Learning Competencies among English Language Teachers: An Exploratory Approach on the Challenges in Resources, Teacher Capacity, and Assessment

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ABSTRACT

The Philippine MATATAG Curriculum is one such reform that advocates for teachers to be models and develop LLL competencies; however, the situation of ELTs during the development of LLL competencies is neither fully understood nor explicitly addressed. The present exploratory qualitative study focused on the perceptions and experiences of the lifelong learning competencies of the ELT teachers of the Junior High Schools in Taguig City District 1 in the context of limited resources, institutional constraints and shifting assessment requirements. The study employed a phenomenological design based on Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) and Lifelong Learning Competency Framework. Fourteen licensed ELTs were interviewed from the three top-performing public high schools, while the transcripts were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Six emergent theme clusters and four cross-case patterns were generated from the analysis. The teacher faced the lack of materials, devices and connectivity by personal spending, self-created materials, and students' mobile connectivity (Downward Resource Subsidy and Institutional Scarcity). They endured conflict between institutional policies and the skills policies encourage (Institutional Policy–Teaching Dissonance), including AI literacy and gadget bans, and a three-term calendar with a day of training. They addressed formal learning gaps with webinars, online communities, learning action cell sessions and reflective practice (Autonomous Upskilling) and they explained learning reciprocally with colleagues and students (Reciprocal Co-Learning). A lack of funding, the time required to grade complex competencies, and the authenticity of out-of-school assessments, especially with the advent of artificial intelligence, hamper the implementation of assessment innovation, such as portfolios, self-assessment, and performance tasks. The time spent on administration also reduced time to learn, with one participant stating that there are few institutional barriers. Results are not generalizable, but indicate that teachers continue to learn a lot through their own effort and integration, and highlight the importance of allowing time, reducing administrative burdens, providing appropriate resources, infrastructure, and systems of assessment and devices.

Keywords: lifelong learning competencies; English language teachers; Resource Dependence Theory; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; MATATAG Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Twenty first-century demands such as economic sustainability and fast changing technologies are changing the face of education globally. The concept of education as transfer of information is now replaced with learning competencies which prepare the individual to become adaptive, creative and successful. This transition is based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) that state for equality in education, and sustainable skills (United Nations, 2015). These elements of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, digital literacy, and self-directed learning are now considered as part of a broader concept of lifelong learning

(LLL) and the teacher has been shifted from being a dispenser of information to being a facilitator of complex lifelong learning skills. The development of these skills in the classroom, however, will be contingent on the interplay of the teacher's own abilities, the availability of institutional resources and the quality of the assessment conducted.

These aspirations are echoed in AmBisyon Natin 2040, the Philippines' vision of an integrated, prosperous and strong society of empowered and internationally competitive Filipinos (National Economic and Development Authority [NEDA], 2016). In order to implement it, the Department of Education (DepEd) has enacted one after another reforms, such as the K to 12 Basic Education Program and the latest DepEd Order No. 10, s. MATATAG Curriculum. 2024. MATATAG, meaning “strong, stable and resilient,” aims to deflate the curriculum, strengthen core learning and integrate twenty-first century skills into the learning areas in a manner that will prepare learners to not just master content, but also to equip them with metacognitive and self-regulation skills they will carry into their future.These aims will only be achieved if three interconnected conditions are met. First, there are limits to instruction as a result of limited resources. In many public schools, instructors are driven to adopt teacher-driven, low-cost teaching methods that do not emphasize independent learning and higher-order thinking skills which MATATAG aspires. This leads to what the literature refers to as a policy–practice disconnect – a disconnect between policy and practice due to structural constraints (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). English teaching is a process of cultivating students' linguistic competence and communicative ability, and without modern textbooks and computer-mediated resources, it is particularly challenging for English teachers to implement competency-based teaching.

Secondly, teachers' skills and continual professional development (CPD) are not uniform. While the new RA 10912 mandates that professionals continue to learn, many of the programs that are available are not connected to the classroom situation of the English teacher. Teachers are unable to teach their students how to have learning competencies unless they have those themselves, and teachers who are oriented to lifelong learning are more digitally competent and prepared to develop twenty-first century skills (Keskin, 2023; Liang, 2025).

Third, assessment practice is decisive to the success of competency-based education. The traditional summative assessment tests, which focus on recalling facts, are still predominant and do not assess critical thinking, collaboration, and self-regulation (Lu et al., 2022). This is because the backwash effect of such tests creates superficial learning, which is not conducive to metacognition and self-directed learning, so it is necessary to create alternative learning assessments that are formative, peer, and performance-based (Butler, 2023; Ningsih et al., 2025). However, institutional support such as mentoring and professional learning communities (PLCs) is not yet in place and there are not many available instruments to measure high-order skills to support this shift (AlAli & Wardat, 2024).To be able to do this, it is important to become familiar with how resources, teacher capacity and assessment relate. The purpose of this study is to obtain evidence to influence institutional support systems and national discussion on teacher preparation, which will be used to find the systemic obstacles in the development of learning competencies of English language teachers (ELTs)

Statement of the Problem

To comply with DepEd Order No. 10, s. The government wants the learners to be lifelong learners who can use the knowledge and skills acquired outside of the classroom in 2024 and the MATATAG Curriculum. But this is not happening easily, as other challenges stand in its way such as lack of resources, inadequate professional development, and the absence of an appropriate assessment system. Hence the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- How do English Language Teachers (ELT) perceive the alignment between their current professional competencies and self-directed learning to adapt to evolving pedagogical demands?
- What are the lived experiences of teachers in accessing and utilizing digital and physical resources to sustain their continuous professional development in ELT?

- How do teachers integrate lifelong learning principles into their assessment strategies, and what obstacles do they face when evaluating student competencies alongside their own professional growth?
- How does the school environment influence the teachers' ability to practice lifelong learning competencies when faced with limited resources and institutional constraints?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study takes an approach of Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978 as cited in Hillman et al., 2009), which is supplemented by the Lifelong Learning (LLL) Competency Framework. Organisations, including schools, are not isolated, their practices and choices are influenced by the resources they have in their environment including textbooks, computers, learning materials, access to the internet, learning facilities, training, management support etc. When resources are abundant, teachers are given the freedom to try out new methods and creative activities; when resources are limited, they are more likely to revert to lecture, writing and board work over technology, group work, or online activities. The teaching practice is thus not influenced only by the efforts of a teacher, but also by the support that the school offers.

The LLL Competency Framework identifies the competencies in the areas of skills, attitudes and knowledge that educators must have to thrive in a rapidly changing world – including the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. It focuses on digital literacy, critical thinking, information management, teaching with digital tools, flexible teaching, and current forms of assessment like formative and peer assessment. In this study, it was used as the criterion for "Teacher Capacity", namely the ability and willingness of teachers in the face of obstacles to cope with the requirements of twenty-first century education. Together, RDT illustrates how resources shape teaching decisions and the LLL framework emphasizes teaching as a professional activity and a lifelong endeavor as part of learner achievement, that is, teaching decisions are influenced by the resources available and by the capacity to leverage those resources.

Scope and Limitations

The study will focus on the lifelong learning competencies of ELTs and the challenges they encounter in relation to the use of resources (physical and digital), capacity (digital competence, assessment literacy, and professional development), and assessment practices as described by the MATATAG Curriculum and DepEd Order No. 10,

s. 2015. 2024. It is reported from the teachers' own experiences and perceptions. It does not directly assess student learning and/or performance, assess effectiveness of intervention, program or policy and test causal relationships. The results are based on the public Junior High English Language Teachers in Taguig City and do not necessarily apply to English teachers in other schools or other educational levels; nor should it be applied to private schools or rural schools, since the results may be different from that found in Taguig City. The responses are also very much dependent on participants' memory, interpretation, and willingness to share and the interpretation of qualitative data by researchers. Other limitations included time constraints, and access to participants.

Significance of the Study

The results may be used to guide educational institutions and their teachers in identifying how their existing resources, teacher capacity, and assessment practices are lacking in support of the teaching and learning of twenty first century skills. They can be used by teachers as a means of moving to a more learner-centred approach to teaching and developing their lifelong learning, technological and assessment skills. Enhancing teaching and assessment should benefit students by providing them with the opportunity to learn critical thinking, to learn through collaboration, and to learn independently. The results can be used to reinforce support systems, infrastructure, and professional development in school. The community has more capable learners ready for challenges in the real world, and researchers have a reference point to further explore the competencies of lifelong learning, pedagogies, and assessment in English language teaching.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Resource and Infrastructure Gaps as Structural Constraints

Structural constraints, such as resource and infrastructure gaps, are not just technical issues.Resource and infrastructure gaps are not only technical issues.

The disconnect between expectations of the schools' capabilities under policies like MATATAG and what they actually do, must be examined in relation to the structural factors that limit the implementation of policies and efforts to reform the schools. RDT believes that schools rely upon the materials, technology and expertise they have in their setting and that the lack of physical resources is amongst the primary limitations to high-resource LLL-oriented teaching. The current ELT practitioners are constrained to using outdated textbooks and lack of authentic language materials and materials using different multimedia, culturally appropriate reading passages, which makes it difficult to apply the resource-intensive approach to teaching English like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The teachers without resources use teacher-centered instruction, drills, and lecturer, and do not have resources to develop meaningful performance tasks and simply grade students using simple and inexpensive methods. The cases below are examples of how the RDT principle of resource constraints shaping pedagogy applies.

Digital technologies such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), online assessment tools and multimedia are essential to ELT and therefore require technological tools (devices, software and strong internet connections) as well as teacher competence to use these tools. The need for timely access to broadband and suitable devices was among the most evident restrictions identified by Alshakhi (2021) in complex assessment as they are essential for carrying out blended (online and offline) and multimedia assessment. Digital competence is one thing that does not enhance teaching, when teachers are not digitally competent, tools are used for “simple” functions like posting materials on the website, not for more meaningful function like assessment and timely feedback. However, both hardware and human resources are needed, as Garzón Artacho et al. (2020, 2021) and Eslit et al. (2024) identified significant competence gaps when it comes to the usage of technology for formative-assessment data analysis and for creating dynamic Digital Learning Environments, respectively.

The support of the institution is an asset in itself. Amemasor et al. (2025) and Liang (2025) conclude that assessment reform will not be possible without ongoing school support, such as targeted mentoring, PLCs centered on assessment practice, and time for teachers to collaborate and plan. The knowledge and skills required to design, implement, and analyze assessments ethically (Davies, 2008; Taylor, 2009) are resource intensive to develop. In the absence of mentoring and collaboration, schools yield unprepared teachers who are not oriented toward formative, LLL assessment as encouraged by policies like MATATAG.

Policy–Practice Disconnect

While the emphasis in curriculum policies is generally on learner-centred educational practices, formative assessment and lifelong learning skills, these are not always realised in classrooms. The failure to change generally does not reflect teachers' reluctance, but rather a systemic problem. Reforms in theory, but in reality it is the traditional, test-based approach that prevails in a high-stakes environment where teachers are forced to teach in large classes and to be held accountable in the same manner. This is in line with RDT which has found that structural barriers are blocking teachers from engaging with authentic, resource-rich formative assessment. The complementary explanation from the stakeholder theory is that an organization's strategy will succeed when all stakeholders, such as teachers, administrators, policy makers and the community, coordinate and commit to the strategy (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Reforms are superficial if there is no coordination of responsibility and resourcing, and individual teachers are left to deal with institutional and administrative issues.

Teacher Capacity and Professional Development

Teaching capacity has been a focus of research from 2020 to 2025. A lack of preparedness in teachers will

not be able to help students to master twenty first century skills. Dadvand and Behzadpoor (2020) identified nine components of pedagogical knowledge that would make educators effective, and Garzón Artacho et al. (2020, 2021) identified structures of digital competence and noted that there are significant gaps in digital competence, assessment literacy, and technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK). Continuing professional development is the key for teachers to enhance classroom management, communication, commitment to teaching, and to become accustomed to the approach of the new curriculum, which is facilitative and technology-enhanced (Romanhuk, 2020). The CPD Act of 2016 (Republic Act No. 10912) mandates that professionals, in the Philippines, obtain CPD units through training sessions, seminars, and other activities to renew their licenses with the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC).

Digital competence is not simply the use of tools, it implies critical and creative use and pedagogical consideration of the integration of traditional teaching with technology (Garzón Artacho et al., 2021). Alshakhi (2021) also found that teachers' assessment literacy is low, meaning they have difficulty making meaningful and reliable assessments, interpreting results, and using results to enhance instruction. Students are impacted in cycles, because they do not get reliable measures of learning, nor useful feedback

Lifelong Learning and Teaching Effectiveness

This is because teachers with good lifelong learning skills have applied their professional skills more effectively and made better use of technology (Şen & Yildiz Durak, 2022). Lifelong learning tendencies are significantly related to digital competence (Keskin, 2023), while teachers who have the characteristics of LLL can more effectively support learners in developing the skills of the 21st century and self-directed learning (Liang, 2025). Good teaching also requires a variety of innovative approaches. Sarabi and Ututalum (2024) indicated that the project-based learning provides students with real-life issues, authentic assessment, collaboration and problem-solving skills, and Suri (2024) highlighted diverse teaching methods and strategies that are tailored to different learning styles and cultural backgrounds to make instruction inclusive.

Assessment Practices and the Twenty-First-Century Skills Gap

The twenty-first and lifelong learning competencies will be shaped by the central role of assessment, a theme that is gaining traction as we push forward from high-stakes testing to formative, competency-based and learner-focused assessment, in line with MATATAG's vision of assessment for growth. Using innovative methods such as peer assessment, self-assessment, performance-based tasks, or gradeless or low-stakes assessment promotes engagement, motivation, collaboration, and communication, as well as self-regulation (Homayouni, 2022; Mohamed et al., 2023). Constructive formative feedback fosters self-regulation and confidence, and views assessment as a part of learning (Butler, 2023; Ningsih et al., 2025).

Implementation remains difficult. Many schools continue to base evaluation on summative measures focusing on recall rather than on higher order skills including critical thinking, teamwork, digital literacy and self-directed learning (Akbari, 2020; Lu et al., 2022). The teacher lacks assessment literacy, poor training of teachers in digital instruments, and there is a lack of validated instruments to measure complex competencies (AlAli & Wardat, 2024; Aleksić et al., 2022). While many have a sound theoretical foundation, they are not used as effectively as they should be (Kang & Lam, 2023; Malabo, 2024; Yen & Thao, 2024) and as they have little training and resources, they resort to more traditional exam-based approaches.

Performance-based assessment, on the other hand, is more likely to evoke reflection, creativity, and continuous improvement (Chukwuedo et al., 2021; Wael et al., 2023), while contextual, learner-centered lesson and teaching strategies foster learner independence, adaptability, and perseverance (Andres-Kimmiman, 2025; Matsumoto-Royo et al., 2021; Schutte et al., 2025). Professional development and formal self-assessment systems that build teachers' knowledge and skills in a context-specific manner enable teachers to identify and modify their weaknesses (Namsone et al., 2021).

Synthesis

The literature suggests that enhancing the lifelong learning skills of ELTs is a multi-layered and incremental

process that relies on key resources, teacher expertise, and assessment structures. The pressure to revert to traditional teaching methods comes from physical gaps (e.g., old textbooks) and digital gaps (e.g., unreliable internet and devices), and maintains a policy–practice disconnect, with policy reform seemingly merely on paper. Teachers need to have capacity to implement the curriculum, but without continuous professional development, teachers are unable to have the capacity in the areas of assessment literacy, digital competence, and TPACK.

This leaves a lasting twenty first century skills deficit, fueled by continuing over reliance on summative evaluations that simply evaluate memorization, and not critical thinking, teamwork, and self-directed learning.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Tradition of Inquiry

The study was a qualitative, exploratory, phenomenological study with a descriptive approach in an interpretivist paradigm (Creswell, 2013) which explored the lifelong learning competencies of ELTs and the problems they encounter in their resources, teachers and assessment practices. A qualitative approach was deemed to be suitable as this would allow for an in-depth exploration of teachers' experience, perceptions and situational reality that quantitative methods could not capture. A phenomenological approach was selected for the purpose of understanding the teachers' interpretation of their everyday phenomena when implementing the MATATAG Curriculum, especially considering that there was a lack of literature that highlighted the interaction between the three (lifelong learning competencies, resource constraints, and assessment practices) among Filipino English teachers. It also enabled the researchers to discover the common threads and core concepts in teachers' experiences and their responses to these scenarios.

RDT directed the focus for the development of the instrument and analytic frame on the three interrelated dimensions in the Statement of the Problem: (1) the level of educational resources, (2) teacher capacity and classroom practice, and (3) the extent to which current assessment practices support twenty-first-century skills and lifelong learning. The study is appropriate for the interpretivist tradition because it aims to provide an understanding of how teachers make sense of the aim of lifelong learning in the MATATAG Curriculum despite the possible challenges or obstacles faced by them in school. The teachers' reflection on their experiences and practices, as well as the researcher's reflection on the data to make sense of a complex system. Through lived experience, teachers will gain an understanding of what support they require and will be able to inform policy and school programs, and will capture the emotional and relational aspects of teaching which numbers cannot provide.

The analytic method used was the main method, which was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Nizza, 2021). IPA explores how people make sense of meaningful life events, particularly life-changing, emotional and/or difficult events, and it is built on three philosophical principles: phenomenology (the lived experience of an event); hermeneutics (the interpretation made by a researcher); and idiography (the unique experience of one individual). In the context of MATATAG, IPA can help to delve into the problem that teachers encounter, their interpretation of the problem, and the significance of their professional learning. Interpretations were constructed by starting from the ground up, based on the teachers' own descriptions.

Participants and Setting

The participants were the teacher in the English, purposively sampled, and three criteria, Junior High School (JHS; Grades 7-10) in the Taguig City District 1 in public schools. First, they were all registered professional teachers in the field of English, which means that they had passed the pre-service training approved by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and have qualified under the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and the requirements of the CPD Act of 2016 (Republic Act No. 10912). Second, they were instructed at the JHS level which is important for cultivating critical thinking, academic literacy and metacognitive skills that facilitate lifelong learning. Third, they were experienced teachers with three to five years of experience in the public school system. First two years teachers are more likely to be

concerned with "survival" issues like classroom management and routines, while by year three they are more likely to be professionally mature enough to critically reflect on their work, and by year five, they will see changes in curriculum, and have a better sense of what works in the classroom and what doesn't.

The setting consisted of the three public high schools that achieved the highest scores in the Taguig City District 1 from the DepEd National Capital Region Directory of Public Schools; the schools' names are omitted to ensure the anonymity of the participants. The high-performing public school is an ideal fit for an RDT-based inquiry because it has to be excellent, and it has to obtain its resources, technology, and training from government funding. Fourteen of the 15 teachers' accounts were analyzed to balance the dataset as were five teachers per school. In this paper, participants will be referred to by codes (e.g., JLG 01).

Research Instrument

The main instrument was a semi structured interview guide, which the researchers had built from the theoretical framework and research questions. It consisted of five interrelated sections: general questions to establish rapport and gain background information about teachers' experiences and context; questions about resources (physical and material resources, digital infrastructure, institutional support, and accessibility and relevance of professional learning); questions about teachers' capacity and professional development (digital literacy, assessment literacy, TPACK, accessibility and relevance of professional learning); questions about assessment practices and barriers to innovative competency-based assessment; and closing part for reflections and recommendations. There were 12 questions in the final guide (Table 1).

This guide was checked prior to use. The first draft was reviewed by the thesis adviser and the panel for consistency with the research objectives and the use of English language and the relevance, clarity, coherence and comprehensiveness of the draft was judged by three external experts in English Language Teaching, Qualitative Research and Educational Assessment. All three questions were validated on a pilot test with three English language teachers in the local school division, who met the inclusion criteria, on the following points: legibility of questions, appropriateness of content, and the anticipated interview length of 30 minutes. Has resulted in a few changes, primarily words that are technically used for more common words.

The authors were also data collection instruments, as they were qualitative researchers. To eliminate bias and remove their own assumptions from the data collection and analysis, they used reflexive journaling and bracketing. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim with the consent of the participants, in order to maintain a sense of place with the participants' actual words. Field notes took on contextual information and initial analytic observations, offering an open and systematic audit trail.

Data Analysis

Data collection took place as Step 0, and then the six-step IPA process of Smith et al. (2009) and Delve (2023) were followed. For Steps 1, the researchers read and re-read the transcripts to familiarize themselves with the data and to discover subtle nuances and meanings (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In Step 2, initial noting, descriptive comments were made about what the participants said, linguistic comments about how they said it and conceptual comments about what they meant by it (Larkin et al., 2006; Eatough & Smith, 2008). For Step 3, the notes were used to construct emergent themes, which were succinct and interpretive, and included the participants' voice as well as the researchers' analytic voice (Smith et al., 2009). In Step 4, themes for relationships were explored, abstracted and subsumed into clusters (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). The data from each participant were analyzed individually as part of Step 5; the idiographic nature of IPA (Smith et al., 2009; Noon, 2018) was maintained. In Step 6, patterns emerged across cases, striking a balance between the depth of each case and the collective insight (Smith, 2004; Tuffour, 2017).

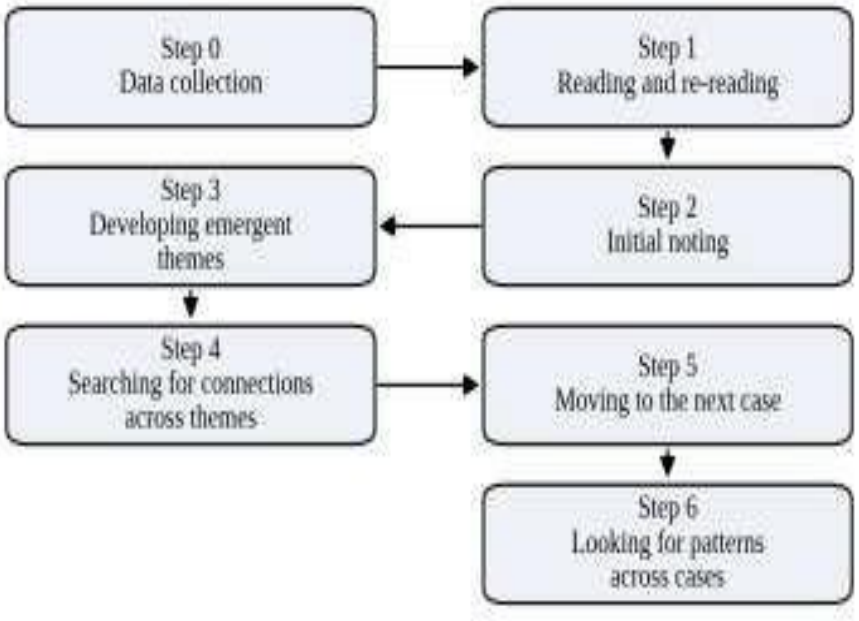


Figure 1. Steps in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) used in the study (adapted from Smith et al., 2009; Delve, 2023).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical safeguards were applied to the study in a manner appropriate for a study which deals with institutional and professional issues. Each participant was given a complete description of the purpose, design and scope of the study, the methods that will be employed, and the approximate length of time that the work will require and the nature of the data to be explored. There were no coercion or penalties involved in withdrawing from the study and participation was voluntary. Prior to any interview or recording the students had signed written consent forms.

In order to prevent possible workplace or career consequences, no documents or reports contain real names, schools, or specific locations, and codes were used to identify participants, and all data were stored in password protected digital folders only accessible to the researchers. Questions for interviews were open, respectful, rather than testing or judging the participant's skills, and allowed the participant to pause, stop, or decline a question. Participants' professional status was respected, the researchers identified systems and contextual issues instead of rating and comparing teachers, and the structural challenges identified were presented without focusing on the participants' shortcomings. The participants' responses have been appropriately represented, interpretations made from the data only, and specialists and advisers reviewed the work. The research adhered to the guidelines of the research ethics framework of the institution and the principles of academic integrity, accountability and social responsibility.

Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

This is to comply with Polytechnic University of the Philippines Executive Order No. 46, s. The researchers reveal that only AI tools helped them organize, structure, and polish the text based on their own notes, literature, and drafts, as well as assisted in the development of the initial version of the interview protocol in 2024. All AI-assisted content was edited by the researchers. Basic text and language editing, which does not require formal disclosure under Section 5.2 of the Executive Order, but is described here for academic reasons, included editing text and sentences for grammatical correctness and for conciseness. During data analysis, the researchers generated the research problem, theory, data analysis and conclusions without the use of AI tools, and all interpretive and analytic decisions were made by the researchers, such as in Section 6.1.1 and 6.1.2. The researchers are solely responsible for the originality, accuracy and integrity of the study and will correct for any errors that may have stemmed from the AI-assisted text (Sections 5.6 and 5.7).

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RESULTS

The finding is adapted from the IPA steps outlined in Section 3.4 and based on the accounts of four public high schools (JHSs) in the Taguig City District 1, their codes being JLG 01. To adhere to the journal length limit, the raw transcripts (Step 1) and the initial-noting tables (Step 2) are not reproduced here.

Steps 0 to 3: From Data Collection to Emergent Themes

All participants were asked the same 12 questions (Table 1) using a semi-structured format, but were given the opportunity to provide more in-depth first person transcripts of their experiences, which formed the main data. Participants' answers were read and reread in Step 1 to familiarize the transcripts and draw conclusions (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The original answers already suggested that participants had to adapt to the new conditions and limited resources, which is what RDT says actors must do when their environment changes. In Step 2, descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments were added to the transcripts (Larkin et al., 2006; Eatough & Smith, 2008), with the conceptual comments focusing on the dependency, coping and resource management of actors operating in an environment of constraints. In Step 3, a relatively short interpretive theme was constructed for every participant's response to each question that represented the voice of the participant, yet also from the researchers perspective (Smith et al., 2009). These emergent themes by interview question are summarized in table 1. Themes for Questions 4, 7, 8 and 11 were not available for GG 06.

Table 1. Interview questions and summary of emergent themes (Step 3)

No.	Interview question	Summary of emergent themes (Step 3)
1	Recall a situation when your competences were challenged by the new teaching demands.	Adjusting to the three-term curriculum and MATATAG (JLG 01, CM 10); relearning amid missing materials (SP 02); AI versus gadget restrictions (MGPZ 03) and AI-assisted writing (JM 04); forced but rewarding digital adaptation (WE 05, BE 08, JL 12, MT 14); creative solutions to scarcity (AE 11).
2	What are your strategies or practices related to self-directed learning?	Goal setting, reflection, and resource seeking (GG 06, WE 05, ED 09); webinars as routine (CJB 07, AE 11, MT 14); scaffolding and the shift from lecturer to facilitator (MGPZ 03, BE 08); personal study (SP 02, JM 04); persistence despite an unfinished master's degree (JL 12).
3	Do you feel motivated or pressured or both in adapting to changing pedagogical practices?	Motivation and pressure held together (JLG 01, CJB 07, CM 10, JL 12); pressure reframed as a catalyst (WE 05, ED 09, SP 13, MT 14); motivation outweighing pressure (AE 11, GG 06); added administrative load (BE 08); waning motivation and disillusionment (SP 02, MGPZ 03).
4	Explain and share at least one example where online materials (webinars, online classes) helped you improve as a teacher.	Division training and webinars strengthening practice and confidence (JLG 01, CJB 07, CM 10, AE 11, SP 13, MT 14); AI tools and training (MGPZ 03, WE 05); seminars and conferences (JM 04, BE 08); an online master's program (SP 02).
5	What resource constraints exist in your school, and how do you address them?	Unstable connectivity and limited devices met by student devices, offline work, and flexible deadlines (WE 05, GG 06, AE 11, JL 12); self-made or low-cost materials (BE 08, CJB 07, ED 09, SP 13); personal financial limits (JM 04); government under-provision (MGPZ 03).

6	Describe creative ways you have used limited resources to continue your professional development.	Free online content and webinars (GG 06, CJB 07, ED 09, JL 12, SP 13); peer cascading, raffled seminar slots, and peer observation (WE 05, BE 08, CM 10, MT 14); mobile data and Google Classroom (AE 11); screen projection (MGPZ 03); scarcity as a driver of creativity (JM 04, SP 02).
7	Provide a learning experience where you have not only learnt with the students but also developed as a teacher.	Students teaching or exploring technology alongside the teacher (BE 08, ED 09, CM 10, AE 11); two-way learning (JLG 01, JM 04, JL 12); modeling humility (MGPZ 03); flexibility gained from students (SP 02, MT 14); confidence from student discussion (CJB 07).

No.	**Interview question**	**Summary of emergent themes (Step 3)**
8	What are some of the challenges that you encounter when applying the principles of learning competencies in your evaluations?	Budget limits on assessment length and depth (WE 05); time constraints (CJB 07, AE 11); converting qualitative thinking into grading metrics (BE 08); verifying authentic performance outside school (JM 04); diverse learner needs and fairness (ED 09, CM 10, MT 14).
9	What do you do to integrate traditional methods of evaluation with the more recent methods?	Pairing written tests with performance, digital, or portfolio tasks (GG 06, CJB 07, BE 08, CM 10, SP 13, MT 14); balancing formative and summative assessment (WE 05); digitizing test delivery (MGPZ 03, AE 11); matching method to learner capability (JLG 01, JL 12).
10	Does professional development in your school occur due to certain situations or initiatives?	Curriculum and grading-system shifts (JM 04, GG 06, CJB 07, ED 09); division- or DepEd-mandated training (SP 02, BE 08, CM 10); planned programs and emerging needs (JLG 01, SP 13, MT 14); Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions (AE 11, JL 12); mandated yet willingly embraced (WE 05).
11	What institutional barriers (e.g., workload, policies, lack of support) do influence your learning competencies?	Heavy workload, paperwork, and time scarcity (SP 02, CJB 07, BE 08, ED 09, CM 10, AE 11, JL 12); understaffing and overlapping roles (MGPZ 03, WE 05); overcrowded classrooms (JM 04); few perceived barriers amid community support (JLG 01).
12	What is the value of collaboration with colleagues to your learning competence development?	Peer exchange, co-planning, and LAC sessions sustaining reflective growth (GG 06, CJB 07, BE 08, ED 09, CM 10, AE 11, SP 13, MT 14); collaboration as an antidote to solitary learning (SP 02); mutual mentoring across generations (JM 04); shared knowledge across roles (MGPZ 03).

Step 4: Searching for Connections across Themes

To summarize the emergent themes, they were abstracted and subsumed into six clusters (Brocki & Wearden, 2006), as presented in Table 2. The clusters reinforce the RDT perspective on actors' reactions to, and limitations from, multiple demands of the environment.

Table 2. Theme clusters, emergent sub-themes, and representative participant evidence (Step 4)

Emergent sub-themes	**Representative evidence**
Cluster A. Self-Directed Learning and Metacognition. Learning is seen as an ongoing, voluntary, self-motivated activity needed to keep up with changing curricula such as MATATAG and with student needs.	
A.1 Goal setting and reflective practice: teachers routinely reflect on and adjust instructional plans after lessons.	WE 05: "So having that constant metacognition." GG 06: "...grounded in goal-setting, reflective practice, and continuous skill practice..."
A.2 Informal and autonomous upskilling: free webinars, open-access journals, social media teacher groups, and tutorials fill gaps in formal training.	CJB 07: "I attend webinars, read professional resources, and explore online teaching materials to improve my knowledge."
A.3 Resilience and growth mindset: systemic pressure is reframed as a driver of professional development.	ED 09: "Despite these challenges, I view change as a necessary part of professional growth and strive to embrace it positively."
Cluster B. Digital Competence and TPACK Integration. Teachers' progression from emergency to intentional digital instruction.	
Emergent sub-themes	**Representative evidence**
B.1 Pivoting to digital pedagogy: online collaborative platforms, Google Classroom, Microsoft Forms, and AI tools such as ChatGPT for lesson preparation and material creation.	BE 08: "...forced me to quickly learn a new way of using digital collaborative platforms."
B.2 Blended and scaffolding strategies: moving from direct lecturing to facilitation through guided instruction ("I do, we do, you do") combined with digital resources.	BE 08: "...stepping away from traditional lecture, I start with scaffolding methods."
Cluster C. Assessment Literacy and Competency-Based Evaluation Shift. A balance of traditional summative paper-and-pencil testing with formative, performance, and authentic assessment.	
C.1 Hybrid and alternative assessment: traditional quizzes for basic knowledge combined with digital portfolios, podcasts, MP4 presentations, debates, and speech choirs.	BE 08: "...a hybrid form of assessment like using traditional grammar and vocabulary written quiz/test, but pair it with a recent method of digital portfolio or a presentation project through MP4 format…"
C.2 Metacognitive and formative feedback: peer assessment, reflective journals, and continuous feedback loops develop student autonomy rather than relying on high-stakes marks alone.	ED 09: "...allow students to monitor their own progress and identify areas for improvement. I also provide formative feedback that focuses on growth…"
Cluster D. Collaborative Lifelong Learning and Collegial Knowledge-Sharing. Professional development as a socially embedded, distributed activity rather than an isolated individual one.	

D.1 Institutionalized collegial networks: knowledge from external seminars is shared through LAC sessions, In-Service Trainings (INSET), and focus group discussions (FGDs).	BE 08: "In our school, one thing that we usually do is conducting LAC session, wherein we do a Teacher Peer Session at school."
D.2 Intergenerational exchange: novice teachers offer modern ICT skills, and veteran teachers offer classroom management and pedagogical experience.	JM 04: "at least they are open. That's the important thing. They are open for new, for these innovations, for these new strategies."
Cluster E. Institutional Policy–Practice Contradictions. Not only resource scarcity (RDT) or skill gaps (LLL) but policy dissonance in which agency rules undermine the very competencies teachers are asked to foster.	
E.1 The AI/gadget paradox: DepEd requires twenty-first-century digital and AI literacy while memoranda prohibit student devices in classrooms.	MGPZ 03: "How could they use AI if the very institution that should be paving the way... disallowed and prohibited them to do that? Make it make sense, right?"
E.2 Curriculum volatility with inadequate lead time: a major structural change (four-quarter to three-term system) supported by one day of orientation or training.	MGPZ 03: "...the three-term curriculum that was just implemented this school year, we just had one day of training for that."
Cluster F. Occupational Burnout, Administrative Overload, and Career Resignation. Standard educational frameworks overlook the effect of occupational burnout and role overload on teachers' capacity to keep learning.	

Emergent sub-themes	**Representative evidence**
F.1 Ancillary task fatigue: heavy teaching loads with teachers acting as registrars, attendance encoders, health monitors (body mass index measurement), and reading and Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) program coordinators.	BE 08: "It is the administrative workload (paperwork, etc) and straight teaching hours (full teaching loads)."
F.2 Turnover intention and financial motivation: in at least one account, entry into public school teaching was financially motivated and accompanied by a desire to leave.	MGPZ 03: "I pursued it because I needed to loan a huge sum of money. But had I not needed, I wouldn't. Sorry DepEd."

Steps 5 and 6: Moving to the Next Case and Looking for Patterns across Cases

On their own terms, and without attempting to 'connect' themes from one case to the next, each participants' transcripts, initial notes, and emergent themes were analyzed in Step 5 without superimposing themes from other participants' accounts on the next.

This case-by-case procedure was continued until all fourteen participants were analysed individually, and the analyses of the cases were then put together for comparison. Four cross-case patterns were identified in Step 6 (Table 3) and each pattern is explained with participant evidence and interpretation below.

Table 3. Patterns across the fourteen participants (Step 6)

Dimension	**Cross-case patterns**
External dependency and structural constraints	**Pattern 1:** Downward Resource Subsidy and Institutional Scarcity. **Pattern 2:** Institutional Policy–Teaching Dissonance.
Internal adaptive and lifelong competencies	**Pattern 3:** Autonomous Upskilling as a Coping Mechanism for Formal Training Gaps. **Pattern 4:** Reciprocal Co-Learning between Teachers, Colleagues, and Students.

Pattern 1: Downward Resource Subsidy and Institutional Scarcity

Teachers explained that they had to do without teaching materials, with poor or non-existent Wi-Fi, and with the students' own devices to compensate for the lack of school devices, rather than canceling teaching: they were able to buy their own or prepare their own materials or ask students to bring their own devices (most commonly mobile data providers). JM 04 cited the lack of the instructional materials, and claimed that “as teachers, we should not be required to draw from our own pockets.” “Some scarcity of school supplies so I need to invest on it,” said JL 12, and added that “not all learners have gadgets and internet access” to be able to meet the deadlines. WE 05 clarified that “what we can do is to re-maximize what we have…we allow our students to use their own data so they could participate in the interactive activity that I have prepared.” AE 11 went on to report that “students are encouraged to use their own mobile data to participate in the interactive activities that I have prepared. MGPZ 03 commented, “If there are not sufficient sheets of paper to print our test, we just flash them on the screen,” and BE 08 spoke about the books being outdated and the internet not being stable “by creating LAS (Learning Activity Sheet), downloadable materials...”.

The shortfall in performance was not because of teachers' ability, but because of the lack of infrastructure and materials. The data do not indicate that the cost was taken uniformly by teachers, but rather ranged from JL 12's resigned acceptance to the open resistance of JM 04. The common denominator in all the accounts is substitution, with a projected screen of printed tests (MGPZ 03), a worksheet to accompany a textbook (BE 08), and students' data to accompany the school's unreliable connection (WE 05, AE 11). By putting connectivity responsibility on students' mobile data, some of the responsibility is placed on students and their families. All fourteen participants reported that the day-to-day lack of was present, although each went about it in a different way and in none of their reports did a lack lead to a cessation of teaching. The answers should not, therefore, be limited to one coping mode.

Pattern 2: Institutional Policy–Teaching Dissonance

This pattern reflects the tension teachers experienced from not having an institution that aligns with their rule. It came in two shapes: changes to the curriculum or schedule, which were not announced with enough notice or preparedness; and a clash between a drive for twenty first century digital and AI literacy and rules that restricted students' access to gadgets in class. MGPZ 03 asked, “How could they use AI when the institution that should be teaching them to welcome, to embrace one of the 21st century learning skills, is the very institution that disallowed and prohibited them to do that?” and mentioned that for the three-term curriculum, “we just had one day of training.” JLG 01 found it challenging “to sort of disseminate it in a three-term way...we’re being open with the years of using the four-quarter system.” This is not something that just occurred," said JM 04. "It is a recurring thing... We want them to at least provide us the necessary things that's needed in this job.

The contradiction between AI and gadgets and the lack of just one day of learning for a significant shift in the school calendar was the clearest articulation in MGPZ 03. Unlike JLG 01, which was more hedged (sort of disseminate), the problem for JM 04 was more recurrent, and associated with previous transitions like the move to K to 12. This pattern was identified by fewer participants than Patterns 1 and 3, and this pattern should be understood as a pattern of tensions that may recur among others, but that is not necessarily the case with all fourteen teachers.

Pattern 3: Autonomous Upskilling as a Coping Mechanism for Formal Training Gaps

Participants actively participated in self-directed learning strategies as a substitute for formal institutional learning, such as attending webinars, graduate coursework (in some cases), and watching tutorials and attending LAC sessions about cloud and the cloud-based platform. In GG 06, they explain that strategies are based on "goal setting, reflective practice, and continuous skill practice" and that "online courses, webinars, professional articles, and teaching communities on social media platforms" are used to achieve these goals. CJB 07 stated, "I attend webinars, read professional reading or materials on the internet to expand my knowledge of the subject" while SP 13 reported, "I attend webinars and LAC, read current educational resources, reflect on my teaching experiences." WE 05 explained that they use a collective version: "WE ask just one of us... and then we would do a locked session. So, focus group discussion, then we talk about or share about what we have learned. The pattern was accepted as qualified by JL 12: "Enroll in Masteral but I just earned units and not able to complete it."

Self-directed learning was used and had been proven to be effective in this sample. Regarding Question 2 and 6, nearly all the fourteen participants indicated some mix of webinars, online reading, and LAC sessions and/or peer cascaded seminar learning. The turn around in WE 05's account is from individual initiative to a collective departmental strategy, where seminar places were drawn and learning was cascaded by an internal focus group. The fact that JL 12 is just finishing his Masters degree demonstrates that time and resource restrictions can restrict even the best intentions of continuing education.

Pattern 4: Reciprocal Co-Learning between Teachers, Colleagues, and Students

Pupils taught digital skills from their teachers, and more senior and more junior digital colleagues learned from each other, not just from the senior to junior. BE 08 said, "I wasn't familiar of some software they use to create their final output. My student ended up teaching me the technicalities and guide me on how to use the apps." In ED 09, it was reported that they "actively shared their knowledge of technology, and we learned from each other in a collaborative environment." JM 04 called it "a give and take process...I am learning from them," and JLG 01 said, "we're also human, so we have limited information to gather. So if the students also shared some new information that is something that I wasn't able to learn by myself, I accept it wholeheartedly."

For each of these accounts the teacher's learning from students was predominantly related to technology and it was not experienced as a threat to the teacher's authority. It was not treated as a problem by JM 04 and JLG 01. In Pattern 3, the account of WE 05 incorporates a P2P element: colleagues who have comparable experience(s) sharing their learning from seminars. What the data reveal is not an "inverted mentorship" – that is, students becoming teachers – but that the teacher stayed in charge, and part of the knowledge in the room was student knowledge.

Findings by Research Question

Research Question 1. The skills mentioned by most participants were not just adequate or inadequate, but rather a process of renewal and recalibration. Most of the participants answered this question from Pattern 3 and Cluster

It was rephrased as competence is a process, not a gap: "It's not a gap, it's always constantly being refreshed, you always have to learn new things and learn new things again. This meant that there was motivation and pressure for recalibration. JLG 01 replied, "You feel motivated because you have a new opportunity to be

used; you feel pressured because you don't know how you would use it in a given situation," and ED 09 replied, "When I feel like I need to change for growth, it's a great feeling." Competence and self-directed learning are very closely and continuously connected in these ELTS, and self-directed learning is not a component of formal learning, but it is the learning that is used to address gaps in learning that are perceived.

Research Question 2. This question was addressed primarily by Pattern 1 and Cluster B, with participants consistently reporting that materials, connections, and devices were not always available, or when they were, were not reliable and would be unavailable on time. They improvised through individual efforts: BE 08 created Learning Activity Sheets to supplement the existing textbooks, MGPZ 03 projected tests on a screen when paper was not on hand, and WE 05 and AE 11 used students' mobile data when there was no school Wi-Fi or it was not working. As for the personal financial cost, JL 12's statement revealed that sometimes it is limited, and JM 04 was clear that it is not. The lived experience was one of continuous, low level improvisation where instruction and professional development were on-going but not adequately provided by the schools.

Research Question 3. This question was answered primarily by Cluster C. ED 09 integrated principles of lifelong learning "by assessing through reflection, critical thinking and self-directed learning tasks, including portfolios, self-assessment activities, reflective journals and tasks that are project-based." Obstacles were also mentioned by participants. WE 05 cited "budgetary constraints that limits us from really evolving into the 21st century assessment that the students need," noting that printed assessments cannot be long "because it will become expensive." When feedback is personalized, BE 08 said "standardizing qualitative competency like critical thinking essay type of questions into measurable grading metrics is time consuming". JM 04 asked a validity question: "If they do it outside...how can we assess the authenticity of their performance if they are using this artificial intelligence?" The barrier was not just a lack of understanding of alternatives to the current methods but rather a combination of budget constraints, the complexity of appropriately assessing competencies, and the challenges of ensuring the authenticity of students' out-of-school experiences of using AI tools.

Research Question 4. The administrative-overload dimension of Cluster F was the second key answerer, answering "Workload is heavy, you're gonna have no time to think about everything because you have to manage load. Policies are changing every single bloody year. JM 04 mentioned the "classroom overload and the student-teacher ratio" and WE 05 stated several roles: "I am a master teacher, I am the head of the department, I am the reading coordinator." JLG 01, however, said: "I don't see any institutional barriers as of the moment...even our community and even our stakeholders is very supportive." Its effect on the school environment was thus far not a standard one – some participants experienced it as very constraining, others as manageable, and at least one as supportive. Workload and role overload, if they existed, was identified as a barrier to sustained professional learning, but not to teaching competence.

DISCUSSION

Pattern 1 in Light of RDT and the Literature

RDT provides a good explanation for pattern 1. The schools lack resources to use on their own, from textbooks to connectivity and devices, which impacts the ability of teachers to utilize their time in the classroom. RDT would suggest that this would trigger a return to simpler, less resource-intensive ways of doing things, but the accounts indicate that this did not happen; the participants did not just go back to lecturing, but they delegated the burden of resources to the means available, whether their own financial resources, improvisation, or the students' devices. This aligns with Akbari (2020) who found that out-of-date textbooks and limited material materials limited ELT practitioners, as well as the gaps in digital infrastructure which were reported by Alshakhi (2021), and the dependence of human and material resources as reported by Garzón Artacho et al. (2020). Rather, Amemasor et al. (2025) emphasize that institutional support is a resource that schools must continually offer, and its lack here makes the burden on the individual teacher or, in the case of connectedness, on the student. The LLL framework is used less frequently and is more

applicable to Pattern 3 since it is about material and infrastructural constraint rather than the skill of the teacher.

Pattern 2 in Light of RDT and the Literature

RDT presents Pattern 2 as a situation where the governing authority (school division or DepEd) expects compliance without providing the necessary resources, which include training time. This puts schools and teachers in a situation where they are reliant on an authority that requires more than it can deliver. The pattern is similar to that found in the literature review in Donaldson and Preston's (1995) frame on the gap between policy and practice, in which reforms are symbolic, and classroom practice is limited by the structural conditions which the policy was designed to address. It's a contradiction with AI and gadgets – the same institution is encouraging digital and AI literacy and, in a different memo, limiting the platform by which it can be used. The pattern is not easily classified within the LLL because it is not a competency gap of the teacher but rather, as MGPZ 03 described it, a contradiction that can only be addressed by teacher's upskilling.

Pattern 3 in Light of the LLL Framework and RDT

The LLL Competency Framework is the most useful for reading Pattern 3; it sets out the learning skills and habits that teachers must keep up with curriculum change, which are fundamentally those of self-directed learning, reflection and ongoing development. The use of webinars and online communities were used by the participants to develop their pedagogical skills, which is a finding in line with Keskin (2023) who correlated teachers' pedagogical skills with the tendency toward lifelong learning. Goal setting and reflective practice, as outlined in GG 06, were recognized aspects of lifelong learning competency and not just habits of the local group, as can be seen in the experiences of teachers while implementing practices under changing demands in Schutte et al.'s (2025) account. The following training gaps in Pattern 2 are filled by teachers in the following ways, also through RDT: Pattern 3: Where formal, institutionally resourced training is missing, the teachers look around for or fund their own training alternatives. This is a type of resource substitution, and is not a sign that formal education is not necessary.

Pattern 4 in Light of the LLL Framework and RDT

Pattern 4 represents an LLL framework that emphasizes flexibility and a lifelong commitment to learning and does not presume knowledge or expertise can only be acquired through training. It echoes Ajani's (2024) understanding of digital fluency as a continuous process, which is developed through use, and through exposure to digitally competent learners, as well as Homayouni's (2022) focus on classrooms as spaces for two way knowledge exchange in the process of peer assessment. As observed in Patterns 1 and 2, students' technological skills serve as a resource to assist in closing gaps in school infrastructure from an RDT perspective. This does not imply that pupils are not expected to be able to contribute to larger institutional issues.

Integrating the Patterns

The four patterns constitute two sides of the same system (Table 3). Patterns 1 and 2 indicate external dependency and structural constraint: teachers rely on resources, knowledge and time to train themselves and obtain permissions that are not fully provided by the institution. Patterns 3 and 4 highlight internal adaptive or lifelong competencies; teachers' own self-directed learning, and their collaborative work with colleagues and students as a low cost external resource to compensate for external constraints. Clusters C and F agree that assessment innovation is constrained by explicit and actionable factors (budget, grading time, and authenticity issues) and that too much administrative work also affects the time that is available for professional learning. It was useful then to look at RDT and the LLL framework together: RDT helps one understand the constraints, and the LLL framework helps one understand how teachers keep learners learning in the face of the constraints.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Findings are presented and conclusions drawn based on RDT and the LLL Competency Framework.

- As RDT notes, resources in the participating schools had a structural effect on teachers' practice and professional development. Where materials, connections or devices were lacking, teachers did not simply not use them but they compensated the deficit in their own pocket, via their own creation of materials, or via student mobile data.

- Although they were dependent on external resources, the participants were oriented towards lifelong learning on an internal level. Self- directed upskilling, reflective practice and "pressure" reframed as "time for learning" served as an internal resource which helped to buffer external pressure.

- Pattern 2 and Cluster E show a mismatch between policy and practice: Curriculum changes require changes to the competencies (e.g., AI, online literacy) but there are no approvals, time or training.Much of the challenge to implementation of MATATAG is therefore structural and administrative, not the lack of teachers' willingness or skill.

- Participants are currently evaluating skills in a competency, formative, and reflective manner, but the level of innovation is constrained by existing conditions: the cost of materials, the time needed to fairly assess more complex competencies, and authenticity issues stemming from students' outside-of-classroom access to AI tools.

- Collaborative and reciprocal learning occurs between people (colleagues in LAC sessions, in informal cascading, and between teachers and learners) and is a low-cost resource that is generated internally, which supports lifelong learning in situations with limited institutional support.

- Time constraints and the administrative burden of non-teaching related responsibilities, described in Cluster F, limit opportunities for professional development and in one instance come with a stated intention to move out of public school teaching. Besides the lack of resources and policy dissonance, role overload is another obstacle to lifelong learning.

- The impact of the school context was not consistent. While most participants spoke of constraint, one participant's experience of institutional and community support illustrates that institutional and community experiences of this policy environment can differ from school to school and from place to place.

Overall, the ELTs in this study seem to have sustained their LLL competencies by their own actions, and through the co-construction of relationships with colleagues and students, rather than from the institutional environment, which in this instance, is more limiting than facilitating, especially with regard to resources, pacing of the institutional learning process, and workload distribution. Due to the nature of the study, it is exploratory, phenomenological and limited by geographical location and sample, the findings presented in this study relate only to the patterns that were observed among the fourteen teachers in the three schools in the Taguig City District 1, and cannot be statistically generalizable to the entire nation of the Philippines.

Recommendations

- **English Language Teachers** have to make further good practices in self-directed learning (SDL) in English as a second language (ESL) a routine in their teaching, for example, after-class self-reflection and goal setting. Considering the authenticity issues with AI, teachers should create activities that involve AI, which can be completed and/or monitored in the school building, not in the home.

Teachers should also keep on sharing knowledge through the collegial forums like LAC session and peer cascading.

- **School administrators** should allow adequate, sustained transition time for significant changes in the structure or teaching, not just one day. They should consider re-distributing non-teaching coordinator ships and administrative tasks to free teachers up for their lifelong learning, and resource current collegial practices like LAC sessions, with the active involvement of teachers' leadership.
- **The Department of Education and policy-makers** must provide for quality instructional resources and a dependable digital learning environment, rather than making personal contributions to fill the void. A common understanding of the digital-literacy and AI-literacy requirements of the MATATAG Curriculum is needed in school device policies, and assessment guidelines need to be adapted to support teachers' concerns about AI authenticity in take-home assignments.
- **Future studies** should be conducted with English language teachers in other districts, regions, and private schools to verify the results of this exploratory study in different local contexts. The quantitative or mixed methods designs could test the relationships identified here, for example between resource availability and the intensity of self-directed learning; and future work could explore how school context explains the institutional constraints faced by teachers in the same institutional landscape.

DECLARATIONS

Ethical Approval

This study was conducted with human subjects. Full information of the study was provided to all participants, they participated voluntarily and provided written informed consent prior to the interviews and the research adhered to research ethics guidelines of Polytechnic University of the Philippines. The study is approved by the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) – University Research Ethics Committee, Ethics Clearance Number: 2026-0423.

Conflict of Interest

A statement of conflict of interest is not included in the original paper.

Data Availability Statement

The data produced in this study are audio-recorded, verbatim-transcribed, semi-structured interview data of the 14 Junior High School EFL teachers and the initial notes of the researchers, in addition to the theme tables. These data are not available to the public. Participants were assured of confidentiality, first-person descriptions of the workplace that might allow identification of the participants and their schools, and the data are made available in password-protected digital folders that are accessible only to the researchers. The themes, clusters, patterns, and supporting participant excerpts that underpinned the findings are presented in Table 1 as the interview guide, and the Results section reports the themes, clusters, patterns, and supporting participant excerpts that informed the findings. This manuscript was abridged because of length requirements, and the raw transcripts and initial-notes tables were not included. Information about the data can be requested from the corresponding author and any release would continue to be governed by confidentiality agreements with participants.

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