they went looking for PD opportunities that meet the related to wants in their own and their organization's personal and professional growth plans. A few claimed that self-initiated learning, peer collaboration, and participating in online courses were able to keep them in touch with new twists and turns of Social Studies learning.

This finding concords with Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000) that teachers are more prone to commit in professional development when they feel personal benefit and opportunities for career development.

This would imply that schools need to correlate PD opportunities with teachers' career path and professional development needs. Making continuous learning more rewarding for teachers can be done by expanding certifications-based PD programs and mentorship opportunities as well as by supporting structured career development paths.

Emerging Themes on the Future Self-Perceptions of Social Studies Teachers Regarding Professional Development

Through an in-depth analysis of the qualitative data, five emerging themes were identified, synthesizing the clustered themes related to social studies teachers' future perceptions of professional development (PD). These themes highlight their aspirations, engagement strategies, and challenges regarding continuous learning and improvement. The themes are as follows: Future Identity as an Innovative and Adaptive Educator, PD as Essential for Staying Updated and Evolving, Proactive Planning for Future PD Engagement, Specific, Hands-On, and Contextualized PD Opportunities, and Advocating for Accessible, Tailored, and Flexible PD Programs.

Emerging Theme 1: Future Identity as an Innovative and Adaptive Educator

Social Studies teachers envision themselves as future educators who are innovative and adaptable to changes in pedagogy, technology, and curriculum. They recognize the importance of continuously improving their instructional approaches to meet the evolving needs of students and educational systems.

Eight out of ten participants expressed that their future teaching careers will be shaped by their ability to integrate emerging technologies, inquiry-based strategies, and culturally responsive teaching. They believe that staying innovative will enhance their effectiveness in the classroom and improve student engagement.

This finding aligns with Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which highlights that teachers' beliefs about their ability to adapt and innovate directly impact their teaching efficacy. Additionally, Mezirow (1991) emphasizes that transformative learning occurs when individuals critically reflect and embrace new teaching methodologies.

To support this vision, schools should encourage innovation-driven PD programs that focus on technology integration, critical thinking, and modern instructional design. Providing training in adaptive teaching strategies will help Social Studies teachers maintain their relevance in a constantly changing educational landscape.

Emerging Theme 2: PD as Essential for Staying Updated and Evolving

Teachers recognize that PD is a crucial factor in staying current with evolving educational trends, policies, and subject matter developments. They view ongoing learning as necessary to enhance their professional competencies and maintain instructional effectiveness.

Seven out of ten participants noted that staying updated with curriculum changes, educational policies, and technological advancements is a priority for their career growth. They believe that without continuous PD, they risk falling behind in instructional best practices and student engagement techniques.

This theme is supported by Guskey (2002), who found that teachers who consistently engage in PD report higher confidence and effectiveness in implementing curriculum changes. Similarly, Desimone (2009) highlights that PD programs tailored to emerging trends result in improved teaching outcomes.

Educational institutions should establish structured, ongoing PD programs that provide regular updates on curriculum reforms, policy changes, and innovative teaching methodologies. This ensures that teachers remain informed and prepared for the dynamic nature of education.

Emerging Theme 3: Proactive Planning for Future PD Engagement

Teachers are taking a proactive approach to planning their future PD activities. Many express the need for long-term PD strategies that align with their career goals, allowing them to structure their professional growth more effectively.

Six out of ten participants reported that they actively seek out PD opportunities, including workshops, certification courses, and postgraduate studies. They aim to develop specific expertise in areas such as digital literacy, global citizenship education, and differentiated instruction.

This theme aligns with Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000), which suggests that teachers are more engaged in PD when they perceive it as relevant to their intrinsic and extrinsic career motivations. Additionally, Opfer and Pedder (2011) found that teachers who plan their PD journey experience greater career satisfaction.

Schools and educational bodies should provide structured career progression pathways and mentorship programs that help teachers strategically plan their professional development journey. Offering PD scholarships, certification-based training, and mentorship can further support teachers in achieving their career aspirations.

Emerging Theme 4: Specific, Hands-On, and Contextualized PD Opportunities

Teachers emphasize the need for PD programs that are specific, hands-on, and directly applicable to their classroom contexts. They value PD sessions that provide real-world applications and actionable teaching strategies rather than theoretical discussions.

Nine out of ten participants expressed frustration with generic PD programs that do not address the unique challenges of Social Studies instruction. They prefer PD opportunities that focus on practical teaching methodologies, case-based learning, and experiential training.

This finding is consistent with Shulman (1987), who stressed that PD programs should be content-specific and directly relevant to teachers' subject areas. Similarly, Timperley et al. (2007) found that teachers are more likely to apply PD learnings when they are highly contextualized.

To maximize PD effectiveness, training programs should incorporate classroom simulations, interactive workshops, and mentorship from experienced educators. Schools should prioritize PD models that emphasize hands-on learning and direct application of knowledge.

Emerging Theme 5: Advocating for Accessible, Tailored, and Flexible PD Programs

Teachers advocate for PD programs that are accessible, tailored to their specific needs, and flexible enough to accommodate their busy schedules. They emphasize that PD should be available in various formats, including online, hybrid, and in-person training sessions.

Eight out of ten participants reported that time constraints, financial limitations, and location accessibility impact their ability to participate in PD. They prefer PD models that offer flexible scheduling, online modules, and institution-supported training options.

This theme aligns with Kennedy (2014), who highlighted the importance of flexible PD programs in increasing teacher engagement. Additionally, Avalos (2011) emphasized that accessible PD ensures equitable learning opportunities for all educators.

Educational policymakers and institutions should develop hybrid PD models, financial assistance programs, and localized training opportunities to ensure that all Social Studies teachers have equitable access to high-quality professional learning experiences.

Summary

This study unveiled teachers' experiences and challenges in engaging in professional development for Social Studies instruction, focusing on their perspectives, challenges encountered, strategies employed to overcome these challenges, and support mechanisms. Using a qualitative phenomenological research design, the study utilized semi-structured interviews with Social Studies teachers who provided in-depth insights, which were analyzed using thematic analysis to uncover key themes related to professional development.

The findings on teachers' experiences highlighted six emerging themes: (1) Engaging in Diverse Professional Development Activities, (2) Noticing Transformative and Innovative PD Features, (3) Experiencing an Emotional and Reflective PD Journey, (4) Implementing PD Impact in Classroom Practices, (5) Valuing Meaningful and Contextual PD Content, and (6) Encountering Barriers in PD Engagement. These themes emphasize teachers' dedication to continuous learning, reflective practice, and adaptability in enhancing instructional quality.

Challenges encountered in professional development were categorized into five themes: Institutional and Organizational Contexts, Workload and Scheduling Constraints, Financial Constraints, Relevance and Accessibility of PD Programs, and Goal-Driven PD Engagement. Teachers faced obstacles related to insufficient resources, limited subject-specific training, and balancing Professional Development activities with teaching responsibilities.

To address these challenges, four key strategies emerged: Future Identity as an Innovative and Adaptive Educator, PD as Essential for Staying Updated and Evolving, Proactive Planning for Future PD Engagement, Specific, Hands-On, and Contextualized PD Opportunities, and Advocating for Accessible, Tailored, and Flexible PD Programs. These strategies underscore teachers' resilience, proactive learning, and reliance on peer collaboration to enhance their professional growth.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the study concluded that Social Studies teachers actively pursue professional development opportunities to enhance their instructional competencies. Their engagement in diverse activities and transformative learning experiences contributes to their growth as reflective and adaptive educators. Teachers value hands-on, practical PD content that is directly applicable to their teaching contexts.

However, challenges such as time constraints, financial limitations, and lack of subject-specific training hinder participation in professional development. Institutional support and administrative encouragement play a critical role in facilitating teachers' growth. When adequately supported, teachers are more likely to implement innovative instructional strategies and contribute to student success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Promote Reflective and Experience-Based Professional Development Practices.** Teachers should be allowed to practice such reflections like journaling, pair sharing and post training discussions. Additionally, these can be institutionalized within School Heads, Master Teachers and LAC coordinators through regular LAC sessions, collaborative lesson planning, mentorship programs where teachers get

to internalize and carry out what they learned during Professional Development activities. The strategies are directly pertinent to teachers' everyday lifeworld experiences and offer geared to sustained instructional growth.

2. Enhance Access and Flexibility of PD Opportunities. Programs for PD in rural areas, should be developed by DepEd leaders and support with respect to the geographic and financial considerations. Funding, travel, and provision of school based, modular or online PD formats. Collaboration of school heads and LGUs will facilitate equitable access for teachers and their overcoming the contextual constraints highlighted in the study.
3. Develop Future-Oriented, Subject-Specific PD Programs for Social Studies. Social Studies Professional Development content should also correspond to the current realities in Social Studies instruction (i.e., student critical thinking, technology integration, culturally responsive teaching). Curriculum planners, together with Education Program Supervisor, should be designing hands-on, in current classroom reality and demand on future pedagogical demands, subject specific training which helps teachers develop to become adaptive and innovative educators.
4. Future researchers are encouraged to develop this phenomenological inquiry and understand the comparative professional development experiences from different subject areas, regions or school level. As this study pertains to professional development journey of Social Studies teachers in rural secondary schools in Lutayan, Sultan Kudarat, future studies may consider and examine differences in journeys of other disciplines' teachers (i.e. Science, English) or in other types of settings, such as urban or in higher education. This perspective on comparison could help us identify patterns and differences in how educators experience institutional support, survive contextual barriers, and put to use what you learned during the day in the classroom. Additionally, future researchers may examine the contribution of digital learning platforms, peer mentoring systems, and policy support at the level of policy makers in promoting professional growth in the most under resourced as well as socially isolated contexts. Participatory action research may be an important area of integration of teacher voices into policy discussions and into PD program development. .

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