

## **Exploring instructional competency gaps and assessment challenges: a phenomenological study of the experiences of non-TLE majors in delivering exploratory courses to Grade 7 students**

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**Abstract:** This study explored the instructional gaps and assessment challenges faced by non-TLE major teachers in delivering Grade 7 exploratory TLE courses in Tantangan District, South Cotabato. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, seven (7) non-TLE major teachers were purposively selected as participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Fifteen (15) themes emerged from the study. Results showed that the teachers struggled in delivering technical content due to limited background in TLE. They also had difficulties preparing practical activities and assessing hands-on tasks. Many relied on theory-based lessons and lacked access to updated tools and materials. In terms of assessment, they found it hard to create fair rubrics and check performance tasks properly. To cope, teachers engaged in self-learning, used online resources, and sought support from co-teachers. Despite their efforts, most still felt unready to meet the demands of TLE instruction. The study concluded that the instructional and assessment gaps affected student learning and performance. It highlighted the need for regular training, industry exposure, and strong support systems. Strengthening partnerships between schools, training centers, and industries can help equip non-TLE teachers with the needed skills to deliver effective and meaningful TLE instruction.

Keywords: Instructional Competency Gaps, Assessment, Exploratory Course

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## INTRODUCTION

The instructional competencies and assessment strategies employed by teachers play a critical role in the effectiveness of Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) courses, particularly at the exploratory level in Grade 7. In this foundational stage, students are introduced to various components of TLE, making it essential for teachers to possess both content knowledge and pedagogical skills tailored to diverse learning needs.

However, there is a significant global, national, and local gap in the preparedness of non-TLE major teachers assigned to deliver specialized TLE courses. Studies have shown that many educators without formal TLE training face challenges in effectively conveying technical content at the exploratory level. This issue is particularly pronounced among non-TLE majors who, despite possessing subject expertise in other fields, may lack the pedagogical and technical knowledge necessary for effective TLE instruction (Elli & Ricafort, 2020). The absence of specialized training impacts their instructional effectiveness and, consequently, student learning

outcomes. Globally, educational systems acknowledge the need to equip teachers with competencies that extend beyond content knowledge to include effective teaching strategies and assessment methods that cater to diverse learning preferences and industry standards.

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on improving instructional competencies among educators to address the demands of 21st-century skills development worldwide. This shift has heightened the need for specialized training, particularly as exploratory courses—such as those in TLE—continue to gain prominence in the curriculum. However, competency gaps among non-specialist teachers tasked with delivering TLE courses pose significant challenges worldwide. Furthermore, assessing student performance in skill-based courses presents additional complexities, as teachers may lack the necessary training to evaluate hands-on competencies effectively (Mezza, 2022).

In the Philippine context, the disparity between the instructional competencies required for TLE and the training provided to non-TLE majors has been a persistent concern. As noted by Tingzon and Buyok (2022), non-TLE major teachers assigned to specialized courses such as Industrial Arts, Information and Communication Technology, and Home Economics frequently encounter difficulties in both content delivery and assessment due to their limited formal background in TLE. While they may bring expertise from their respective disciplines, the lack of pedagogical and TLE-specific training can result in instructional approaches that fail to fully support student learning. This issue is further compounded by the Department of Education's (DepEd) push for enhanced TLE education through the MATATAG curriculum, which underscores the need for skilled and adequately trained educators in exploratory TLE courses.

In Region 12, or the SOCCSKSARGEN region, the delivery of TLE courses is shaped by unique challenges, including socioeconomic factors, resource constraints, and teacher shortages. Many educators teaching TLE exploratory courses in the region are non-TLE majors, often assigned due to the limited availability of trained TLE specialists. This situation exacerbates competency gaps in instructional delivery and assessment practices. Mustafa (2024) mentioned in their study that in rural schools, where access to technical resources and training opportunities is restricted, non-specialist teachers often resort to traditional, theory-based instruction, which may not fully engage students or meet the practical demands of TLE courses.

To be more specific, the Municipality of Tantaran has a Trade High School that, aside from implementing the K to 12 and MATATAG curriculum, also follows the Strengthened Technical-Vocational Education Program – Competency-Based Curriculum (STVEP-CBC). However, in some schools there are still non-TLE major teachers assigned to teach exploratory TLE subjects, further highlighting the issue of instructional competency gaps in the region.

Consequently, this study aimed to explore these instructional competency gaps and assessment challenges by examining the experiences of non-TLE major teachers in delivering TLE exploratory courses to Grade 7 students. The researcher anticipated that the findings would offer valuable insights into the professional development needs of these educators and propose strategies to enhance their teaching practices. Furthermore, this study was particularly relevant in light of the urgent need to improve TLE education in the Schools Division of South Cotabato, ensuring its alignment with the objectives of the MATATAG curriculum and its contribution to the development of skilled and employable students (DepEd, 2024). The researcher ascertained that by exploring the challenges faced by non-TLE majors, it would enrich ongoing discussions on teacher education and training, ultimately working towards the goal of equipping all educators with the necessary competencies to deliver high-quality TLE instruction.

*Statement of the problem*

Generally, this study aimed to explore the instructional competency gaps and assessment challenges experienced by non-Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) majors teaching TLE exploratory courses in Grade 7 in Tantaran District under the Schools Division of South Cotabato.

More specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What instructional competency gaps do non-TLE major teachers experience in delivering TLE exploratory courses to Grade 7 students?
2. How do non-TLE major teachers perceive their preparedness and capability to deliver hands-on or practical activities in TLE courses?
3. What challenges do non-TLE major teachers face in assessing student performance in TLE exploratory courses?
4. What coping strategies do non-TLE major teachers employ to overcome competency and assessment challenges in delivering TLE courses?
5. How do the assessment challenges experience by non-TLE major teachers impact student engagement and learning outcomes in Grade 7 TLE exploratory courses?

## METHODOLOGY

### *Protocol type*

The study followed a qualitative research protocol, specifically Transcendental Phenomenology, to explore the lived experiences on the instructional competency gaps and assessment challenges.

### *Search strategy*

While a typical “search strategy” applies more commonly to systematic reviews, in qualitative studies this can be interpreted as the method for identifying and selecting participants and the setting of the study:

- 1) The study was conducted at Tantaran National Trade High School, New Lambunao Integrated School, Tacub Integrated School, Upper Tantaran Integrated School, Tantaran National High School, Bukay Pait National High School, Dumadalig Integrated School, and Mangilala Integrated School
- 2) Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that only teachers fitting specific inclusion criteria were invited to participate.

### *Eligibility criteria*

The inclusion criteria for participant selection included:

- 1) Must be national-paid teachers employed by the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines for at least one year
- 2) Must be actively teaching TLE exploratory courses during the school year under study

### *Data extraction*

In this context, data extraction refers to how information was gathered and analyzed:

1. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using a researcher-made interview guide.
2. Interviews focused on non-TLE major teachers’ instructional competencies, assessment strategies, and challenges in teaching TLE exploratory courses.

3. Thematic analysis, guided by Moustakas' (1994) thematic analysis approaches, was employed to extract key data, involving:

- 3.1. Transcribing interview responses verbatim
- 3.2. Identifying significant statements from participants' narratives
- 3.3. Formulating meanings based on the lived experiences shared
- 3.4. Clustering these meanings into emergent themes reflecting instructional gaps, assessment difficulties, and adaptation challenges
- 3.5. Validating themes through member checking, peer debriefing, and expert consultation to ensure trustworthiness

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Instructional competency gaps do non-tle major teachers experience in delivering tle exploratory courses to Grade 7 students*

Non-TLE major teachers experienced significant gaps in technical knowledge, particularly in ICT, Agriculture, and Industrial Arts, which are core components of TLE exploratory courses. These teachers often lacked the subject-specific expertise needed to effectively teach practical skills. This gap in knowledge hindered their ability to provide hands-on learning experiences, leading them to rely more on theoretical lessons. Consequently, students were not able to engage in meaningful skill acquisition, which is essential in vocational education.

### *Perception on non-TLE major teachers on their preparedness and capability to deliver hands-on or practical activities in TLE courses*

Non-TLE major teachers generally felt unprepared to deliver hands-on or practical activities. Their lack of training and technical experience in TLE subjects left them feeling inadequate in guiding students through practical tasks. Despite their efforts to supplement their knowledge through online resources and mentorship from colleagues, they acknowledged that they lacked the practical expertise to lead effective hands-on sessions. This gap in their preparedness affected their confidence in teaching and their ability to engage students in practical skills development.

### *Challenges do non-TLE major teachers face in assessing student performance in TLE exploratory courses*

Non-TLE major teachers faced several challenges in assessing student performance, particularly in evaluating practical competencies. The absence of appropriate rubrics and performance-based assessment tools made it difficult for teachers to assess students' hands-on skills accurately. Many teachers used traditional written tests rather than project-based assessments, which did not effectively measure students' ability to apply the concepts learned. Inconsistent grading criteria further contributed to frustration, as students received unclear or unfair evaluations of their work.

### *Coping strategies do non-TLE major teachers employ to overcome competency and assessment challenges in delivering TLE courses*

To cope with competency and assessment challenges, non-TLE major teachers employed several strategies. They engaged in self-directed learning through online platforms like YouTube and Coursera to build their technical skills. Peer collaboration and mentorship from experienced TLE teachers also played a key role in helping them improve their instructional approaches. Some teachers used technology-driven assessment methods, such as project-based evaluations and portfolio assessments, to provide students with alternative ways to demonstrate their skills. These coping strategies allowed teachers to address gaps in their expertise and create more engaging learning experiences for their students.

*Impact of assessment challenges experienced by non-TLE major teachers on student engagement and learning outcomes in GRADE 7 TLE exploratory courses*

The assessment challenges faced by non-TLE major teachers significantly impacted student engagement and learning outcomes. Because of the reliance on theoretical assessments, students had limited opportunities to showcase their practical skills. This hindered their ability to engage in meaningful learning and apply what they had learned to real-world situations. The lack of consistent and clear assessment criteria also caused confusion and frustration among students, diminishing their motivation to actively participate in TLE activities. As a result, students were less likely to develop the practical competencies necessary for future vocational success.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that teachers who handled subjects they did not major in faced different kinds of teaching and grading problems. These problems happened because their training did not match the subject they were assigned to teach. Their lessons and ways of checking students' work were not always the same, which affected how students learned.

Even with these problems, some teachers still managed to find ways to help students learn. What they did in the classroom was shaped by the support they had and the resources available. The results pointed to common issues that have been happening for a long time in teaching specialized subjects.

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