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Graduates Are Failing in the Examination: An Ethical Investigation on the Experiences of Board Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers (BLEPT) Takers

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study aimed to explore the experiences of graduate students from Bohol Island State University, focusing on those who graduated with Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education degree. The research utilized semi-structured interviews with 10 participants who graduated between 2018 and 2022 and did not pass the Board Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers (BLEPT). Employing snowball sampling due to the challenge of reaching recent non-passers, the study delved into the narratives of individuals facing licensure challenges. Thematic analysis of interview data revealed patterns within participants' experiences. The open narrative approach provided a platform for participants to articulate their unique stories, facilitating a rich understanding of the complex phenomena surrounding board examination outcomes. Ethical considerations were prioritized, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and a registered psychologist's validation of the interview guide. The findings revealed the following themes as reasons for failing the board examination; absence of concentration on key topics, study habits, socio-economic factors, psychological factors, inadequate institutional support, lack of academic preparation contributing to examination difficulties. The study emphasizes the need for collaborative efforts among educational institutions and stakeholders to address these challenges comprehensively, fostering an environment conducive to graduates' success in professional licensure examinations.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is known to be as the noblest profession and vocation because it is devoted to honing the students' cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains. After leaving one of their life's frontiers, graduates are unsure about a lot of things. They are unsure about whether they will produce or remain stagnant. But they must have a career; that much is certain (Calamayo, 2022) to become a professional teacher and an aspirant must pass the board examination to get a license to teach.

The academe endlessly seeks quality education, innovates instruction practices and enhances graduates' performance (Solis-Foronda, 2017). Despite all these, the College of Teacher Education in Bohol Island State University has 18 non-passers of the curricular program Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education from 2018-2022. In this case, Republic Act 8981 or Philippine Regulatory Commission (PRC) implements certificate of registration and valid professional license specifically for education graduates who pass the Licensure Examination for Teachers. The agency monitors the performance of universities, ensures the global competency and modernization of teaching interventions by teachers in the Philippines, and uplifts their performance for professional strategy (Figuerras, 2010).

By exploring the experiences of graduates incurring failure in board examinations, this study aspires to provide actionable insights that may inform policy decisions, educational practices, and support mechanisms to ensure the success of future educators.

The Board Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers (BLEPT) is a crucial exam that aspiring educators in the Philippines must take to obtain their teaching license. This examination is mandated by Republic Act 7836, also known as the "Philippine Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994," which aims to ensure that teachers in the Philippines meet the necessary standards and qualifications to provide quality education to their students.

Anyone wishing to pursue a teaching career in the Philippines must pass the BLEPT, a key requirement. It is regarded as a common indicator of a teacher's proficiency and capacity to give pupils a high-quality education. To guarantee that they have the knowledge and abilities to carry out their jobs to the best of their abilities, the law requires instructors who want to teach in the Philippines to pass the BLEPT.

In the dynamic landscape of professional development, the journey from academic achievement to successful board examination outcomes stands as a critical juncture for aspiring professionals. However, a disconcerting trend has emerged, echoing concerns that recent graduates are encountering unexpected hurdles on their path to licensure. The alarming revelation that many graduates face difficulties in navigating BLEPT demands urgent attention and a comprehensive ethical investigation. the Philippines, teacher education institutions (TEIs) create their reputation assessing the caliber of their graduates' education based on how well they performed on the licensing. The Board Licensure for Professional Teachers

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(BLEPT). Therefore, Teacher Education Institution alignment is required, delivery of instruction using the LET competencies (Amanonce, & Maramag, 2020).

The Philippine government is investing much in education. It has been a tradition for the education sector to get the biggest portion of the national budget (Ismael, 2020). The government supports various educational reforms and mechanisms implemented both in basic education and higher education institutions to ensure the quality of education offered to Filipino students. Likewise, the Department of Education (DepEd) strictly monitors the adherence to standards set in hiring public school teachers since they are considered as the backbone of education. One of the highlighted standards for teacher education graduates to qualify as professional teachers as stipulated in RA 7836, also known as the “Philippine Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994”, is passing the BLEPT. Aspiring teachers who finished Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) are tested along three components in the BLEPT: General Education, Professional Education, and Field of Specialization with corresponding weights of 20%, 40%, and 40%, respectively.

Passing this standardized test is not only a requirement to practice the teaching profession but also a guarantee that teachers in the basic education sector possess the necessary competence and professional accountability. Consequently, teacher education institutions (TEIs) in the Philippines establish their brand of educational quality through their graduates’ performance in the BLEPT (Balagtas, 2014). The BLEPT is also a crucial criterion of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in granting Center of Development (COD) and Center of Excellence (COE) status to the curricular programs of Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs). Furthermore, local and international accrediting agencies consider the institution’s licensure examination performance as a key performance indicator for quality assurance.

Given the significance of the BLEPT, TEIs are compelled to do well in the board examination. To this end, Teacher Education Institutions (“TEIs) conduct curricular reviews, update course syllabi, and implement stringent admission and retention policies. TEIs also conduct extensive pre-board review programs to prepare teacher education students for the BLEPT. These programs are course audits that try to mimic the actual board examination and which prospective graduates need to pass.

By exploring the experiences of graduates facing challenges in board examinations, this study aspires to provide actionable insights that may inform policy decisions, educational practices, and support mechanisms to ensure the success of future educators.

Aims

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of graduates who did not pass the board licensure examination for professional teachers (BLEPT); they are

graduates of Bohol Island State University, specifically from the College of Teacher Education; Bachelor of Secondary Education.

METHODOLOGY

Design

A qualitative design consists of thematic analysis of interview data will be used in this study. Qualitative research enables the researcher to achieve rich descriptions of an area, examine unique or unexpected events, illuminate the experience and interpretation of events by individuals, give a voice to those whose views are rarely heard, and move toward understanding a complex phenomenon (Sofaer, 1999). Semi-structured interviews using an open narrative approach allowed participants to tell their own stories (Peterson, 2008). Thematic analysis allowed for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within the data while permitting rich and detailed descriptions of the content embedded within (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Participants

The interview was conducted on the month of January of the year 2024. The participants are those Bachelor of Secondary Education graduates from 2018 to 2022 who did not pass the board licensure examination for professional teachers (BLEPT). All participants included in this study were non-BLEPT passers, regardless of attempts to pass the board exam.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews was conducted among graduates who are non-passers. The researchers made An interview guide and checked and validated by a registered psychologist. Participants were offered the opportunity to have the interview in either English or in the Visayan dialect, as some participants have a hard time answering the interview guide in English. It is tough to reach the recent graduates who are non-passers of BLEPT.

Snowball sampling will be used, which is often used when study subjects are hard to reach (Atkinson *et al.*, 2002).

Ethical Considerations

Potential participants will be contacted through the help of their adviser in the institution where they finished their undergraduate. Following this, interviews were arranged at a mutually convenient time for those indicating interest and consenting to participate.

At the time of the interview, the researchers reviewed the information about the study and ensured the participant wanted to continue with the interview. All interviewees will be informed that the findings from this research would be published and presented at conferences and meetings, but that no individual identifiable information would be shared.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

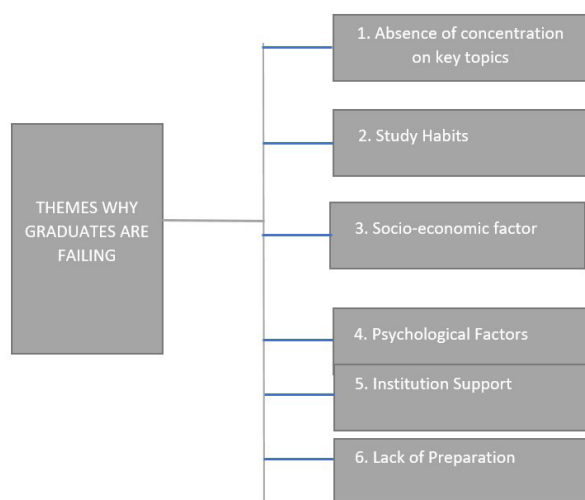


Figure 1: Themes Emerging from the Interview

Absence of Concentration on Key Topics

Study participants commented on the institution's teaching approaches in the BTLED program. Time constraints and a focused approach to core subjects within the major may have contributed to a situation where some specific topics were not thoroughly discussed or explored during the respondent's academic journey. Teachers who do not focus on important subjects may cause their students to perform poorly in board exams. This problem is exacerbated by a number of factors, such as the teacher's lack of subject-matter expertise, ineffective teaching strategies, and a lack of background knowledge and information (Cicekci & Sadik, 2019).

"In our major there are some topics that was not able to discuss deeply due to small time and aside from that we focus on our major." (Informant 1)

"Insufficient time to discuss the topics in the field of specialization especially having online classes during the pandemic." (Informant 6)

Wexler (2019) according to a National Council on Teacher Quality assessment, teacher-training programs bear a large portion of the blame. The exam evaluates knowledge in the four subjects that primary school teachers are supposed to teach: science, arithmetic, social studies, and English. Evaluating the quality of teaching and offering feedback for the enhancement of teaching methods is essential through the analysis of examination results (Yuan et. al, 2012). Examining test outcomes, performing item analysis, and engaging diverse stakeholders in discussions, including students, faculty, and employers, are crucial for comprehending and enhancing the efficiency of instructional approaches. Teachers and Students worldwide often dance to the tune of tests and examinations. Assessments are powerful tools for catalyzing the achievement of educational goals, especially if done rightly (Odukoya et. al, 2017)). However, teacher-training programs don't guarantee that their alumni are fundamentally grounded in that subject matter. Furthermore, several claim that their training

curricula failed to adequately prepare them for teaching or the test. Rather of guaranteeing a comprehensive comprehension of elementary-level ideas, their mandatory courses concentrated on arithmetic teaching methodologies.

Study Habits

Challenging and multifaceted situation where time constraints due to work and parenting, coupled with emotional instability, collectively pose obstacles to the respondent's preparation for the board examination. Consistent attendance in classes forms the basis for comprehending concepts and motivates students to actively engage by asking pertinent questions (Ebele and Olofu, 2017). Students' study sessions outside class are important learning opportunities in college courses. However, we often depend on students to study effectively without explicit instruction. Involvement in tasks like solving problem sets, elucidating concepts, self-quizzing, and participating in review sessions is associated with enhanced performance in exams when taking into account factors like preparation, class absences, and overall study time (Walck-Shannon, et. al, 2021). It reflects the real-life complexities individuals may face while trying to balance various responsibilities during a crucial period of academic preparation.

"One of those obstacles is time, I can't really manage my time coz I have job and I have a baby to look after to that time and also to be honest I'm not emotionally stable that time also." (Informant 1)

"Based on my experience when I took my first board exam. I am not really prepared since I didn't had my review, I just want to take the boards without reviewing. And the result was expected since I didn't make any effort to pass the boards, I failed." (Informant 2)

"I think failed because I didn't review at all, I'm not prepared to take the boards yet I still took my luck to take the exam. Informant 3)

"All I did was self review, watching educational videos and read my reviewer that I bought online." (Informant 4)

"Procrastination hits me and I only got short time to study because of it." (Informant 4)

"I worked immediately after I graduated, so lack of time to study was a great factor for me." (Informant 5)

Lack of motivation. (Informant 9)

Exam failure might be caused by bad study habits. Poor study habits can lead to poor academic performance and exam failure. Examples of these habits include cramming, multitasking, listening to music, skipping classes, not creating an outline, using social media, procrastinating, allowing distractions, taking inefficient notes, and having poor time management skills (Julius & Evans, 2015).

Socio-Economic Factor

Financial constraint where the respondent's income from their job was insufficient to meet all their needs. This financial struggle could have implications for accessing resources crucial for board exam preparation and may

have added stress and challenges to an already demanding period in the respondent's life. Stressors including food insecurity, unstable housing, and parental unemployment are common among low-income families' children, and they can have a detrimental effect on their mental and cognitive development. It's possible that underprivileged students lack access to basic resources like computers, books, tutoring, and extracurricular activities that can improve their education and help them study for tests (Deveci, & Ersen, 2022).

"At that time I was struggling with my finances because the salary I got from my job is not enough to provide all my needs." (Informant 1)

"Family problems and pressure to provide my familys' needs." (Informant 6)

Psychological Factors

Insights into the respondent's emotional state before taking the board examination, emphasizing the stress and worries related to the uncertainty of exam content and familial expectations. It highlights the psychological challenges individuals may face in the context of high-stakes exams and the importance of managing stress during critical periods. When you experience horror, trepidation, uneasiness, or panic before, during, or after an exam, it is known as performance anxiety. It impairs both your working memory and your capacity to learn. Most students worry at least a little, but some may experience extreme anxiety, which will have a negative impact on their performance. Among the psychological elements influencing students' exam failures are: elevated levels of melancholy, anxiety, and stress. Test anxiety and inadequate test-taking techniques. Perfectionism, nervousness, and an intense desire for acceptance. reduced drive, insecurity, and difficulties adjusting. inadequate advice and counseling. Need for oneself to pass the test (Shin, et.at, 2023)

"Yes there is, I was really stress before taking the exam , was worried what will come out and the pressure from the family" (Informant 2).

"I was pressured by that time from my family down to my toxic co-workers." (Informant 6)

"Always conscious and overthinks a lot because if I fail, people might judge" (Informant 7)

"Lack of dedication to continue professional development" (Informant 10)

The respondent explicitly states "Yes, there is," indicating an affirmation that they experienced stress. The stress is specifically associated with the period leading up to the examination. This suggests that the respondent was grappling with anxiety and pressure during the preparation phase. Uncertainty about exam content was mentioned, being worried about what will come out implies uncertainty about the exam content. This uncertainty can contribute significantly to pre-exam stress. Pressure from family, the respondent cites pressure from the family as another source of stress. Family expectations and

support can have a considerable impact on an individual's emotional state during a high-stakes examination. The use of the term "really stressed" suggests a heightened level of emotional strain. Stress can manifest in various ways, including difficulty concentrating, heightened anxiety, and overall emotional discomfort.

Test anxiety is actually rather common, despite the fact that it may be extremely unpleasant for students who suffer from it. Anxiety and nervousness are acceptable responses to stress. However, for other people, this anxiety can grow so strong that it really gets in the way of their performance. Furthermore, test anxiety is a significant issue that negatively impacts students' academic performance, cognitive ability, and overall well-being. It is characterized by physical, cognitive, and emotional symptoms, which can lead to poor test performance, increased drop-out rates, and long-term socioeconomic consequences (Yusefzadeh et.al, 2019).

Institutional Support

There is a lack of institutional support for board exam preparation and emphasizes the respondent's belief in the value of a refresher course. The respondent advocates for additional interventions to enhance the overall preparedness of students, indicating a proactive stance toward improving the quality of exam preparation. Effective time management, discipline, and employee dedication are factors that leaders must contribute to be successful in executing of organizational aims, one of them is to extend help to graduates to pass the licensure examination (Alfozan, 2024).

"There was no intervention by the institution for our preparation in the board exam like refresher course, I believe there should be refresher course for us to be more prepared in the board examination" (Informat 1)

"Free review sessions would be a great help before taking the BLEPT" (Informant 8)

Institutional support for students who will take board examinations is crucial in ensuring their success. Several studies have explored the predictors of board exam performance and factors that influence exam preparation. For example, some institutions offer course audits that mimic the actual board examination to help students prepare for the test (Amanonce, 2020). The difficulties faced by board exam takers include memory loss, anxiety, organizing one's schedule, and excessive use of social media, all of which might affect how well kids perform on board exams. Lack of institutional support can also result in obstacles like inadequate study habits, inadequate program preparation, and the psychological fallout from failing an exam.

Lack of Preparation

The lack of preparation for exams can have a significant impact on students' test anxiety and academic performance. Research suggests that test anxiety is often linked to students' complaints of not having enough time to prepare for exams or study course materials, as well

as being dissatisfied with their academic performance in previous assessments (Yusefzadeh et. al, 2019).

“Based on my experience when I took my first board exam. I am not really prepared since I didn’t had my review, I just want to take the boards without reviewing. And the result was expected since I didn’t make any effort to pass the boards, I failed.” (Informant 4)

“I think failed because I didn’t review at all, I’m not prepared to take the boards yet I still took my luck to take the exam.”

(Informant 5)

“I was over confident, I thought I can pass with enrolling in a review center .” (Informant 5)

Factors such as lack of knowledge about testing demands, personal need to pass the exam, and external factors outside students’ control can contribute to the difficulty of preparing for exams (Minott, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, addressing the challenges of BLEPT takers requires a comprehensive and collaborative effort involving the educational institution and stakeholders. By bridging the gaps in academic preparation, psychological support, socio-economic support, study habits, and institutional support, we can create an environment conducive to graduates’ success in the Board Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers. This research underscores the ethical imperative of ensuring equal opportunities for all aspiring educators and advocates for a holistic approach to enhance teacher licensure processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The institution may thoroughly review its Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education curricula to ensure a concentrated emphasis on key topics covered in the BLEPT . This will help students develop a comprehensive understanding of the subjects and better prepare them for the examination.

2. The institution may implement academic support programs within teacher education programs to address any academic preparation gaps, especially in the Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education program. These programs may include additional tutorials, workshops, and resources designed to strengthen students’ knowledge and skills in BLEPT-related subjects.

3. The institution may implement institutional support services by providing counselling, mentorship, and guidance to students. Creating a supportive environment within the institution can significantly contribute to students’ overall well-being and preparedness for the BLEPT.

4. The institution may explore more flexible and innovative assessment methods within teacher education programs. This may include project-based assessments, portfolios, and practical teaching experiences that go beyond traditional examination formats, allowing students to demonstrate their competencies in diverse ways.

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