

Research Article

Affirming Career Stages of Teachers and School Leaders: A Competency-based Path to Growth and Recognition

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Abstract

The operationalization of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), aligned with Republic Act (RA) 11713, s. 2022, which provides a clear competency framework that fosters teachers' professional growth and accountability, while enabling school leaders to effectively support, assess, and recognize teachers in the pursuit of quality education. Affirmation of career stages refers to the certification of accredited assessors recognizing an educator's current career stage based on professional standards. This study aims to explore the affirmation of the career stages process for teachers and school leaders in the Philippines, following the implementation of RA No. 12288, or the Career Progression System for Public School Teachers and School Leaders Act and other relevant Department of Education (DepEd) policies. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study will examine how competency-based affirmation of career stages systems impacts the professional development, career mobility, and motivation of public-school teachers and leaders. Key themes include promotion, professional development, evidence-based assessments, and the institutionalization of the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS). This research will provide insights into how affirmation of career stages processes can be optimized for teacher retention, motivation, and leadership development in public education. Preliminary findings suggest that while the system provides a structured path for career advancement, limited plantilla positions constrain actual promotions, and a rigorous documentary requirement which influences many educators to shift toward administrative roles or remain in their existing positions. Implications emphasize institutional support for career progression independent of administrative transitions and suggest recommendations for continuous professional development aligned with the PPST.

Keywords

Affirmation, Career Stages, Teachers, School Leaders, Philippine Professional Standards, Competency-based Certification, Career Progression, Expanded Career Progression System

1. Introduction

Teacher quality remains the most influential school-based factor affecting student learning outcomes [4, 11, 17].

Consequently, education systems worldwide are transitioning from tenure-based advancement toward competency-

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Received: 12 January 2026; **Accepted:** 27 January 2026; **Published:** 16 March 2026



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based career frameworks anchored on professional standards [1, 8, 10]. These frameworks emphasize observable practice, professional growth, and evidence-based recognition of competence across progressive career stages.

In the Philippines, this global shift is reflected in the institutionalization of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), which aligns teacher competencies with career stages and professional learning pathways [7, 15]. The enactment of Republic Act No. 11713 (Excellence in Teacher Education Act) and the issuance of Executive Order No. 174 (Expanded Career Progression System) solidify the national framework for aligning teacher standards, career recognition, and professional development [12, 13].

Within this context, Career Stage Affirmation emerges as a formal process that validates an educator’s demonstrated competencies irrespective of position availability. Affirmation

acknowledges professional achievement and readiness for higher levels of practice based on standards-aligned evidence. This paper examines the conceptual and policy mechanisms supporting career stage affirmation, analyzes its early implementation, and considers its implications for professional development, motivation, and career mobility among teachers and school leaders in the public basic education system.

2. Policy and Conceptual Foundations

Career stage affirmation is grounded in standards-based reform, which emphasizes coherence among teacher preparation, professional development, performance assessment, and career progression [5, 8, 11]. (see Table 1).

Table 1. List of Policies and its key provisions related to affirmation of career stages.

Policy Instrument	Key Provisions Relevant to Affirmation
DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017	Establishes the PPST and professional career stages
RA No. 11713 (2022)	Empowers the Teacher Education Council (TEC) to align teacher education and standards-based systems
EO No. 174 (2023)	Institutionalizes the Expanded Career Progression System (ECPS) for teachers and school leaders
DepEd Orders on HR and Professional Development	Integrate standards in appraisal, learning design, and teacher advancement systems

The enactment of RA 11713 reinforces international recommendations that teacher education councils play a central role in ensuring quality assurance across the teacher development continuum [16, 18].

Together, these provide the legal and administrative foundation for recognizing competency-based practice within the teaching profession, reinforcing coherence across preparation, practice, and progression.

3. Conceptual Framework

Competency-based progression frameworks emphasize developmental assessment rather than compliance-driven evaluation, positioning career advancement as a function of demonstrated professional practice [6, 2, 10].

The study employs a competency-based progression framework that positions affirmation as the link between professional standards and career outcomes. It assumes four interrelated dynamics:

- 1) Professional standards define the expected competencies across career stages.
- 2) Evidence-based assessments validate an educator’s

demonstrated proficiency.

- 3) Affirmation outcomes guide individual professional development and career planning.
- 4) Institutional supports and policy coherence moderate system effectiveness and sustainability.

This framework aligns with international models that promote developmental, rather than compliance-driven, assessment of professional practice [2, 6]. Evidence-based affirmation systems have been shown to enhance teacher motivation, professional identity, and instructional quality when supported by institutional capacity and clear standards [8, 14].

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach that combined qualitative analysis of policy and implementation documents with quantitative survey data to examine stakeholder experiences and perceptions of affirmation.

Mixed-methods approaches are widely recommended in

education policy research to capture both implementation fidelity and practitioner experiences in standards-based reforms [3, 10].

4.2. Data Sources

The study drew from:

- 1) National policy documents (RA 11713, EO 174, DepEd Orders on PPST and NEAP transformation);
- 2) Survey responses from teachers and school leaders involved in early implementation phases;
- 3) Key informant interviews with policy implementers and assessors in selected regions.

4.3. Data Analysis

Policy data underwent thematic analysis to identify alignment patterns between standards, assessment, and progression.

Survey responses were analyzed descriptively, focusing on perceptions of clarity, fairness, workload, and developmental value associated with career stage affirmation.

5. Results

The findings align with international evidence indicating that standards-based recognition systems enhance professional motivation and instructional improvement when they are perceived as fair, transparent, and development-oriented [5, 11].

5.1. Career Clarity and Professional Recognition

Respondents reported that the affirmation process enhanced clarity about expectations at each career stage. Teachers found the PPST career stage descriptors helpful in guiding professional growth and self-assessment. Affirmation also boosted professional identity, as it provided formal recognition of demonstrated practice even when promotion positions were limited.

“Affirmation makes us feel seen—not because of tenure but because of what we actually do in the classroom,” noted one Master Teacher respondent.

5.2. Alignment to Professional Development

Survey data showed that most teachers viewed the affirmation process as valuable for identifying professional learning priorities. The evidence-based portfolio and assessor feedback offered direction for designing individualized professional development plans consistent with PPST domains. Many respondents highlighted greater alignment between learning opportunities and developmental needs, especially when affirmation results informed NEAP training pathways.

5.3. Evidence-based Assessment and Documentation Challenges

While affirmation encourages reflective practice through portfolio curation and classroom observation, teachers cited administrative workload as a major concern. Preparing documentation was especially challenging in large classes and high-load assignments, where teachers had limited time to compile, digitize, and annotate evidence of practice. Some assessors reported variability in evaluation quality due to differences in assessor training and access to digital tools.

5.4. Structural and Systemic Constraints

A recurring theme among school leaders was the disconnect between affirmation and promotion. Although affirmation validates competence, limited plantilla positions prevent affirmed teachers from moving up the salary or designation ladder, leading to frustration and perceived inequity. Moreover, rural schools with limited technology access faced greater difficulties in fulfilling digital documentation requirements, accentuating implementation disparities.

6. Discussion

The findings corroborate international evidence that competency-based recognition systems enhance professional motivation and instructional quality when properly supported [6, 8].

However, documentation-heavy accountability mechanisms risk being perceived as bureaucratic when not sufficiently supported by time, digital infrastructure, and assessor calibration [14, 18].

In the Philippine context, career stage affirmation performs dual functions: it validates teaching quality and supports professional learning.

1) Affirmation as Quality Assurance and Professional Growth

Affirmation mechanisms reinforce the integrity of the PPST by ensuring that practice at every stage is benchmarked against nationally recognized standards. This aligns with the quality assurance role envisioned under RA 11713 and the TEC’s mandate to standardize teacher quality systems. When implemented equitably, affirmation strengthens public trust in the teaching profession by certifying competence based on evidence, not merely tenure.

2) Tensions Between Development and Compliance

Although affirmation was designed as a growth-oriented process, teachers often perceive it as bureaucratic due to documentation intensity and differentiation in assessor interpretation. The challenge lies in balancing accountability and professional trust—ensuring that affirmation remains a formative learning process rather than a procedural hurdle.

3) Institutional Constraints and Equity

Sustainability of affirmation depends on systemic support—adequate training for assessors, digital infrastructure for portfolio management, and integration with existing human resource systems. Without these, the process may reinforce workload inequities and regional disparities in teacher recognition. Alignment with TEC and DepEd frameworks remains vital to harmonizing teacher education, deployment, and recognition systems under a coherent standards-based architecture.

7. Conclusion

Career stage affirmation marks an important milestone in reforming teacher career systems in the Philippines. By institutionalizing standards-based recognition of professional practice, it moves the system toward meritocratic and developmental principles consistent with global best practices.

The study concludes that affirmation:

- 1) Enhances clarity of role expectations and reinforces teacher professionalism;
- 2) Encourages reflective and standards-aligned teaching practice; and
- 3) Faces implementation challenges stemming from structural and administrative constraints.

Affirmation should therefore be pursued as an independent professional certification mechanism, distinct from promotion but integrated into career progression, professional development, and quality assurance systems.

International experience suggests that career stage certification systems are most effective when recognition of competence is decoupled from limited promotion slots and embedded within broader professional learning and quality assurance systems [9, 10, 16].

8. Recommendations

Drawing from the results and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

- 1) Institutionalize affirmation as a professional recognition system independent of promotion or salary grade. Recognition of competence should carry intrinsic professional value beyond appointment benefits.
- 2) Strengthen assessor training and calibration through TEC-led capacity-building programs to ensure fairness, reliability, and uniform application of PPST-based criteria.
- 3) Streamline documentation requirements using digital portfolio platforms and simplified templates to reduce administrative burden.
- 4) Integrate affirmation outcomes into National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP) professional development planning, mentoring, and appraisal systems.
- 5) Expand access and equity measures, including ICT support for rural schools, to ensure fair participation in affirmation processes.

- 6) Monitor implementation through a national quality assurance framework led by TEC and DepEd, combining periodic audits with stakeholder feedback.

Abbreviations

DepEd	Department of Education
ECPS	Expanded Career Progression System
EO	Executive Order
HR	Human Resource
NEAP	National Educators' Academy of the Philippines
PPST	Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers
RA	Republic Act
TEC	Teacher Education Council

Author Contributions

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Mary Carousel Refuerzo Aquino: Data curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Resources, Writing – review & editing

Earl John Pelaez Pascual: Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Software, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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