

# The Untold Stories of Graduate Student's Preparation for LET: A Phenomenological Study

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## ABSTRACT

Despite facing constraints, distress, and challenges, graduate students preparing for board exams find comfort and support in engaging in vicarious learning and relying on support systems. In this qualitative-phenomenological study, the researchers sought to uncover the untold stories of education graduates while preparing for the Licensure Exam for Professional Teachers. Through purposive sampling, the researchers interviewed twelve (12) education graduates at Misamis University as participants. The interview guide protocol was used as a data-gathering instrument. The data were analyzed using Seidman's phenomenological data analysis technique. Results revealed eight (8) themes: 1) Acquiring Motivation and decision; 2) Encountering financial problems; 3) Experiencing psychological pressures; 4) Embracing time management during the review; 5) Having a Good support system; 6) Developing Personal Growth; 7) Longing to become a professional teacher; 8) Highlighting Memorable Experiences. Acknowledging the multifaceted journey of educational graduates preparing for the LET enables them to navigate the preparation process more holistically, thereby increasing their chances of success in becoming licensed teachers. Teacher education institutions offer guidance and resources specific to LET preparation, such as study materials, mock exams, and review sessions. They should create mentorship programs or establish relationships with experienced educators who can provide insights and support during the preparation phase.

**Keywords:** Education, Board Examination, Exam Preparation, Qualitative and Graduates' preparation

## CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

One of the most in-demand professions in the Philippines is Teacher Education. However, becoming a professional teacher takes a lot of effort to pass the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). Every graduating student dreams of becoming a full-fledged teacher. They can be fully recognised as one if they graduate with the competencies required of them as professional teachers and pass the Licensure Examination for Teachers which is conducted by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC). The teachers are regarded as job-ready after passing the LET, as it confirms effectiveness and efficiency in the competencies of pedagogical content knowledge and skills that a teacher must possess (Binayao & Dales, 2020).

The licensure examination is critical in determining a school's performance in terms of the quality of education it provides. This examination is a necessity for practising a particular profession (Khairy & Guraya, 2017). It is a prerequisite to becoming a recognized expert in one's specific discipline. The Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) is required for every graduate of a teacher education course to practice the teaching profession. Even though the magnitude of the impact was barely noticeable, female students emerged to stand at a greater risk of experiencing unfavourable mental health repercussions (Salehi et al., 2019). Also states that through addressing worry and stress, the findings revealed that the majority of the participants 85.8%, experienced signs and symptoms of anxiety, however, the vast majority of these signs were minor (63.3%) (Lister et al., (2023).

An individual with a positive predisposition may experience less test anxiety because of more positive cognitions and coping better with stress about exams. In contrast, an individual who possesses negative

thoughts is prone to develop feelings of depression, which in turn decreases well-being (Beck & Alford, 2018). The most important aspect that every LET taker would never forget is to seek God's intervention. Most of the participants sought spiritual guidance, sustained devotion and prayer support. They believe that praying reduces stress, nervousness, and pressure. They also assume that in God's perfect time and by His grace and blessings, they will pass the LET (Quintana, 2014).

The LET takers were firm, not entertaining problems during the reviews to refrain from getting stressed and worried. They uphold positivity and optimism, life study balance, psychological readiness, have someone's inspiration, and maintain confidence and self-trust (Alessandre, et.al. 2019). According to one study, the home and family factors have a strong influence on LET achievement, whereas the other factors namely: student, school, review center, and personal indicators have an average influence only. Furthermore, ten theme clusters emerged as factors influencing CLE success. The following are the factors: (1) program interest and focus, (2) undisrupted schooling, (3) moral and financial support from parents, (4) sufficiency of classrooms, laboratory equipment, and physical facilities, (5) availability of qualified and committed faculty, (6) use of various teaching methodologies that encourage effective learning, (7) a cutoff grade-based retention policy (8) attendance at review centers regularly (9) sufficient time, focus, and discipline during the review period, and lastly (10) the ability to manage test anxiety and retain what has been studied (Albina et.al, 2022).

In terms of the student-related factor, it was discovered that HEIs in Abra screened incoming teacher education enrollees. Before awarding completion certificates in their course, the graduate students were scrutinized, and they honed teacher aspirants to become catalysts for change and moulders of youth. College admission examinations may also play a significant role in student-related factors. In the selection process, interviewers such as college deans, program heads and teacher education faculty should evaluate student applicants' verbal understanding, figural reasoning, and quantitative skills (Refugio, 2019).

There was a group study method conducted, Collaborative test reviews: student performance and they found out that a group study method proved helpful in improving senior-level students' performance on unit tests through collaborative learning. According to them, "mean scores of the students who attended the collaborative review sessions were significantly higher than those who did not attend." Similarly, in this study, those who kept on coming to the review sessions had higher scores than those who had one or two absences and had just attended the post-test. It is also noticed by other researchers that future teachers' education should include an examination that tests their personal and professional values including educational and cultural values. (Reyes & Chua, 2019).

There is an increase in examination results by reviewing the test-taking strategies using the previous licensure examinations and holding content review sessions. He further suggested making test-taking methodology part of the college curriculum. Hence, students enrolled in the program generate a genuine and significant learning experience (Miyasaka, 2018). Similarly, studies looked into the training sessions on test-taking to find out if the programs on licensure examination results were effective. The method reviewed is translate, eliminate, solve or substitute, and tricks (TEST). It was concluded that one's participation in the TEST program augments the teacher preparation examination scores. It also revealed that introducing these strategies to students lessens nervousness in testing while enhancing the content knowledge and self-worth (Wall et. al, 2022).

Moreover, other tutoring sessions prove to help prepare students to pass the examinations. One study posited that there is the provision of an authentic test-taking environment and content anticipated to be on the examination for students (ME, 2019). The experiences of the faculty members as test takers guided them in the grounding of the Praxis II content examination. The basis of the development of the program is the students' experiences. Hence, those students enrolled in the tutoring program had an 88% passing rate on the first try, compared to the 77% passing rate of those students who did not enrol in the program. Being stressed that review significantly influences the final licensure examination. Exposure to in-house review or course audit is an essential preparation for taking the LET. Therefore, institutions are bound to provide a comprehensive course audit for their students (Visco, 2019).

The undergraduate students enrolled in a teacher preparation program must prepare for licensure examinations in some way, as part of enrolment. The faculty members and preparation programs aid in preparing students for success on the examinations leading to passing licensure scores. Early exposure of students to test-taking strategies through forums, seminars, and classroom discussions shows to improve their understanding of the test and succeed in the licensure exam. Also emphasized that the student's exposure to the test environment is beneficial to student success in a high-stakes testing environment (Childs et.al, 2020). Further stressed as well that the learning facilities available within an educational institution have a positive relationship with the quality of teaching and learning activities to attain the goals set (Afolabi, 2019).

Interest in and focus on one's course while still in college is a significant factor that influences licensure exam performance when graduates decide to take the exam later. Some participants in this study disclosed that they very often attended classes due to a lack of interest or peer pressure. It was covered that one of the challenges faced by LET non-passers is indeed a lack of exam preparation due to one's employment (Albina et al, 2022). This finding backs up the findings, who found that if participants were too busy to study, they would consider quitting (Kwi-Soon & Bok-Sun (2019). Work-related exhaustion, both physically and mentally, reduced motivation to study also discovered that the support of participants' families and those around them motivated those who were hesitant to prepare for the examination (NCLEX-RN) because of a lack of self-confidence. Parental support both in financial and moral aspects makes a significant difference in exam performance (Albina et al, 2022).

In addition, factors associated with faculty-related predictors revealed that it is also an indicator of LET performance. Faculty members must be equipped with knowledge, skills, and values which can be used to produce dynamic and high-quality educators in the field of teacher education (Ventayen, 2020). This finding was also supported and asserted that faculty members with high levels of qualification and training help to improve standards in educational institutions (Gurney, 2017). The current study's findings also indicated that reviewing and taking the exam is very costly, which respondents identified as a serious problem in preparing for and taking the licensure exam. Another study found that the respondents' problems with personal preparations, particularly financial aspects, are only moderately serious (Asuncion, 2019).

Health is a big factor for one examinee, it is also important that they observe their healthy diet on the way to their examination day to make sure they are mentally, emotionally, and physically prepared. Regarding the respondents' perception that the poor physical environment of the examination venue is a serious problem encountered in the CLE, this finding confirms one study which also revealed that environmental factor affects the performance of examinees in the licensure examination (Pregoner, 2020). The respondents' performance in taking the board examination was hampered by excessive noise caused by an aeroplane near the examination venue and a chair that kept moving (Briones and Romero (2020).

Regarding the correlation between personal factors and the problems encountered in the CLE, this finding lends support to the study which confirms that some students who are very good in their academic performance but have failed in the licensure examination due to personal problems, sickness, and nervousness in the examination proper (Bandura, 2020). Furthermore, in terms of the relationship between school factors and CLE problems, there is a substantial significant positive relationship between academic and teaching performance (Espino et al., 2019). The "review school attended, school, peers, and review mates (not included in this study), individual/personal skills and in-house review program (not also included in this study) are factors that affect licensure examination performance as perceived by those who successfully passed the licensure examination (Serrano's, 2019).

Another study of teacher education graduates found that graduates plan to do a variety of things after graduation including looking for work is considered. However, most graduates intended to take the LET as soon as possible. Graduates typically prepare by enrolling in a review center, but a few opted for self-review due to financial struggles and time constraints. Every graduate's eagerness to pass the licensure examination is admirable, but according to some studies, review factors are influencing the results (Aquino & Ballila, 2020).

The LET is a crucial milestone for graduate students aspiring to become professional educators ((Khairy & Guraya, 2017). While there is existing research on LET and examination preparation, there is a dearth of knowledge regarding the unique experiences, challenges, and perspectives of graduate students during their preparation process. Through this study, the untold stories of graduate students' LET preparation will be uncovered, providing a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted factors that influence their journey. It explored various aspects, including the psychological, social, and academic dimensions of their preparation process.

Understanding the untold stories of graduate students' preparation for LET holds significant implications for both academia and practice. The findings will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on examination preparation and provide valuable insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers involved in designing effective support systems and interventions for graduate students. The research will inform the development of targeted strategies to address the challenges faced by graduate students during their LET preparation and enhance their overall experience.

Ultimately, this study aimed to give voice to graduate students and uncover the rich, nuanced narratives that shape their preparation for the LET. By shedding light on their experiences, this research will pave the way for a more holistic understanding of the graduate student journey, informing future research, practice, and policy decisions related to examination preparation and educational advancement. The purpose of this study is to explore and shed light on the untold stories of graduate students' preparation for the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET).

### **Statements of the problem**

This study explored the untold stories of education graduate students' experiences in the preparation for the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). Specifically, it aimed to:

1. What determining variables were utilized by education graduates in their preparation for the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET)
2. What is it like to be an education graduate who prepared for the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET)?
3. What kind of future self-image do the education graduates of a particular university have?

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

A phenomenological design was used in this qualitative investigation. It is an examination in which the substance of participants' descriptions of human experiences with a phenomenon is determined (Creswell, 2009). This focuses on the experiences people have and how they experience those experiences. The objective is to determine the value of the common experience that underlies all the differences in this particular learning event (Patton, 1990). The overarching objective of this qualitative plan was investigated and recognized by the researchers as the varied experiences that education graduates experience as they get ready to take the teacher licensure examination.

### **Research Setting**

The study was carried out in the province of Misamis Occidental at the chosen tertiary level in a teacher education institution. It is the top center for teacher education in the area and was one of the initial courses offered by the college. In 1949, the government granted full recognition to the Bachelor of Science in Education (BSE), and four years later, it did the same for the Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education (BSED) and the Two-Year Junior Normal Home Economics Course. To fulfil the institution's purpose and vision of offering top-notch academic programs, the Education, Liberal Arts, and Commerce programs were



filed for voluntary accreditation by the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACUCOA). In 1988 and 1990, respectively, the education program received Level I and Level II accreditation. The Level III programs for the Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) and Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) were reaccredited by PACUCOA in 2011, this accreditation is valid until November 2014.

The importance of teaching students numeracy, which relates to the expertise, abilities, behaviours, and attitudes required for the preparation of taking the licensure examination for teachers in a wide range of circumstances, was highlighted in one of the program outcomes for the teacher education institution. To become a center for teacher education that satisfies national and international standards in the education of professional teachers for the pre-elementary, elementary, and secondary levels, as well as having the views and capabilities to use knowledge and understanding meaningfully, particularly in today's world, it entails understanding the various experiences and acknowledging responsibilities to make the impossible to possibly happen.

### **Participants**

The participants of the study were (12) twelve education graduates from the selected institution at the tertiary level in Misamis Occidental, who were selected through purposive sampling. These participants were chosen based on the following criteria: Graduates in a selected tertiary institution who are willing to participate in the study. These are all education graduates who are aspiring to be licensed professional teachers.

### **Research Instrument**

Researchers used the researcher-made questions for the interview and actual observations of the participants. The interview guide includes the opening question, core question, and closing question that focus on the experiences of education graduates in preparation for the licensure examination for teachers. The purpose of this research is to explore and understand the lived experiences of graduate students in their preparation for the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). The study aims to uncover the untold stories, perspectives, and challenges faced by these students during their journey towards preparing for the LET. By employing a phenomenological research approach, this study intends to capture the essence of the graduate students' experiences, shed light on their unique narratives, and gain valuable insights into the various factors influencing their preparation for the LET.

### **Data Collection**

In gathering the data, the researchers asked permission from the College of Education at Misamis University to conduct the study. Moreover, after the approval, the researchers asked permission from the instructor to survey the selected respondents. After obtaining permits, the researchers prepared a consent letter for the participants. The researchers explained the importance of the study to the participants. An approved interview guide was prepared by the researchers to be used in gathering information. Seidman's phenomenological technique was used in the document analysis process to keep the information confidential. The researchers asked the participants' permission to record the interview. The participants were then interviewed face-to-face to allow the researchers to identify and solicit knowledge from them. All the interviews lasted for a minimum of 5 minutes.

This data collection benefited the researchers by being able to clarify questions, ask further probing questions and observe non-verbal communication. In addition, this technique provided voluntary reactions and ideas that the researchers could observe and take notes about their thoughts and emotions. Furthermore, a voice recorder was used for the researchers' interview. It was used by the researchers in transcribing information from the interview. The researchers then analyzed the transcriptions using Hyperresearch software to code subthemes and themes. The researchers then interpreted the themes and supporting responses from the participants. The study findings were then sent back to the participants for verification.

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## Ethical Considerations

Before the interview, the subjects' informed consent was obtained by the study's ethical criteria. At all times, participants were informed of the study's objectives, potential benefits to them and others, the confidentiality of the data, and their anonymity inside the study. Researchers reassured participants that their interview questions were open-ended, allowing them to answer favourably or unfavourably at any time.

Interviews were conducted without taking into account any potential bias on the part of the researchers. Personal prejudices and ideas about virtual laboratories. Also avoided were bad teaching, bad advice, and bad original data interpretation. Full honesty and integrity were displayed during all interactions with the research.

## Data Analysis

The data was examined using Seidman's phenomenological data analysis technique, which involves viewing the data holistically, selecting certain sections to focus on, going over them in depth or line-by-line, and analyzing the data by themes. The analysis took into account the study's findings and concepts.

*Holistic reading* is a method for understanding the basic significance and phenomenological meaning of a text.

*The selective or emphasizing approach* is the act of deciding which remark or phrase seems particularly essential or illuminating about the phenomena or experience being described.

*Detailed or line-by-line approach or coding* is the stage to learn about the phenomena or experience being described.

*Analyzing data by themes* is the final stage of data analysis involves grouping the themes by the fundamental components of the world of life and developing a specific structure for the interpretation of the meaning of the lived experience.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Profile of the Participants

A total of 12 participants participated in this study. All 12 of them graduated from Misamis University in Ozamis City last July 2022, with ages ranging from 22 to 29 years old; wherein eight (8) of them are 23 years old, two (2) of them are 22 years old, and the remaining participants were 24 years old, and 29 years old, respectively. All of them are female; among the participants, eight (8) are working while attending review sessions, while the remaining four (4) are full-fledged reviewees. In terms of the review centers they are attending, one of them attends the Peak Review Center in Cagayan, six (6) of them go to St. Louis Review Center; two (2) of these are attending the Cagayan branch while also attending Gurong Pinoy, while four (4) attends the Pagadian branch, although, another participant attends CBRC in Pagadian, three (3) of the participants are enrolled in Falculan Twins Review Center in Davao, and the remaining participant does not attend a particular review center. In terms of programs they pursued in college, seven (7) of the participants graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education (BEED), majoring in General Education, while five of them pursued a Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education (BSED), although two (2) of them majored in English, and another one major in Filipino. Lastly, the remaining two (2) participants majored in Science.

Every participant shared their respective stories on their journey toward the professional license that they have been eyeing for a long time. From these stories, the researchers gathered eight (8) primary themes. Based on the analysis of the gathered data, the following are the primary themes that have emerged: 1.) Acquiring Motivation and Decision, 2.) Encountering Financial Problems, 3.) Experiencing Psychological Pressures, 4.) Embracing Time Management During the Review 5.) Having a Good Support System, 6.) Developing Personal Growth, 7.) Longing to Become a Professional Teacher, and lastly, 8.) Highlighting Memorable Experiences.

## Acquiring Motivation and Decision

Based on the responses, one of the emerging themes highlighted the stories of hopes, and dreams, their respective motivations, and the decisions that they have made before them pursuing education. One of the respondents heartily expressed that:

*I wanted to become a teacher ever since I was just a child because I grew up being highly influenced by watching my mom do her job. From then on, I became aware that I needed to prepare myself for taking the LET. (P6)*

Based on the findings of one study, it has been found that the motivation of students in higher education, or pursuing career progression is influenced by the words of motivation that parents provide their children. Apart from this, parents are highly encouraged to provide moral support for their children pursuing job opportunities (Abdulhameed & Khalid, 2021). Parental influence plays a critical role in the formation of dreams, and goals that will later lead them into a path to achieving these goals.

Apart from the familial influence in pursuing education, one of the considerable factors for these Education major students in pursuing this course is their aspirations. In such cases, one respondent is interested in working in a government-regulated school, yet also welcomes the idea of working abroad should the opportunities permit. They particularly mentioned that:

*I had always planned on taking up teaching. I envisioned myself working as a teacher in a public school and maybe taking a teaching position outside of the country if an opportunity became available to me. (P1)*

*Honestly, I would like to say I would continue being a teacher here in the Philippines but realizing that I am the breadwinner of my family and my parents are surely getting old. I would have to admit that I plan to continue my teaching career or any opportunity abroad for a bigger income. (P8)*

Interestingly, some of the responses during the interview expressed how being a Licensed Professional Teacher (LPT) would become a representation of their hard work, and the effort they exerted to complete the four-year education course. For this participant, passing the board exam is the achievement that fuels the motivation within. In verbatim, P9 and P4 respectively stated that:

*Since I was an Education student, I thought that being an LPT was a way to show justice to the years I spent in college. Being an LPT is a great achievement too and I must become one. (P9)*

*I'd arrived at this realization by setting my ultimate goal which is to pass the boards. (P4)*

*I have always known and planned that I will take the licensure examination the early I can get. I do not want to delay any further because I dislike feeling anxious and pressured about it. (P7)*

*I envision myself as a licensed professional teacher with a stable job and enough salary. The LPT. I passed the LET and that's what I am seeing myself in the future. I hope so. (P9)*

According to the findings of one study, grit was related to better academic standing which illustrates how extreme focus can greatly positively impact the result. Establishing and furthering tenacity and perseverance in the academe is a significant identifier of career progression (Lee & Sohn, 2017). While the responses emphasize the dreams and their respective goals which mostly are to pass the coming board examinations, stories of faith not just in oneself, yet as well as faith in a supreme being guided by religious affiliations, have also been expressed. This has been expressed by Participant One here:

*Having a positive mind attracts positive results which is why I am claiming to pass or top the board exam. On the other hand, I already surrendered my future to Jesus which is why no matter what the result may be, I have to accept it with the whole of my heart and remind myself that He has better plans for me. (P2)*

In a country like the Philippines, religion remains a significant part of the culture that lives on to tell various stories on how faith is attributed to success stories. This can be seen through the tradition of visiting a particular temple in Cebu, the Simala Shrine, known for the number of stories that circulate about the success stories of different people, even those coming from different areas of the country. Some end up flying to Cebu to show their devotion to pursuing the desires of their heart. To put it simply, there are various ways in which individuals discover their aspirations, and these can affect the way they approach the goals they have set for themselves.

### **Encountering Financial Problem**

In the context of graduates' preparation process for the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET), encountering financial problems refers to the challenges and constraints they face related to their financial resources. These financial difficulties may include limited funds for review materials, coaching or tutorial fees, transportation expenses to review centers or examination venues, and other related costs. Graduate students preparing for the LET often require additional resources, such as study materials, review classes, and practice exams, to enhance their chances of success. However, financial constraints can pose significant barriers and may hinder their ability to access these resources. This is reflected in the responses of Participant 1:

*For me, the first encounter would be the financial aspect. Reviews of any kind require money and some if not most recent graduates don't have the means to be able to pay. (P1)*

*The biggest encounter I had was with financial matters. I had to go to a different city which was hours away from home. I also had to live there for months. So, there were a lot of expenses to consider. I had to plan everything to avoid unnecessary purchases to save enough amount to survive there on my own. (P7)*

Aside from the expensive cost of review centers, this comes with the realization that much bigger expenses can be accumulated by food costs, transportation, and others (Peña et al., 2018). The participants mentioned the following:

*Still, you have to spend from your pocket for your food, transportation, health (vitamins/medicines), filing for the LET, and even other review materials. (P6)*

*We also experienced financial problems since we took our review in Davao City which is way too far from Ozamiz. (P12)*

*The biggest encounter I had was with financial matters. I had to go to a different city which was hours away from home. I also had to live there for months. So, there were a lot of expenses to consider. I had to plan everything to avoid unnecessary purchases to save enough amount to survive there on my own. (P7)*

This fact has serious ramifications for individual students, their families, and institutions of higher learning's ability to fulfil the goals for the development of the country. Financial constraints undeniably contribute to the lived experiences of the participants of this study, the same way previous studies reflect their data on the role of financial capability in maintaining academic endeavours in line and reaching above-the-average academic results (Mngomezulu & Dhunpath, 2017).

Institutions and stakeholders can help alleviate the financial burdens faced by education graduates during their LET preparation and create a more equitable and supportive environment for aspiring teachers.

### **Experiencing Psychological Pressures**

Preparing for the LET can be a demanding and high-stakes process, as it determines the graduates' eligibility to become licensed teachers. As a result, they may experience significant psychological pressures, including stress, anxiety, self-doubt, and fear of failure. The psychological pressures can arise from multiple factors,



such as the competitive nature of the examination, the weight of expectations from oneself, family, or peers, and the anticipation of the impact the results will have on their future career prospects. These pressures can have a profound impact on graduates' mental well-being, affecting their motivation, focus, and confidence during their preparation period. The psychological pressures may also lead to sleeplessness, fatigue, difficulty in managing time effectively, and an increased sense of overall stress. For every examination that a student is expected to take to progress in the academe, it is a fact that increased anxiety levels can be observed among those who are preparing for a periodical examination or brain-wrecking board examinations. Through in-depth interviews with the respondents, the researchers were able to gather a common ground in terms of the struggles experienced by these Education major students preparing for the LET.

*Let's focus on the mental and physical aspects first, it's not easy, a lot of pressure from the people who expect a lot from you, a lot of worries and sleepless nights. (P3)*

*Pressure and self-doubt. I was excited at first with the thought that I was finally a step closer to my dream of becoming a Licensed Teacher, but during those times I was also pressured and doubted my capabilities. (P11)*

The participants experienced significant pressure during their preparation for the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). This pressure was particularly heightened for honour graduates, as there were high expectations from others for them to excel in the exam. The participants expressed a desire for people to be more considerate, sensitive, and mindful of the struggles faced by LET takers in managing these expectations. The participants expressed that:

*Pressure - especially if you're an honour graduate because people expect you to top/ace the exam. I just hope people become more considerate, sensitive, and mindful of how takers are struggling just to level their expectations. (P6)*

*The review center that I enrolled myself in was strict. Therefore, I had to double my efforts in studying. There were a bunch of quizzes, oral recitations, and readings to do at night. Hence, preparing for the exam is altogether mentally, emotionally, and physically draining. On top of that, I was away from home. I am in a city that was foreign to me so coping with stress was difficult. (P7)*

The participants experienced significant fear and nervousness due to the prospect of failure in the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). They expressed a strong desire to pass the exam and not disappoint themselves. The participants held high hopes for the results aligning with their expectations, indicating a strong desire for success. Participant 9 expressed that there is a fear of failure that pushes the anxiety levels to increase while preparing for the board exam:

*As usual, I felt nervous because I feared the thought of failure. I don't want to fail the exam or fail myself. I've been wanting to take the exam once and then pass it, but hoping that the results will go according to my hopes. (P9)*

*Although the review was very rigid, we also took breaks from time to time just to make sure we were still in the mood to learn. They also give punishments to those who will fail quizzes, give wrong answers for oral recitation, and those who are late in a form of talent portion where they let you sing, dance or act in front of hundreds of audience. I also get to sleep for 2 hours a day. Our final coaching was the best and worst experience we've had so far. We get to listen to lectures for 12 hours with working lunch and dinner for 3 days. We only get to sleep for as much as 1 hour a day during that time. (P12)*

Examinations, whether licensure or simple knowledge assessment tests, written on paper or digitally produced, are overall found to be anxiety-inducing. The academic performance of the students has been significantly affected by the anxiety that the students feel whenever they prepare for exams. Male students have shown higher anxiety indications through their scores as compared to the scores reported by female students (Ajmal & Ahmad, 2019).

In another study, test anxiety was found to be strongly and negatively associated with a variety of educational performance outcomes, including standardized tests, university admission examinations, and grade point averages. The effects were mainly noticeable in the intermediate grades. Self-esteem was found to be a major and powerful predictor of test anxiety. Greater test anxiety was also associated with the perceived difficulty of the test and its high-stakes character or implications (Von der Embse et al., 2018).

Despite the magnitude of the impact was barely noticeable, female students emerged to stand at a greater risk of experiencing unfavourable mental health repercussions. However, the researchers could not fully determine if these signs occurred before the pandemic since the research follows a cross-sectional method (Lischer et al., 2021). In addition, stating that through addressing worry and stress, the findings revealed: that about 85.8% of the participants experienced signs and symptoms of anxiety, however, most of these signs were minor (63.3%) (Lister et al. (2023).

The weight of having a goal or aspiration that one aims to achieve for oneself, for family members, for society, or the community, is enough reason for an individual to struggle with the pressure of succeeding. Most especially when the success of this individual will become an inspiration to others, to continue pursuing their dreams despite the hurdles that come their way.

Understanding the experiences of graduates in terms of psychological pressures during LET preparation is crucial for developing appropriate support mechanisms. It highlights the need for interventions that address the emotional well-being of graduate students, such as counselling services, stress management techniques, and strategies to build resilience. Providing a supportive environment that acknowledges and addresses these psychological pressures can enhance graduates' preparation experience, improve their mental health, and increase their chances of success in the LET.

### **Embracing Time Management during the Review**

Among the untold stories of Education major students preparing for the board exam was their experience with time management. Preparing for the LET requires a comprehensive and structured approach to cover the vast amount of content. Time management plays a crucial role in ensuring that graduates allocate sufficient time for studying, practice exams, and other essential review activities. Embracing time management involves creating a well-structured study schedule that outlines specific study goals, breaks, and designated time slots for different subjects or topics. It also entails prioritizing tasks, setting deadlines, and adhering to a disciplined routine. This became a crucial aspect for the duration of the review wherein some of them expressed how it has affected their social interactions, study habits, and health management strategies in coping with their respective situation.

*Time management and perseverance because I am a full-time private teacher. I need to give at least 1 hr. of study every night after work. (P10)*

*Of course with reviews, personal time becomes time for studying, so I think most students don't get to hang out, especially with friends who are also recent graduates as we are all focused on attaining our dreams. (P1)*

Other findings of the study reflect the corresponding value of adopting time management and conceptualization methods in connection to achieving certain academic endeavours. Time management allows an individual to organize tasks that need attention or accomplishment, which assists in developing a system that can enhance their ability to work on their goals and stay focused on achieving their aspirations (Broadbent, 2017). In particular, P6 shared that time management helps in creating a plan that would result in positive results for the board examination. P6 shared that:

*My plans on how to ace the exam (including time management, study habits, and my holistic health). (P6)*

*I realized back then that aiming to have a license would not be easy. So, I decided to take seriously on the review in every meeting we had in Seminar courses. (P2)*

*The center promised to cover all the subjects mentioned in the LET TOS for the board exam. However, the Civil Licensure Examination changed its schedule, resulting in LET taking place earlier than March 26. That is why some subjects were not discussed by a lecturer. The center just*

*Gave us test questionnaires (TQs) to answer. (P8)*

One factor that is proven to influence academic performance is succumbing to distractions perpetuated by social networking sites. Findings from Giunchiglia et al. (2018) illustrate the detrimental effects of online social networking usage, separating various social networking sites that contribute to mechanisms of educational endeavours, and emphasizing the necessity to limit the utilization of smartphones in educational environments. Keeping track of social media exposure is one way of doing time management. For this study, the participants thought that the lecturers had provided them with educational information but also became part of their support system. Upon recognizing the importance of getting the license they were after, the participants learned to have a system that would support their goals and that is time management.

Other findings of a study corroborated the influence of various stresses previously identified in research such as having excessive workload, and difficulty with learning and managing time which then translates to encountering problems in life at work and relationships, peer relationships, and health issues (Hill et al., 2018). The experiences of the participants demonstrate that for the goals they set for themselves, they had to find a way to achieve them step-by-step. The first step was studying college, and now attending a review center to prepare for the board examination. Ultimately, time management is a considerable factor that the participants highlighted in terms of their approach toward the preparation.

By embracing time management, graduates can enhance their overall preparation experience for the LET. They can maximize their learning potential, minimize stress and overwhelm, and increase their chances of success in the examination. It also instils valuable skills that can be beneficial in their future teaching careers, where effective time management is essential for managing classroom activities, lesson planning, and professional development.

### **Having a Good Support System**

One way to survive the dreading review sessions for a board examination preparation is to have a good source of strength and support that motivates them to do better. The respondents expressed their gratefulness for the significant individuals who contributed to their review preparations. It highlights the importance of having a good social support system in maintaining individual well-being (Saltzman et al. (2020). Participants P2 and P11 expressed how their review lecturers were inspirational in the way they were treated during the sessions. They mentioned that:

*Our lecturer allowed us to become lecturers as well during our pre-majorship review. That experience, inspires me to become a lecturer in reviewing for the LET board exam soon. (P2)*

*The lecturers at the center are the best! They inspired me even more to review thoroughly and aim to pass or top the board exam. I commend also those lecturers who humbly ask for understanding whenever they cannot give an accurate answer to a certain item. (7)*

*The lecturers by the way are super nice and do their job perfectly. "They are the best teachers I've had so far, no bias just pure admiration. (P11)*

In terms of peer support, findings indicate how those with deep significant connections, personally as well as in professional aspects, may be healthier and happier. They are less susceptible to burnout. Thus, individuals who encounter more work-home conflicts are more vulnerable (Callahan et al., 2020). In this study, good support systems also consist of friendships that were formed throughout the process. This was mentioned by the participants below:

*Those experiences are memorable for I had my classmates, whom I call my friends now, with me on those journeys. (P2)*

*My friends and my family were my best supporters before and during the review and of course, my ups and downs and always worried if I was going to pass the exam or not. (P5)*

*That specific experience I had was when during the last month of review, I almost decided to not take the board exam because of anxiety. Gladly, I was given support by the people around me who helped me finish my goal. (P11)*

Assistance from peers can be differentially characterized in previous research, however, it can be summarized as the assistance and encouragement provided by individuals who have lived experience with mental issues, and even those with learning impairment (Shalaby & Agyapong, 2020). Considering this, the connections formed through a series of review sessions, with a common goal in mind, and a mutual understanding of how their objectives will benefit them in the long run, is an example of being able to relate to people with whom you can share a common ground with.

In this case, these graduate students preparing for their most-awaited board examination found comfort in the thought of sharing their struggles and their respective lived experiences in addressing the issues they encountered along the way in pursuing their goals. Receiving a strong type of support from friends and family members allowed the participants to stay motivated, and fueled their desires to acquire additional learning, and all these happened because they had a good support system.

### **Developing Personal Growth**

More than the fact that board examinations are aimed at career progression, the respondents also expressed their stories of personal growth that were unleashed through the preparations they had for the LET. These experiences fuel their desire to commit to becoming a Licensed Professional Teacher in the end. Also, they aim to become inspirational beings of their own while carrying the values, and virtues that they have developed through time and throughout the education they took to attain their bachelor's degree. As stated by the participants here:

*My decision to take my review in Cagayan Since I lived in Ozamiz my whole life, the chance to go somewhere new has always been in my mind. So when I had the chance, I immediately took it. It was truly incredible to live in a new place alone. (P1)*

The change of environment for the participants coming from other provinces seemed to signify a fresh start in preparation for the review. The time to be engrossed with review materials, lecture videos, and meeting new people to boost their interpersonal skills. A structure where an individual can grow from the experiences that they encounter throughout their life.

According to the findings of the structural equation modeling study, the importance of the structure, and feedback for instructors, have been positively associated with the development of students' goal setting. Moreover, growth goal setting indicated an increase in determination, desires, and conduct towards assignments; and growth goal setting greatly influenced the association among assistance through structure and student-teacher involvement. Furthermore, creating growth goals proved to dramatically improve multiple results for low-achieving individuals from low-income families (Martin et al., 2022). P6 considers vicarious learning as a strength that can be utilized to better oneself. P6 stated that:

*I have too many, but the best one was learning from other's experiences/stories (Vicarious Learning) and making them one of my strengths to move forward and become a better version of myself. (P6)*

*But at the end of all those struggles I was thankful that I learned a lot from them. (P12)*



In another study, findings revealed that the powerful components of advocacy engagement related to a greater sense of agency, an overwhelming feeling of belongingness, a sense of responsibility and moral integrity, the ability to find one's voice and gain new skills, and a perception of individual progress (Budziszewska & Głód, 2021). Participant 6 also added that the additional learning contributes to another goal, which is self-betterment and contribution to others.

*Unlocking more achievements and hidden fixations. And most importantly, learning more about how I can be of great help to myself and others. (P6)*

*I also watch YouTube channels every night that were recommended to be helpful when it comes to LET review. Because of all those personal preparations, I was able to hone my testmanship. (P1)*

*I remember I created a schedule of the subjects and the time allotment for each, and I pasted it in front of my study table. I was very motivated and strict in following the schedule and I even had a checklist whether I had achieved it or not. But it only lasted for a week. But because of that one-week experience, studying became a routine without me realizing that I was already doing it every day. (P6)*

*My planned schedule was simple. I usually wake up around 5 AM and prepare for the review since it starts at 8 and ends at 12. After the review, my original plan was to study the things discussed in the morning. (P12)*

*Study plans - you have to know more about yourself on what technique and time to study suit you the best. (P6)*

Through individual objectives, life ambitions inadvertently projected the overall effectiveness of placed accomplishment goal seeking. Ultimately, contextual fulfilment of the basic psychological requirements for independence, skill, and connection explained variations on placed accomplishment objectives, which explained the contextual internal motivation for work and commitment to work. Most of the participants also mentioned a decline in their health, with their well-being affected by their respective experiences while preparing for the examination (Janke & Dickhäuser, 2018). These are presented below:

*For the physical aspect, I did not compromise my sleep just to review. I eat on time and avoid unhealthy foods, especially a week before the exam itself. (P2)*

*Declining health condition - It came to a point where I needed to take laboratory tests because I was so sick that I needed medication. I was becoming too selfish and abusive of my physical self that it almost gave up on me. That is why taking care of yourself/health should be put on top of the LET pyramid preparation and learning to rest from time to time is also a must. (P6)*

*Losing motivation - I became unmotivated in the middle of my review and I began to lose confidence in myself. (P6)*

In this study, it was obvious that developing personal growth was realized through mingling with other members of the society, sharing untold stories of their lived experiences, and learning from these experiences as they progress in their future careers one day. The learning, more than the technical aspect, brings certain values into formation, that could be beneficial once they enter the professional field.

### **Longing to Become a Professional Teacher**

From the moment the respondents decided to pursue an education course for college, there was an underlying dream that needed satisfaction, this is the longing to become a Professional Teacher. The collective experiences of the respondent present narratives that highlight the goal of becoming a professional in their chosen field.

For graduates like Participant 3, the value of teaching is to be a facilitator of learning, yet also guided by a vision of being able to influence the students to aim for a better life. Their actual statements about this can be seen here:

*My vision for myself in the future is to become a facilitator of learning, not just to teach but to touch their lives as well. (P3)*

*I want to be a licensed teacher someday that would shape the minds and mentality of my students. I want them to be brave and stay positive just like me as I deal with everything. Do not give up if you're feeling exhausted and continue what has been started. That license would be the evidence that I did everything to achieve my dream of becoming a professional teacher. (P3)*

*The second reason why I wanted to become a teacher is the love that I have for children. And the best action in expressing what I feel for them is through teaching. As I was in the middle of college, I realized that if I wanted to reach out to those children who are in marginalized areas, I must be a licensed teacher. If I'm just a "teacher", I will be contained in a box of children from middle and even rich-class families. But if I become a licensed one, I'll get to help children from deprived and oppressed environments. (P6)*

*I want to become an educator who inspires her students to be their best versions. (P11)*

*There were a couple of reasons that led me to that decision, mostly personal. One of the reasons is that I wanted to make a big step toward my goal of becoming a duly licensed professional teacher. Although this was the main reason it was also coupled with external pressures. (P12)*

This can be viewed through the findings of another study which suggests that independent of the type and level of motivation for teaching, instructors' values regarding conservation were positively connected with their sense of self-efficacy. More intriguingly, the associations among receptivity to transformation along with self-efficacy, as well as transcendence of oneself and confidence, all varied according to the reasons for the teaching of the educators. These relationships appeared deeper whenever educators experienced reduced peer pressure and more self-determination in their pedagogy (Barni et al., 2019). Moreover, P1 and P5 interestingly set their eye to reach the global scene in the field of teaching. Career growth by personal growth are two factors that contribute greatly to the respondents' vision. They expressed that:

*I had always planned on taking up teaching. I envisioned myself working as a teacher in a public school and maybe taking a teaching position outside of the country if an opportunity became available to me. (P1)*

*I envision myself becoming a licensed professional teacher who is globally competent and will enable me to grow my career professionally. (P5)*

The current situation of Filipino educators and the lack of sufficient job opportunities within the country is a considerable factor in why P1 and P5 have thought of pursuing a teaching career outside the Philippines. The opportunity for career growth and personal growth in the pool of international talents can be hard to decline, especially considering the hefty compensation that these opportunities entail for teachers who are considered professionals in the field.

The participants had a collective objective when it came to pursuing the current path that they were taking. Their burning desire was fueled by the practical learning that they acquired from studying Education, and by attending the sessions within their respective review centers. These allowed them to have a strong regard for their dreams. The longing to become a professional teacher someday will soon be achieved, and this will make them realize how they will approach their goals moving forward.

### **Highlighting Memorable Experiences**

While pursuing important goals, especially related to career development, and progression, it cannot be denied that there can be unforgettable experiences that help shape their perspectives. The participants of this study

expressed their respective memorable experiences based on the stories they told during the interview. Some of these experiences dwell on the learning they acquired directly related to teaching, yet some also expressed how they value the learning they acquired from inspirational people whom they met during the review sessions. These can be viewed through their actual responses here:

*My most memorable experiences were when I was doing demonstrative teachings and internship. It gave me an insight into what a teacher has to go through every day. (P1)*

*One of the most memorable experiences I had was when we took the mock board exam. It was memorable because I got to immerse myself in what would the exam be like during the actual day. (P7)*

*I enjoyed our review sessions especially since I have my classmates at MU who enrolled also in the center. My type of relationship with my classmates before was just civil when we were just studying at MU. (P1)*

Human contact is important to social existence (Capozzi & Ristic, 2018). Being able to interact with others provides a sense of belongingness that ultimately represents a bond that becomes unforgettable. A memory that may eventually slip from the mind yet would become a core memory that can be shared with other groups of people the individual can potentially meet throughout their life. These reflect the perspective of the participants, which is evident here:

*I think the most memorable experience was being in a circle of friends/classmates that would lift you, help you in times of crisis, especially requirements, and still be there in your downs. (P3)*

*I had many wonderful and memorable experiences during my college and review days. I met great people who helped me survive and overcome the challenges I encountered along the way. (P10)*

Individuals with biological mechanisms reside within wider social frameworks such as familial relationships, community, and society (Holt-Lunstad, 2018). The circles, and friendships formed during the review sessions attended by the participants are a testament that humans can easily form a social connection that can be preserved with a proper approach, and mutual understanding. It is not that some individuals are incapable of forming meaningful relationships with others, it may just be because some human beings, tend to selectively choose their interaction companions and fail to take advantage of every possibility for interaction with others (Capozzi & Ristic, 2018).

## **SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Summary**

Various lived experiences of twelve (12) Education graduates preparing for the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) have been realized through the conduct of this study which utilized a qualitative-phenomenological research design. The researchers used purposive sampling in gathering the participants of the study, all are residing in Misamis Occidental. Based on the data that was analyzed through Seidman's phenomenological data analysis technique. Despite each distinctive experience from the stories of the participants, there have been common struggles that they collectively experience. These struggles include financial constraints, dealing with the weight of pressure from expectations either from oneself or from other people, and their objectives set into place to become a professional in the field of Education. The experiences and coping mechanisms developed during the review sessions present eight (8) primary themes representing their untold stories.

### **Findings**

The following are the salient findings of the study:

1. Education graduates prepared themselves for the LET through developing personal growth by engaging in continuous learning, self-reflection, and practice teaching. They acquired motivation and

decision-making skills by setting clear goals, creating study plans, seeking support, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

2. The lifeworld of education graduates as they prepare for the LET is characterized by a mix of memorable experiences, a good support system, potential financial challenges, psychological pressures, and the need for effective time management.
3. Education graduates preparing for the LET longed to enter the teaching profession.

## Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions are made:

1. Education graduates enhance their chances of They recognize that personal growth, motivation, and effective decision-making are critical elements that contribute to their readiness for the examination.
2. Acknowledging the multifaceted journey of education graduates preparing for the LET enables them to navigate the preparation process more holistically, thereby increasing their chances of success in becoming licensed teachers.
3. Education graduates preparing for the LET demonstrate a clear and passionate vision of themselves as future professional teachers. Their commitment to preparing for the LET stems from their genuine passion for education and their strong belief in the transformative power of teaching.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research study, it is recommended that:

1. Education graduates create a comprehensive study plan that covers all relevant subject areas, giving priority to their areas of weakness. They should set specific goals and allocate dedicated time for studying each topic.
2. Parents and family members assist with financial planning by discussing budgeting strategies and exploring options for study materials. Provide a conducive study environment and offer encouragement during challenging times.
3. Teacher education institutions offer guidance and resources specific to LET preparation, such as study materials, mock exams, and review sessions. They should create mentorship programs or establish relationships with experienced educators who can provide insights and support during the preparation phase.
4. Assess the effectiveness of stress management interventions: Research to evaluate the impact of stress management interventions, such as workshops or counselling services, on education graduates' ability to cope with the psychological pressures of exam preparation. Measure their effectiveness in reducing stress levels and improving overall well-being.

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