Exploring Job Mismatch Experiences Among Licensed English Teachers: A Phenomenological Inquiry

Jeralyn B. Tag-ulo[1]*, Mary Rose P. Gooc[2], Joseph S. Seclot[3]
[1]Tangub City Global College, Tangub City, Philippines
[2]Tangub City Global College, Tangub City, Philippines
[3]Tangub City Global College, Tangub City, Philippines
*Corresponding Author: seclot.joseph2020@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Job mismatch occurs when individuals are employed in roles unrelated to their field of study, often resulting in underutilization of acquired skills. This phenomenological study, guided by Human Capital Theory and Protean Career Theory, explored the lived experiences of licensed English teachers who pursued careers outside their specialization. Ten participants were purposively selected from a local college and interviewed using a semi-structured format. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) thematic approach. Findings revealed varied perceptions of job preparedness, with some participants feeling adequately prepared while others felt unready for the job market. Key factors influencing job mismatch included family and peer influence and the personal fulfillment found in alternative career paths. Challenges encountered involved adapting to unfamiliar work environments and lacking sufficient knowledge and skills for new roles. To address these, participants demonstrated adaptability through continuous learning and a proactive, growth-oriented mindset. The findings support the principles of Protean Career Theory, highlighting autonomy and self-direction, but challenge the assumptions of Human Capital Theory, as educational investment did not always lead to aligned employment. The study underscores the need for structured career guidance and recommends institutional interventions, such as early orientation and stronger job placement efforts for teacher education graduates.

INTRODUCTION

Job mismatch remains a persistent and multifaceted issue within global labor markets, affecting not only individual career trajectories but also organizational productivity and broader economic development. Defined as the divergence between one's educational qualifications and the nature of their employment, job mismatch often results in the underutilization of acquired skills, diminished job satisfaction, and inefficiencies in human capital allocation (Montt, 2017). While students invest in specialized academic training with the expectation of relevant employment, the structural realities of the labor market frequently hinder this alignment. A study by Salas-Velasco (2021) revealed that health sciences and engineering/architecture graduates increase the probability of achieving an education-job match. Hence, the study's findings lead to the hypothesis that job mismatch is more likely among those graduates in degree fields that provide more general skills and less likely among those from degree fields providing more occupation-specific skills. Similarly, Montt (2017) contends that educational specialization does not guarantee occupational placement within the same field, reinforcing the complexity of education-to-employment transitions.

The phenomenon is widespread. In Turkey, 71.2% of higher education computer graduates and 92.5% of vocational high school graduates are employed outside their fields of study (Ege, 2020). In Thailand, 32.02% of university graduates experience job mismatch (Senkrua, 2022). The Philippine context echoes this concern: 64% of TVL graduates in Butuan City face job mismatch, and teaching graduates from Bataan Peninsula State University and other institutions are employed in unrelated sectors (Autentico & Alerta, 2020; Panlaqui & Bardemorilla, 2023; Condes & Lachica, 2022). Additionally, teacher education graduates often cite financial pressures and perceived low compensation as deterrents to entering the teaching profession (Abulon & Rungduin, 2015).

Regionally, the Asian Development Bank emphasizes the pressing need to align education systems with labor market demands to better equip graduates with relevant competencies (Maclean et al., 2018). In this regard, research is essential to inform targeted policies and interventions that address job mismatch systematically and contextually. College graduates often choose careers that do not align with their education, highlighting the need for project-based learning and industry-student interaction to reduce job-education mismatch (Sudakova et al., 2024). Despite the extensive discourse on the topic, in the Philippines, there is a notable gap in the literature exploring the phenomenon from the perspective of licensed teacher education graduates, particularly within specific localities.

To address this gap, the present phenomenological study investigates the lived experiences of ten licensed Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) English graduates from a local college in Tangub City, Misamis Occidental, covering academic years 2017–2018 to 2021–2022. It specifically seeks to understand how these licensed professionals perceive their preparedness for entering the job market and identify the key factors contributing to job mismatch in their professional lives. Additionally, the study intends to examine the challenges these graduates encounter in their current occupations, particularly those unrelated to their specialization. Lastly, it aims to uncover the strategies and coping mechanisms they employ in response to these challenges, providing insights into how they navigate their career trajectories despite the mismatch between their qualifications and current job roles. By offering localized insights, the study contributes to the growing literature on education-employment alignment and provides evidence-based recommendations to improve workforce integration among future graduates.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives: Human Capital Theory and proton career Theory. Together, they offer a robust lens through which to examine the complex phenomenon of job mismatch among Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) English graduates.

Human Capital Theory, advanced initially by Becker (1964), posits that education, training, and other human development are strategic investments that enhance an individual's productivity and labor market value. According to this theory, individuals with higher levels of human capital, acquired through formal education and skill development, are expected to attain employment matching their qualifications and yield commensurate economic returns. However, the persistent occurrence of job mismatch suggests a disjuncture between academic preparation and labor market realities. Autor et al. (2019) emphasize that such misalignments often result in graduates occupying positions that do not fully utilize their educational attainment, leading to underemployment and reduced economic efficiency. In this context, the present study investigates whether the job mismatch experienced by BSED English graduates can be attributed to discrepancies between their pedagogical training and the skill demands of their current non-teaching roles.

In contrast, Protean Career Theory, conceptualized by Hall and Moss (1998), provides an individual-centered perspective by emphasizing self-directed career management, personal adaptability, and value-driven decision-making. Unlike traditional career models that follow a linear trajectory aligned with one's educational background, the protean career is characterized by flexibility, lifelong learning, and pursuit of personal fulfillment. From this standpoint, individuals may intentionally diverge from their field of study to

explore alternative career paths that better align with their evolving interests and life goals, even at the cost of a skills mismatch (Wiernik et al., 2019). Park et al. (2022) further illustrate that individuals with a protean orientation demonstrate resilience and adaptability but often transition into roles that do not directly correspond with their formal qualifications, contributing to voluntary job mismatch. In this study, the Protean Career lens examines how graduates' pursuit of meaningful and fulfilling work may lead them away from the teaching profession despite their licensure and educational preparation.

Together, these theoretical models provide a comprehensive framework for understanding job mismatch as a product of structural-economic forces and individual career agency. Human Capital Theory explains the systemic inefficiencies and misalignments between education and employment, while Protean Career Theory accounts for graduates' personal aspirations and adaptive strategies in navigating the labor market. By integrating these perspectives, the study seeks to uncover the multifaceted nature of job mismatch and offer insights into the personal and contextual factors shaping the career trajectories of licensed English teacher graduates.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a phenomenological research design, which was deemed most appropriate for exploring the lived experiences of individuals facing job mismatch. Phenomenology allows for a deep understanding of how participants make sense of their experiences and the meanings they assign to them (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 2016). This design aimed to uncover the essence of the job mismatch phenomenon as experienced by licensed BSED English graduates.

Participants were purposively selected based on specific criteria: they must be graduates of the Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English of the college between 2017 and 2022, must have passed the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET), and must currently be employed in jobs unrelated to their teaching qualifications. The selection was guided by criterion sampling, a form of purposive sampling instrumental in phenomenological research (Palinkas et al., 2015). Ten participants were included in the final sample, with data saturation as the basis for determining the adequacy of the sample size (Guest et al., 2006).

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Participants

Participant	Gender	Year Graduated	Current Occupation	Number of Years/Months Working on the Job
P1	Female	2017	Customer Service Representative	6 years & 3 months
P2	Female	2022	Customer Service Representative	2 years
P3	Female	2017	Customer Service Representative	5 years
P4	Female	2017	Gas Station Cashier	1 year and 5 months
P5	Female	2017	Customer Service Representative	7 years
P6	Female	2022	Self-Employed	1 year and 9 months
P7	Female	2022	Admin Aide	9 months
P8	Female	2017	Virtual Assistant	2 years
P9	Female	2022	Self-Employed	1 year and 8 months
P10	Male	2019	Business Development Manager	5 years

To identify and recruit participants, the researchers accessed official alumni records from the institution's Alumni Office and cross-referenced the names using tracer forms. Before data collection, permission was secured through formal communication letters approved by institutional authorities. Participants were

contacted via Facebook Messenger due to accessibility and convenience. Informed consent was obtained, ensuring voluntary participation and adherence to ethical standards (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using a validated guide to elicit rich, descriptive responses. This format allowed consistency in questioning and flexibility to probe deeper into emerging themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviews were conducted virtually using Facebook Messenger and Google Classroom to accommodate the participants' schedules and geographic constraints. Participants were allowed to use English, Tagalog, Cebuano, or a mix of these languages, allowing them to express themselves more naturally. Each interview lasted between 7 and 10 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent.

To ensure credibility and accuracy, transcripts of the interviews were returned to participants for member checking, allowing them to verify and revise their responses where necessary (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Signed electronic consent forms were also collected. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, which includes horizontalization, clustering of meaning units, and developing textual and structural descriptions to capture the essence of participants' experiences. Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process, guided by the ten ethical considerations for qualitative research articulated by Bryman and Bell (2007), including informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants' autonomy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study provided insights into participants' job market preparedness, factors influencing job mismatch, challenges, coping mechanisms, and recommendations. Responses were themed and interpreted with excerpts, supported by relevant literature.

Perceptions of Licensed English Teachers on Job Market Preparedness

The participants in this study expressed divergent perceptions regarding their preparedness for the job market following their completion of the BSED English program and their successful licensure examination. Two dominant themes emerged from the data: (1) perceived lack of preparedness due to theory-practice gaps, and (2) perceived readiness grounded in experiential and self-directed learning.

Theme 1. Lack of Preparedness Due to the Reality Gap

Several participants reflected feelings of inadequacy and underpreparedness, emphasizing the discrepancy between their academic preparation and the realities of the teaching profession. This sense of unpreparedness was primarily rooted in their perception that classroom experiences during their college years were insufficient to equip them for the demands of real-world teaching. As they have shared:

> *"I cannot say that I am prepared because the real world of teaching was very different."*
> *"I cannot say I was well prepared during college. All I can say is that I tried my best…"*
> *"I am not that prepared at all… I know my skills are not enough…"*

These sentiments reveal a disconnect between theoretical instruction and practical application, a persistent critique of teacher education programs. Participants who echoed these concerns demonstrated a lack of professional confidence, often attributing it to insufficient exposure to authentic teaching contexts. Studies have shown that job mismatch is significantly influenced by both technical and soft skills (Al Shanfari, 2024) as well as the nature of the job (Akhtar et al., 2018). Moreover, Granero-Gallegos et al. (2022) emphasize that academic performance alone does not guarantee teacher readiness, as it may not translate directly into effective classroom practice.

Consequently, the participants' limited confidence may affect their initial job search and influence their long-term commitment to the teaching profession. Findings from the study of Çelik and Topkaya (2023) show that school-based mentoring played a pivotal role in developing pre-service teachers' preparedness to teach. The perceived preparation gap becomes a critical barrier to transitioning smoothly into the workforce, contributing to emotional strain and uncertainty in their professional identity formation.

Theme 2. Readiness Grounded in Experiential and Self-Directed Learning

In contrast, several participants expressed a sense of preparedness, underscoring the role of institutional training and self-initiated learning experiences in building their confidence in the job market. These individuals attributed their readiness to hands-on engagements and proactive strategies they adopted during or after college. As they have narrated:

"I'd say that I am prepared."

"I am prepared because I learned."

"That's what I told myself, that I'm ready."

"In the job market, I'd say that I am prepared. I developed natural approaches to learning new things."

"I tutored one student... I can say that I am prepared."

"I read blogs, listen to podcasts, and attended webinars and seminars... Yes, I am prepared."

These responses illustrate that preparedness is not solely a function of formal training, but also of initiative and exposure to informal learning opportunities. Participants who engaged in tutoring, continuous professional development (CPD), and other supplementary activities demonstrated a more empowered orientation toward entering the profession. A study by Caingcoy (2021) revealed that the top employable skills among teacher education graduates in the Philippines include communication, information and communication technology, problem-solving and critical thinking, collaboration, cooperation, teamwork, research, and leadership.

Nonetheless, while participants in this group reported a positive self-assessment of their readiness, they were also cognizant that perceived preparedness does not guarantee employment in the teaching field. Structural challenges such as labor market competition, limited available teaching positions, and personal career preferences can all influence actual job placement (Education Review Office, 2019). Thus, while self-perceived preparedness is a valuable internal resource, it is not a definitive predictor of professional entry or retention in teaching.

Factors Contributing to Job Mismatch Among Licensed English Teachers

Through the analysis of participants' narratives, two overarching themes emerged as central to understanding the factors behind job mismatch: (1) social influence in career decision-making, and (2) personal fulfillment in alternative career paths. These themes reveal how individual agency, social context, and labor market realities intersect to shape the career trajectories of licensed English teachers who opted out of the teaching profession.

Theme 3. Family and Peer Influence on Career Decisions

A salient theme among participants was the influence of family members and peers in steering their career decisions away from teaching. Several participants shared that their choice to pursue non-teaching jobs was significantly shaped by people close to them, including former classmates and family members.

"I am influenced because I knew a lot of my batch mates before who graduated from TCGC, and even though they are LET passers, they work as customer service representatives here in Cebu."

"One thing is because of my father."

Participant 1 emphasized how observing peers, licensed teachers, successfully transitioned into non-teaching roles influenced her to follow a similar path. Participant 6, on the other hand, cited parental influence as a determining factor, highlighting how family expectations and obligations can override personal aspirations in teaching.

These findings echo prior literature suggesting that career decision-making among pre-service and newly licensed teachers is not made in isolation, but is shaped by social utility value (Watt & Richardson, 2020). Siddiky and Akter (2021) noted that students' career choice and career preferences are not determined by their interests alone; rather they are determined by the interplay of several social, cultural and economic forces.

Studies have shown that indicate that parental support and peer influence contribute significantly to students' career decision-making (Koçak et al., 2021; Offando & Sukma, 2024; Owusu et al., 2021). While the initial desire to teach may stem from altruistic motives, the final decision is often influenced by normative expectations within one's social environment, leading to a diversion from the teaching profession.

Theme 4. Fulfillment in New Career Paths

Beyond social influence, many participants described their careers as more personally fulfilling, materially and psychologically, than teaching. This theme is expanded through three interconnected subthemes: satisfactory compensation, manageable workload, and shifting personal interests.

Subtheme 1: Satisfactory Salary as a Key Motivator

Participants frequently identified salary as a central consideration in choosing non-teaching careers. For many, teaching, especially in private institutions, was perceived as financially inadequate compared to opportunities in other sectors.

"It is well-paid and has a higher rate compared to a private school."

"The pay is great."

"It is salary-wise."

The emphasis on financial stability and competitive pay reflects broader trends in the labor market, where graduates weigh the economic value of their degrees against prevailing employment opportunities. This aligns with Panlaqui and Bardemorilla's (2023) findings that low teacher compensation in the Philippines contributes to the attrition of newly licensed teachers. National salary benchmarks, such as those reported in the Education Salary in the Philippines (2025), confirm that secondary teachers earn substantially less than professionals in other sectors, such as business processing, IT, and sciences. However, in Vietnam, graduates in mismatched jobs earn higher average wages than those in matched jobs, which in turn, may lead graduates to self-select into mismatched jobs offering higher pay (Nguyen et al., 2025). Similarly, in Pakistan, monthly income is one of the determinants of job mismatch (Akhtar et al., 2024).

Subtheme 2: Manageable Workload and Work-Life Balance

Aside from financial reasons, participants described their current jobs as less stressful and more sustainable, especially in terms of workload and time management.

"It is less stressful than teaching."

"The workload is not that heavy."

"I do not have to bring anything home to continue the tasks, and it is less stressful."

"I realized that I did not want to make lesson plans."

These responses reflect a strong preference for roles that preserve work-life balance, a known challenge in the teaching profession. Recent studies showed that workload and challenging working conditions contribute to the factors why teachers do not pursue or leave the profession (Amitai & Van Houtte, 2022; Perryman & Calvert, 2020). The demands of lesson planning, grading, and emotional labor in teaching have been widely cited as factors in teacher burnout and attrition (Agyapong et al., 2022; Shah et al., 2024). The comparative manageability of tasks in their new roles has become a critical determinant for career shifts.

Subtheme 3: Emergence of Newfound Interests and Career Aspirations

As participants explored new environments and responsibilities, many experienced a shift in career identity and personal goals, leading them to pursue opportunities aligned with their evolving interests.

"I realized that I really did not fall in love with teaching but only with the English language itself."

"I also thought that I had a business to manage."

"Right after I graduated, I was given this opportunity..."

"Because I wanted to be with my family and support them financially at the same time..."

"What I'm looking for is real experience and growth."

Not all pre-service teachers remain in teaching after graduation. Some graduates struggle to construct their preferred professional identities during teaching practicums, leading them to choose alternative careers (Trent, 2018). Some may find alternative career pathways, especially if their initial motivation for teaching was not strong or if they entered the profession through nontraditional routes (Fütterer et al., 2023; Matsko et al., 2022). While several recent studies reveal that job mismatch adversely affects the job satisfaction of individuals (Chavadi et al., 2022; Kolosova et al., 2020; More & Rosenbloom, 2021; Sam, 2020), these narratives show how career decisions evolve as individuals confront new realities, opportunities, and self-discoveries. For some, this involved aligning with family-centered goals; for others, it meant pursuing creative, entrepreneurial, or civic work. Such career realignments are consistent with Pop and Turner's (2009) assertion that career expectations formed during pre-service years often shift in response to emerging life priorities. Similarly, Rinke (2023) observed that early-career teachers who found more congruence with non-teaching roles eventually transitioned out of the classroom for greater personal growth and satisfaction.

Challenges Faced by Licensed English Teachers in Their Current Occupation

The participants, now working outside the teaching profession, particularly in the business process outsourcing (BPO) sector and related non-teaching fields, reported facing multiple challenges in their current work environments. These challenges are clustered under two major themes: (1) adapting to a new and demanding environment, and (2) receiving unfavorable feedback for career deviation. The discussion unpacks the lived experiences of these individuals as they transition into careers unrelated to their educational training.

Theme 5. Adapting to a New and Demanding Environment

Transitioning from teacher education to non-teaching jobs, particularly in fast-paced industries such as customer service and business, demands considerable personal and professional adjustment. Numerou studies claimed that job mismatch negatively affects the job satisfaction of individuals in the job not aligned to their field (Chavadi et al., 2022; Kolosova et al., 2020; More & Rosenbloom, 2021; Sam, 2020), The participants articulated various challenges related to unfamiliar work systems, erratic schedules, and steep learning curves. These were further categorized into three subthemes: working at night, managing dynamic tasks, and grappling with insufficient knowledge and skills.

Subtheme 1: Working at Night

Several participants reported difficulty adjusting to night shift work, particularly those employed as customer service representatives in call centers. The change in circadian rhythm from day-time to night-time labor disrupted their normal functioning and posed health, social, and emotional challenges.

> *"It was struggling at first because I used to do the opposite. Before, I used to sleep during the night and perform my job during the day."*
> *"Two of my challenges are the night shift..."*

These experiences reflect how temporal dislocation, the misalignment of biological and social clocks, negatively affects physical well-being and family dynamics. A study conducted by Candelario et al. (2024) revealed that BPO workers face risks related to physical and psychological stress, sleep disturbances, and occupational diseases owing to the unique challenges inherent to the nature of their jobs. Night shifts affect employees' biological balance, leading to work-life stress (Latha & Panchanatham, 2011). Santos-Manangan (2021) reported that over half of call center agents experience stress and emotional exhaustion due to night work. Similarly, David and Reys (2019) emphasized that night shifts disrupt social interactions and create a disconnection from daily routine, reducing productivity and affecting quality of life.

Subtheme 2: Dynamic and Complex Job Tasks

Participants also highlighted the cognitive demands and variability of their job responsibilities. Customer service requires flexible problem-solving, adaptability to various customer needs, and proficiency with multiple communication platforms and systems.

> *"The admin work requires many tasks and thorough effort."*

"In BPO, I really have to use my critical thinking on how to resolve the concerns of my customers..."

These accounts illustrate the complexity of task performance under pressure. Each customer interaction presents a unique challenge, requiring a tailored response that goes beyond scripted communication. Nandhini (2023) confirmed that mastering dynamic tasks and adapting to diverse clients are critical yet difficult aspects of call center work. Likewise, Marla and Dimaculangan (2024) expounded that Customer Service Advocates (CSAs) faced various challenges in managing Average Handle Time (AHT) due to difficulties in understanding customer concerns, leading to prolonged calls and escalated requests for supervisor intervention.

Subtheme 3: Insufficient Knowledge and Skills

Participants expressed difficulty performing their tasks due to limited training, inadequate subject-matter expertise, and cross-cultural communication barriers, especially when dealing with foreign clients or unfamiliar business protocols.

"We encounter random people every day. I am challenged when dealing with customers who are not Filipinos."

"Language barrier as one of the problems..."

"So I still struggle and learn because of my lack of expertise."

"I only have one; I have no idea about business."

Such utterances reflect skill gaps and cultural mismatch as recurring difficulties for participants transitioning into customer service and entrepreneurial ventures. Murga and Lockwood (2023) observed that Filipino call center agents trained in formal English often struggle with colloquial or accented forms of English from Western customers. Moreover, Albina et al. (2024) found that individuals without formal business training face persistent obstacles in understanding financial systems, business strategies, and operational demands, often resulting in performance anxiety and reduced efficiency.

Theme 6. Unfavorable Feedback and Perceived Career Deviance

Another recurring challenge among participants is the negative social reception they receive for choosing careers unrelated to their degree in education. Participants shared experiences of criticism, judgment, and discrimination from relatives, peers, and the broader community.

"There were many of them who would curse us..."

"Up to this day, people's criticisms are still there. Other people also say that I'm stupid for not pursuing my degree."

"It's maybe the discrimination I received from people saying that my degree was wasted. They also question why I did not pursue teaching."

"The most challenging thing is that some people judged me. Some were vehement that I should teach since I got a degree in one."

These statements highlight the emotional burden of social expectations and the stigma surrounding career paths that diverge from one's formal education. The participants not only contend with job-related stressors but also navigate external judgment and internalized guilt associated with perceived failure to fulfill their "intended" professional identity.

Saladaga (2022) found that hostile interactions with both clients and supervisors exacerbate emotional exhaustion among customer service agents. Meanwhile, Pentang et al. (2022) reported that over 70% of college graduates working in unrelated fields faced social criticism for perceived underachievement, with many being told their education had been "wasted."

Strategies and Coping Mechanisms Employed by Licensed English Teachers

The participants employed various adaptive strategies to navigate the challenges associated with their non-teaching occupations. Their responses revealed a strong inclination toward self-directed development, emotional regulation, and positive cognitive reframing. Two major themes emerged from the data: (1)

investment in continuous learning, and (2) cultivation of a growth mindset. These themes reflect a shift from reactive coping to proactive engagement with their current roles.

Theme 7. Investment in Continuous Learning

Faced with new workplace demands and unfamiliar responsibilities, participants embraced continuous learning as a primary strategy to enhance their job competence, build confidence, and develop a sense of fulfillment in their current roles. Their coping mechanisms included participation in workplace-based training, peer learning, self-initiated inquiry, and the use of online resources.

> *"I always made sure to attend our pre-shift and post-shift huddles."*
>
> *"When you start working in a call center company, of course, there will be training that will range from two weeks to one month."*
>
> *"What I'm currently doing is actually learning from others. Every time I have questions in mind, I reach out to them and actually learn from them."*
>
> *"I was lazy, but I had to do research, ask questions, and probe to find specific answers... So you really have to cultivate whatever your job demands."*

These narratives indicate a deliberate shift from passive adjustment to active engagement in skill development, highlighting the participants' initiative in closing knowledge gaps and adapting to evolving workplace expectations. Participants 1 and 2 participated in structured learning through company-provided huddles and training, while Participants 9 and 10 engaged in informal and independent learning through peer consultation and online exploration.

This finding aligns with Gretz and Jacobson (2021), who assert that team huddles in BPO settings improve agent focus, reinforce key strategies, and foster collaborative problem-solving. Similarly, Kram (2019) emphasized the value of informal mentoring relationships in supporting continuous professional growth. Brooks (2024) also highlighted the efficacy of online platforms in equipping workers with up-to-date skills, insights, and problem-solving strategies, especially in rapidly changing sectors like customer service and entrepreneurship.

Theme 8. Cultivation of a Growth Mindset

In addition to skill-building, participants relied on psychological resilience and positive mindset cultivation as key coping mechanisms. They viewed challenges as opportunities for growth and employed self-affirmation, emotional regulation, and goal-orientation to navigate criticism, stress, and professional uncertainty.

> *"Another thing is dedication to my work, regardless of how difficult it may be... I also motivate myself, as always..."*
>
> *"I am learning to love this job already."*
>
> *"All I can say is that I equipped myself to have a positive mindset... I focused on my goal, which means that I kept moving forward regardless of what other people may say."*
>
> *"I say to myself that the criticisms are normal, and I understand that it really is not that easy to get a degree for nothing."*
>
> *"I focus on positivity."*
>
> *"I made adjustments on the English words that I use in both oral and written. I also established more patience and I tried to be gentle, especially in making them understand the language."*

These accounts demonstrate the participants' adaptive emotional intelligence, as they reframed challenges as manageable and sought to align personal values with professional demands. Participants 3, 5, and 6 emphasized dedication and intrinsic motivation, while Participants 4 and 7 coped by normalizing external judgment and sustaining positivity. Participant 8 focused on cultivating patience and linguistic flexibility, demonstrating how emotional regulation supported professional communication.

This reflects a growth mindset, wherein individuals view abilities as improvable and are thus more likely to persevere despite adversity (Seligman, 2019). According to Bhat (2023), dedication fosters resilience by linking personal effort to organizational goals. Similarly, Cornillez et al. (2022) emphasize that committed employees tend to thrive despite obstacles, often surpassing performance expectations. Curtis et al. (2021) further affirm that patience and empathy are essential in building rapport with customers and maintaining productive interpersonal relationships.

CONCLUSION

This study provides nuanced insights into the phenomenon of job mismatch among Licensed English Teachers. Contrary to the assumptions of Human Capital Theory, which posits that educational investment should directly translate into employment within one's trained field for maximum productivity. Findings reveal that job mismatch did not necessarily result in dissatisfaction, economic disadvantage, or a devaluation of acquired skills. Many participants reported positive adaptation, satisfaction, and perceived career growth in their non-teaching roles.

The findings lend greater support to Protean Career Theory, which emphasizes career self-direction, adaptability, and psychological success. Participants demonstrated agency in navigating evolving personal interests, external circumstances, and labor market opportunities. Their capacity to redefine success beyond traditional occupational trajectories reflects some shift toward non-linear, individualized career pathways. Despite deviating from their formal field of study, participants applied transferable skills, such as communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving, developed through their teacher education, to excel in customer service, administrative, and entrepreneurial roles.

However, the transition was not without its challenges. Participants encountered several occupational and psychosocial stressors, including unfamiliar work environments, night shifts, skill gaps, and social criticism for not pursuing a teaching career. These challenges were mitigated through coping strategies anchored in continuous learning, peer mentoring, resilience, and growth-oriented thinking. The ability to self-regulate, embrace new learning, and maintain a positive outlook proved critical in facilitating their adaptation and redefining their professional identities.

This study recommends that higher education institutions, particularly those offering teacher education programs, enhance their career orientation strategies by providing comprehensive, accessible pre-admission program briefings to help students make informed academic choices aligned with their interests and long-term goals. Integrating lifelong learning skills, such as adaptability, digital literacy, and self-regulated learning, into the curriculum is also essential to prepare graduates for diverse career trajectories. Additionally, colleges should institutionalize robust career development services, offering mentoring, job placement assistance, and resilience training to support graduates navigating employment transitions. Recognizing that career success extends beyond licensure alignment, education stakeholders must also promote inclusive and evolving definitions of professional fulfillment.

While this study offered valuable insights into the lived experiences of BSED English Licensed Professional Teachers passers facing job mismatch, it was limited by its small sample size (n=10), virtual data collection methods, and geographic scope, all constrained by time and logistical barriers during Academic Year 2023–2024. Thus, future research is encouraged to explore broader, multi-site samples using hybrid data collection methods and to investigate how early career awareness, evolving self-identity, and institutional interventions influence career alignment and adaptability. These efforts can inform policy, program design, and graduate support systems to better equip education graduates for the complexities of the modern labor market.

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