

The Lived Experiences of Technology and Livelihood Educators in Passing the Philippine Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers

Francis Edward A. Blanco^{1*}, Jannielyn A. Fernando²

¹Bataan Peninsula State University, Philippines

²Philippine Women's University, Bataan, Philippines

Corresponding Author: Francis Edward A. Blanco

francisedwardblanco@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study investigates the lived experiences of Filipino Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) educators who successfully passed the Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers (LEPT). Utilizing a purposive sampling strategy, the research aims to systematically document and interpret the key challenges and effective coping strategies employed during preparation for this high-stakes assessment. The analysis reveals that TLE teacher-candidates encountered multifaceted hurdles, including significant mental and physical strain, the difficulty posed by the unpredictable and broad scope of the exam content, and intense social and familial pressure. To navigate these obstacles, successful participants employed a range of deliberate strategies: they established personalized, self-directed learning environments, actively sought peer-to-peer collaborative support, and focused on mastering strategic test-taking skills. Furthermore, the findings highlight the crucial, transformative role of external review centers in providing structured material and mitigating candidate anxiety. These insights provide valuable, evidence-based guidance for policymakers, teacher education institutions, and professional development initiatives designed to enhance the preparedness and support systems for aspiring TLE educators.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of an education system hinges on the effectiveness of its educators. Governments worldwide recognize the importance of quality instruction by implementing measures to ensure teaching standards remain high. A well-known effort is the licensure examination and certification for teachers which serves as a vital benchmark for assessing the readiness and competence of aspiring professional educators. This credential, as noted by Nodalo et al. (2025) is not merely a formality as it signifies a cognitive excellence of teachers and professional competence which provide them with the authority to practice and the opportunity to enhance their careers. In the United States the relevant policy has made American educators one of the country's most highly licensed workforces, underscoring the universal value placed on this professional gatekeeping (Cowan et al., 2020).

In the Philippines, the Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers (LEPT) is a legal mandate outlined in Republic Act No. 7836. The exam is structured to test three key areas: General Education, Professional Education, and a specific area of specialization. Among the specializations, Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) stands out for its unique and challenging breadth. TLE is designed to equip students with practical skills in a wide array of fields from basic drafting and electronics to food preparation and entrepreneurship (Mangubat, 2022). This comprehensive scope while essential for the curriculum presents a significant hurdle for aspiring TLE teachers preparing for the LEPT. The diversity of topics means that candidates must master a vast and often unrelated set of subjects, a task that can be overwhelming and complex.

Despite the critical role of the LEPT in ensuring educational quality and the specific difficulties faced by TLE teachers, there is a notable dearth of investigation that explores the lived experiences of those who successfully navigate this challenge. While, existing studies on teacher licensure exams primarily focus on academic performance and teacher attitudes (Balinario et al., 2023; Muico et al., 2024; Ferrer, 2025). However, there's a significant gap in the literature regarding the specific strategies and coping mechanisms TLE teachers use to overcome the unique content and personal struggles of the licensure exam. This research aims to address that gap by exploring how successful TLE teachers navigated this high-stakes assessment.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by providing a phenomenological exploration of the experiences of successful TLE teachers. This research will offer valuable insights that can inform future review programs and professional development initiatives for TLE educators by exploring their challenges and strategies. The findings will provide a comprehensive understanding of the resilience and resourcefulness required to succeed, ultimately contributing to the empowerment of the TLE teaching profession in the Philippines. This study will specifically address the following questions: (1) What are the challenges encountered by TLE professional teachers in the licensure examination? (2) What are the strategies employed by TLE professional teachers to pass the licensure examination?

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers

The Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers (LEPT) is a critical gatekeeping mechanism for individuals entering the teaching profession, as it confirms they have the necessary knowledge and pedagogical skills (Ayyub & Siraji, 2025; Irene, 2023). Both educational institutions and the government rely on this professional credential as a primary indicator of an educator's quality and preparedness. Earning a successful score on the LEPT validates a teacher's readiness and ensures they are equipped to effectively guide students (Abao et al., 2023). Ultimately, the LEPT serves as an essential safeguard, upholding and protecting high standards within the teaching field.

2. Teacher Quality

Passing the Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers (LEPT) is a significant indicator of a teacher's professional quality and competence (Caye, 2024). The quality of a teacher's education is a strong predictor of their success on this high-stakes exam (Cadosales et al., 2023). Furthermore, a low LEPT passing rate among graduates is often considered a sign that a teacher education institution (TEI) may be underperforming (Villanueva et al., 2025). This underscores the critical role of the licensure examination in both evaluating individual educators and assessing the effectiveness of the institutions that train the said individuals.

3. Technology and Livelihood Educators

Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) teachers are crucial to the Philippine education system, serving as the foundation for developing students' lifelong learning skills and practical competencies in technical-vocational fields (Barcelona et al., 2023; Layese et al., 2024). This responsibility demands a commitment to quality teaching, as TLE educators are directly involved in cultivating the 21st-century skills necessary for student success (Elli & Ricafort, 2020).

4. Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy, an individual's belief in their ability to succeed, is a critical factor for achieving academic excellence in education (Mehden et al., 2024). This personal quality is a key indicator for aspiring educators who aim to pass the Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers (LEPT) (Briones & Romero, 2020). Studies have consistently shown that successful LEPT takers tend to possess higher self-efficacy in overcoming the challenges of the exam compared to those who do not pass (Binayao & Dales, 2020). This highlights that a strong sense of self-efficacy is not merely a personality trait but a crucial predictor of success, empowering individuals to face the demanding nature of the LEPT with resilience and determination. The evidence suggests that fostering self-efficacy should be a central component of any preparation program designed to help future educators achieve their professional goals.

The LEPT functions as a national quality assurance mechanism which stands as the crucial gatekeeper for entry into the teaching profession specifically for TLE teachers. The educators are indispensable in building practical and lifelong learning skills of students which placing a high demand on their professional competence. Consequently, the LEPT score acts as a dual-indicator as it validates an individual readiness of teachers and serves as a direct metric for evaluating the effectiveness and accountability of TEIs. However, success in navigating this high-stakes assessment is not solely a measure of academic input since it is powerfully mediated by self-efficacy which is the psychological belief in the personal ability to succeed. The study firmly establishes that cultivating a strong sense of resilience and determination which a core component of self-efficacy that is a needed evidence-based strategy that must be integrated into preparation programs.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of TLE teachers who successfully passed the LEPT. This qualitative method was ideal for the research, as it helped uncover the core of how these individuals perceived and made sense of their journey through the licensure examination. The researcher utilized purposive sampling to select the participants of the study with an established criteria such as individuals who were licensed TLE teachers, graduates of the Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education (BTLEd) program and willing to share personal detailed experiences. The said sampling is crucial for qualitative study as it is helpful in gathering rich and relevant data (Campbell et al., 2020).

The study conducted semi-structured interviews to gather data. This method allowed participants to share their personal stories freely, providing a wealth of qualitative information. Each interview was audio-recorded with consent and then transcribed word-for-word to ensure accuracy. The data was analyzed using Swain's Hybrid Approach to Thematic Analysis (2018), a flexible method that combines both deductive and inductive reasoning. This allowed us to find both pre-existing themes from the research questions and new patterns that emerged directly from the participants' narratives.

Finally, the study strictly followed ethical guidelines. The study made sure all participants gave their informed consent, fully understanding the purpose of the study, rights, and the confidentiality of their information. It was also assured to the participants that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. This commitment to ethical conduct ensured the research was trustworthy and respected the participants' well-being.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A total of six (6) individuals participated in the study and unravel the following findings:

Challenges in the Licensure Examination

The Weight of Well-being: A Test of Resilience

The journey to becoming a licensed teacher is not merely an academic one; it is a profound test of personal resilience. For many, this challenge began with a deep, internal struggle to maintain their physical and mental well-being. The participants' accounts painted a vivid picture of this battle. It was a constant negotiation with their own bodies and minds, where exhaustion and anxiety were as formidable as any test question.

Participant I, described a feeling of intense, crippling nervousness that began the moment she sat down to take the exam. *"My hands were still shaking from the nervousness,"* she recalled, a simple admission that spoke volumes about the physical toll of her stress. This feeling of being on the brink of breakdown was a common thread. Another participant, Participant II, shared a poignant moment of self-realization. *"When you know you're exhausted, sleep, rest, don't push yourself too hard because you'll break down,"* he said. He realized that neglecting his need for rest wasn't a sign of discipline, but a path to failure.

The personal narratives echo the findings of Zhang (2024) which has long documented the link between mental health and academic performance. The instability of their physical and mental states, a direct result of the immense pressure which created a cascade of negative outcomes. The shared experiences show that the preparation for a major exam must include a focus on self-care which recognize that rest and emotional stability are not luxuries but essential components of acing the licensure examination.

The Unpredictable Gauntlet: Confronting the Exam's Challenges

Despite meticulous preparation, the licensure exam presented an unpredictable gauntlet of challenges that tested the limits of the knowledge and resolve of the participants. They had studied tirelessly, poring over every textbook and reviewer they could find, yet the content of the examination was a surprise. The specialized knowledge they had spent years cultivating was not always what the test demanded.

Take for example, Participant III, who had prepared for topics he considered fundamental to his specialization. He was shocked to find that the questions were far from basic, delving into obscure topics like *"sleeves electronics"* and *"plumbing with types of fittings."* *"Even basic types of stitches weren't there,"* he lamented, expressing a shared frustration that the exam was less about core expertise and more about a vast, sometimes random and breadth of knowledge. The unexpected content forced the participants to confront the limitations of their preparation and highlighted the sheer unpredictability of the exam. As mentioned by Mulder and French (2023) high-stakes exams often include a wide range of content, challenging candidates to master a broad body of knowledge beyond core curriculum.

Beyond the academic hurdles, participants also faced a silent, yet powerful, adversary: social pressure. Participant IV felt this acutely. As an older student, she was surrounded by classmates who were years, sometimes decades, younger than her. *"I kept wondering if I could do it because my classmates were so young,"* she confessed. This self-doubt, fueled by social comparison, eroded her confidence. In a quiet review room, Participant V, felt the unspoken pressure of the intense study habits of his peers. He described the feeling *"even more pressured when you see them,"* a subtle but potent force that chipped away at his focus. The experiences show that the exam is not just a measure of knowledge, but a test of one's ability to withstand external pressures and internal self-doubt. This is consistent with the study of Jansen, et al. (2022) on academic stress, which consistently identifies social comparison and peer pressure as significant contributors to self-doubt and anxiety among test-takers.

Strategies in Hurdling the Licensure Examination The Blueprint for Success: Strategies and Support

In the face of these challenges, the participants did not surrender; they innovated. The success was a testament to the strategic preparation which went far beyond simply reading books. The participants developed a personal blueprint for success; a collection of unique strategies and coping mechanisms tailored to the individual needs.

Participant VI, realized that her preparation needed to be as unique as she was. She covered the walls of her room with notes and Manila paper, transforming her personal space into an immersive learning environment. *"When I wake up in the morning,"* she explained, *"I already know what I need to review."* This ingenious approach, born out of a deep understanding of her own learning style, was a game-changer. Others relied on more pragmatic techniques. The participants learned to eliminate incorrect answers which is a strategy taught at their review centers that felt less like a trick and more like a logical puzzle. This approach helped them navigate the tricky, convoluted questions and find the *"best answer"* even when they were unsure. Makhambetov et al. (2021) emphasizes the effectiveness of personalized learning strategies and metacognitive skills for complex problem-solving. It can be implied that learners who are aware of their own thought processes are better equipped to handle difficult tasks and get better results.

The role of the review center itself was a recurring theme in their success stories. Far from being a simple classroom, the centers were a crucible for motivation and competence. The participants spoke of a competitive but supportive atmosphere that pushed them to their limits. The strict, almost militaristic, routine of answering questions before entering a room created a sense of discipline and urgency. This environment instilled in them a *"grit and grind mentality,"* as Participant I put it. But it wasn't just about discipline. The review centers also provided a wellspring of motivation. *"It will give you the motivation or the initiative to start preparing and start studying,"* Participant III said. The review centers nurtured the emotional well-being which encourage them to stay positive and dismiss negativity. This confirms the findings of educational research that highlights the dual role of review centers as not only academic aids

but also as crucial social and psychological support systems that build resilience and self-efficacy among examinees (Innab, 2024).

Thus, the success was a culmination of self-awareness, strategic planning, and a fierce dedication to their goal. They understood that the path to a license was not just about what they knew, but how they faced the unknown, how they managed their well-being, and how they built a support system to carry them to the finish line.

Ingenious Preparations and Coping Mechanisms

The path to a successful licensure examination was not a linear one for the participants; it was a journey marked by creativity and personal adaptation. The participants quickly realized that success was not just about knowing the answers but about having a holistic strategy that addressed their unique learning styles and mental fortitude.

Many of the participants began their preparation by returning to the fundamentals. They revisited their old college notes and textbooks, a process that went beyond simple memorization. As Participant IV reflected, it was a crucial step in "*rebuilding their foundational knowledge*." This approach aligns with the cognitive principle of schema theory, where prior knowledge serves as a framework for integrating new information (Cho & Ma, 2020). Participants were able to connect basic concepts to more complex ones, ensuring a deeper and more lasting understanding by strengthening this foundation.

In a move that highlighted their resourcefulness, some participants transformed the physical spaces into personalized learning environments. Participant II described covering her room with notes and diagrams, turning it into a "*visual memory palace*." This method is supported by the of Pabito and Santos (2023) on learning styles which suggests that visual and kinesthetic learners benefit from engaging with their environment to process information. For these individuals, their living space became an extension of their review materials, making facts and formulas inescapable and reinforcing their learning every day.

Technology also played a critical role, acting as a lifeline that provided access to information and a sense of community. Through online platforms and group chats, participants collaborated, shared materials, and found support. As Participant VI noted, this network made them feel like they "*weren't alone*," a sentiment that speaks to the importance of social learning theory in motivation and information exchange (Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022). This constant collaboration ensured that no one was left behind and that knowledge flowed freely.

Beyond academic content, participants also mastered key test-taking strategies that proved invaluable. They learned to approach questions with a pragmatic mindset, focusing on logical reasoning and the process of elimination rather than just relying on pure recall. As Participant IV explained, this technique "*saved*" them during the exam, demonstrating that strategic thinking can be just as crucial as content knowledge (). Finally, participants understood that their physical well-being was a non-negotiable part of their strategy. They prioritized proper nutrition and rest, recognizing that a "*hungry stomach would just distract*"

them. This focus on mind-body connection is well-documented in research, which links good dietary habits and adequate rest to improved cognitive function and academic performance (Rajan et al., 2024).

The Transformative Role of Review Centers

For the majority of participants, review centers were a cornerstone of their preparation. The institutions were not simply providers of review materials; they were dynamic environments that fostered intellectual and emotional growth.

Review centers were instrumental in sharpening the participants' analytical and critical thinking skills. The instructors taught them to "*read questions carefully*" and dissect them to uncover their true meaning, moving beyond simple factual recall to a higher level of analysis. This training in critical reasoning is a fundamental component of effective exam preparation, as it helps candidates navigate the complex, often tricky, nature of licensure examinations (Kaddoura et al., 2017).

The centers also created a culture of healthy competition that served as a powerful motivator. Being surrounded by peers who shared the same goals encouraged participants to push their own limits. As Participant I said, seeing her classmates "*answering questions confidently*" challenged her to do better. This form of healthy peer pressure is known to drive positive outcomes, as it encourages individuals to set higher goals and strive for continuous improvement.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, review centers offered a vital source of emotional reinforcement. The instructors often acted as mentors, providing encouragement and a much-needed sense of belief during moments of self-doubt. When Participant III felt like giving up, her instructor's simple words, "*Kaya ninyo 'to'*" (*You can do this*), became a powerful source of motivation. This psychological support is essential for nurturing perseverance and self-efficacy, which are crucial for success in high-pressure situations (Acoba, 2024). Hence, the review centers equipped participants with a powerful combination of knowledge, strategy, and resilience, which proved to be the winning formula for passing the licensure examination.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Passing the LEPT is a formidable challenge for TLE teachers, extending far beyond a simple test of academic knowledge. It can be implied from the findings of the study that success is a testament to the unique resilience and resourcefulness of these individuals. Participants faced a gauntlet of personal and academic hurdles, including intense mental and physical strain, the unpredictability of exam content, and the pressure of social expectations. The success, however, was not accidental but the result of a deliberate, multi-faceted approach. They transformed their living spaces into immersive learning environments, leveraged technology for collaborative study, and adopted strategic test-taking skills like the process of elimination. The transformative role of review centers was also a recurring theme, providing not only structured academic preparation but also a crucial source of psychological and emotional support.

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations can be made to improve support for future TLE licensure exam candidates. First, educational institutions and review centers should integrate holistic well-being into their preparation programs. This includes providing resources on stress management, time management, and the importance of rest to prevent burnout. Second, given the unpredictable nature of the exam's content, review programs should emphasize not just rote memorization but also the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Instead of focusing on a fixed set of topics, programs should teach candidates how to analyze and deconstruct questions effectively. Finally, it is recommended that aspiring teachers leverage peer-to-peer learning and collaborative networks. Forming study groups and using online platforms can provide a vital support system, helping candidates share resources, clarify concepts, and reinforce a sense of community that combats feelings of isolation and pressure.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study has several key limitations. First, its use of purposive sampling and a small sample size means the findings may not be generalizable to the wider population of TLE teachers. The experiences shared by the participants, while valuable, may not reflect the full spectrum of challenges and strategies used by all educators. Furthermore, the phenomenological approach focused exclusively on the perspectives of those who succeeded on the exam, creating a potential selection bias. The study does not include the experiences of those who did not pass, which would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the obstacles and ineffective strategies. Future research could conduct a mixed-methods study with a larger, more diverse sample to address the said limitations. This could combine qualitative interviews with a quantitative survey to validate the identified strategies on a broader scale. Additionally, comparative research that includes both passers and non-passers of the LEPT could provide deeper insights into the factors that differentiate success from failure. Investigating the specific content of the TLE exam would also be a valuable area for further research, helping to determine how the curriculum aligns with the unpredictable nature of the questions.

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