

National Certificate Qualifications In Teacher Education Programs: Evaluating Credential Confidence

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Abstract

Contemporary education requires teachers to possess both instructional expertise and practical competencies to remain competitive. However, the impact of technical-vocational qualifications, specifically National Certificate (NC) credentials, on the professional confidence of teacher education graduates remains underexplored. Anchored in Human Capital Theory, this exploratory qualitative study investigates how Filipino pre-service and in-service teachers view the integration of NC skills into their academic training. Through reflexive thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with twenty participants, the research evaluates whether these competencies enhance perceived labor-market value. The findings reveal that participants view NC training as a vital tool for fostering experiential teaching methods, improving classroom readiness, and boosting self-assurance during the hiring process. Rather than proving direct curriculum efficacy, the data suggests these certifications function primarily as symbolic and experiential assets that elevate employability. Furthermore, the results highlight inconsistent exposure to NC training, pointing to disjointed integration across academic programs. Ultimately, this study illuminates how stakeholders interpret technical-vocational credentials within traditional teacher education and how these achievements influence perceived professional positioning.

Keywords: *Technical-Vocational Qualifications; Teacher Education Programs; Credential Confidence; Employability; National Certificate*

Introduction

Modern educational environments increasingly dictate that future educators possess a dual proficiency: robust pedagogical foundations coupled with versatile, practical competencies ^[1]. In the Philippine educational context, this practical readiness is formally recognized through National Certificates

(NC) issued by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). Historically, these industry-standard credentials have been systematically embedded into technical-vocational degrees, such as the Bachelor of Technical Vocational Teacher Education (BTVTED) and the Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education (BTLED). Because students in these specific tracks must undergo rigorous training and TESDA-accredited assessments, they secure a distinct labor-market advantage, qualifying for a broader spectrum of teaching assignments in both junior and senior high schools.

Conversely, traditional academic pathways, such as the Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) and Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED), frequently lack this formalized technical integration. While tech-voc graduates successfully leverage their mandatory NC training to outpace their peers in job readiness, academic graduates face a practical skills gap. Addressing this disparity requires institutions to innovate their curricula. By deliberately embedding relevant technical-vocational competencies into traditional academic degrees, higher education institutions can ensure all educators meet contemporary instructional demands and achieve equitable employment positioning ^[2].

Theoretical knowledge alone is no longer sufficient to meet the complexities of contemporary classrooms or the expectations of employers. Grounded in Human Capital Theory, the acquisition of specialized certifications serves as a critical investment that directly elevates an individual's labor-market value, workforce readiness, and professional agility ^[3, 4]. When applied to teacher education, this framework suggests that supplementing traditional degrees with technical-vocational training transforms graduates into highly adaptable instructional assets. Competency-based education paradigms echo this necessity, emphasizing that bridging abstract frameworks with concrete, real-world applications is essential for authentic learning and skill mastery ^[5, 6].

To realize this curriculum innovation, academic programs must deliberately map specific credentials to their corresponding pedagogical disciplines. For example, language educators can amplify their instructional delivery and audience connection through targeted communication or audio production certifications ^[7, 8]. Similarly, science and mathematics majors might pursue laboratory services or bookkeeping qualifications to ground theoretical concepts in practical utility. Early childhood and physical education candidates stand to gain equally from specialized caregiving or sports coaching credentials. By adopting this integrative micro-credentialing approach, academic teacher education pathways can produce professionals equipped with the same practical versatility as their technical-vocational counterparts, ultimately broadening their career trajectories and employability ^[9].

Beyond immediate classroom applications, the acquisition of technical certifications profoundly influences an educator's self-assurance and labor-market positioning. Possessing dual qualifications, pedagogical expertise alongside specialized technical abilities, signals to employers a high degree of work readiness and professional versatility. Furthermore, basic technical training is increasingly recognized as a prerequisite for teachers to effectively integrate educational technologies and navigate the complexities of modern instructional design ^[10, 11]. This adaptability is especially critical for building resilience within flexible or emergency learning environments, cementing an educator's capacity for continuous professional evolution ^[12].

The alignment of academic curricula with industry-standard credentials also cultivates essential 21st-century competencies and interpersonal skills demanded by an increasingly digital and globalized workforce ^[13, 14]. However, despite the acknowledged benefits of these certifications in technical-vocational contexts, there remains a distinct gap in the literature regarding their application within traditional academic teacher education programs. To address this, the current study explores how pre-service and in-service teachers in the Philippines interpret the relevance of National Certificate competencies within their academic pathways. Ultimately, this research aims to illuminate how these technical-vocational credentials function as professional capital, shaping the participants' perceived instructional readiness, professional identity, and employability confidence.

Methods

Research Design

This research utilized an exploratory qualitative approach to investigate how teaching professionals, both current and future, view the impact of National Certificate (NC) training on their job readiness and professional self-assurance. This specific design is highly effective for investigating areas where a deeper, more nuanced understanding of an under-researched topic is needed. Through this framework, the study aimed to uncover how the integration of technical qualifications influences teachers' feelings of instructional competence and marketability in the workforce.

Population and Sampling

To gather rich and informed perspectives, a purposive sampling method was applied. The study involved a total of 20 participants located in Mindanao, Philippines. This group was evenly divided into two distinct categories: 10 pre-service students currently enrolled in education degrees, and 10 active, in-service teachers working in either academic or technical-vocational settings. The primary selection criterion was that participants must have direct involvement with or exposure to NC programs within their educational training.

Instrument

Data was collected using a researcher-developed, semi-structured interview guide. Grounded in Human Capital Theory and relevant literature on workforce adaptability, the tool was structured around two primary goals: assessing the educational relevance of technical skills and evaluating their effect on hiring confidence. To ensure reliability and clarity, three specialists in education and qualitative methodology validated the instrument. Additionally, a pilot test involving two non-participating teachers helped refine the phrasing, flow, and sequence of the questions prior to the actual interviews. Table 1 presents the instruments used in the study.

Table 1. Interview Guide

Research Objectives	Interview Questions
1. To evaluate how technical qualifications (NC skills) within academic programs contribute to job readiness.	1. How does your current academic curriculum demonstrate the value of technical certifications?
	2. In your view, how do these technical skills align with the overall goals of your degree program?
	3. How do these certifications indicate that you are fully prepared for a real-world work environment?
2. To explore how these certifications impact hiring success, professional self-belief, and workplace credibility.	1. From your perspective, how do hiring managers perceive applicants who hold technical certifications?
	2. How does possessing these credentials change your personal confidence during the job application process?

3. In what ways do these technical skills give you an edge over other candidates in local or international job markets?

Data Gathering Procedure

The primary data collection method involved individual, semi-structured interviews. This format allowed the researcher to guide the conversation consistently while giving participants the freedom to share detailed personal insights. Depending on participant preference and location, sessions were held either in person or through virtual meeting platforms, lasting between 30 and 45 minutes each. All conversations were audio-recorded to guarantee transcription accuracy. The researcher strictly adhered to all ethical guidelines, ensuring guaranteed confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent throughout the process.

Data Analysis

To interpret the interview data, the study applied Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) following the framework established by Braun and Clarke ^[15]. Because the researchers have professional backgrounds in both academic and technical education, they actively used peer discussions and memo-writing to remain objective and prevent personal assumptions from overshadowing the participants' voices. The analysis progressed through six standard stages: familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, theme refinement, theme naming, and final reporting. By constantly comparing codes across all participant transcripts, the researchers ensured that the finalized themes accurately and transparently represented the participants' genuine experiences.

Results

Research Objective 1: To evaluate the relevance of National Certificate skills within the teacher education curriculum and their impact on professional preparedness.

Theme 1: Curricular Integration and Bridging the Theory-Practice Divide

Participants highlighted a notable disconnect between the heavily theoretical nature of their academic programs and the practical demands of modern classrooms, particularly within the K-12 Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) track. While traditional teacher training provided a robust foundation in pedagogy and classroom management, many respondents felt that technical competencies were treated as optional supplements rather than core curricular requirements. Consequently, graduates often found themselves needing to pursue independent, post-graduation training to meet industry standards. Respondents emphasized that deliberately integrating hands-on, TESDA-aligned modules into the university curriculum would eliminate this divide. Such integration would transform abstract educational outcomes into practical teaching versatility, ensuring future educators are genuinely equipped to meet the diverse needs of vocational learners.

"While our coursework is heavily anchored in pedagogical theories, acquiring technical certifications significantly broadens our hiring versatility, particularly for TVL teaching assignments."

"Despite the program's official goals of developing globally competitive educators, our actual exposure to industry-standard technical training during our studies remains quite limited."

"Entering the TVL classroom made me realize that possessing the theoretical knowledge of how to teach a concept is entirely different from being able to physically execute that technical skill."

Theme 2: Instructional Adaptability and Competency-Based Assessment

Exposure to technical certification frameworks fundamentally alters how educators approach lesson design and student evaluation. Respondents noted that understanding industry-standard training shifts their perspective from traditional academic lecturing to competency-based facilitation. By mirroring the performance-driven structures of technical assessments, teachers find it significantly easier to establish clear learning metrics and manage hands-on activities. This dual capacity, functioning as both an academic instructor and a technical trainer, enables educators to craft relevant, experiential lesson plans that directly prepare their students for professional certification and practical workforce expectations.

"Initially, I viewed the technical training activities as mere supplementary tasks. However, in professional practice, they proved crucial for guiding students toward industry-recognized standards."

"Understanding certification frameworks streamlines the lesson planning process, enabling me to construct practical activities that directly align with my students' future technical assessments."

"The certification process taught me that technical training goes beyond personal skill acquisition; it is equally about mastering the instructional methods required for experiential learning spaces."

Theme 3: Professional Credibility and Workforce Readiness

Acquiring technical certifications provides concrete validation of an educator's practical capabilities, which directly elevates their professional self-assurance. Participants emphasized that possessing recognized credentials serves as tangible proof of hands-on proficiency, facilitating a much smoother transition from university study to actual employment. Familiarity with industry-grade equipment, safety protocols, and operational workflows significantly reduces the learning curve when entering the workforce. Ultimately, these credentials empower new teachers to model authentic professional practices confidently, signaling to employers that they possess the applied readiness necessary to handle complex instructional environments.

"Earning a technical certification gives me the self-assurance that I can successfully execute practical, real-world duties rather than relying solely on educational theory."

"Possessing a recognized credential provided an immediate edge in the job market, demonstrating to employers my capacity to complete specific operations safely and effectively."

"These certifications effectively connect academic study with professional reality. Employers highly regard these credentials as verifiable proof of rigorous, hands-on performance evaluation."

Research Objective 2: To examine how participants interpret the influence of National Certificate credentials on employability confidence, professional credibility, and perceived hiring experiences.

Theme 4: Employer Perception and Operational Efficiency

Participants observed that educational administrators and industry employers view technical certifications as definitive proof of a candidate's functional capabilities. Rather than relying on theoretical promises, hiring managers treat these credentials as a guarantee that an applicant is immediately ready for deployment. This perception positions certified educators as highly reliable assets who can be trusted to facilitate hands-on learning and safely manage technical equipment. Consequently, institutions prioritize these candidates because their verifiable expertise significantly reduces the time, financial resources, and institutional effort typically required for new-hire orientation and fundamental skills training.

"During my practicum, it became clear that institutions favor candidates with technical certifications because they offer undeniable evidence of practical, hands-on capability."

"Administrators consider certified educators to be invaluable resources. Having passed rigorous assessments, they are implicitly trusted to execute complex practical duties safely."

"Candidates holding technical credentials frequently receive hiring preference because institutions see them as immediately deployable, substantially cutting down on orientation costs."

Theme 5: Psychological Capital and Interview Competitiveness

Possessing a recognized technical credential significantly diminishes interview anxiety and bolsters the psychological readiness of job applicants. Respondents expressed that while they may lack decades of teaching experience, their certifications serve as concrete evidence of their specialized capabilities. This tangible proof empowers them to navigate rigorous, industry-specific interview questions with authority. By offering a dual profile of pedagogical training and practical mastery, certified candidates distinctly separate themselves from peers who rely solely on traditional academic transcripts, making them highly competitive for specialized instructional roles.

"Even without extensive tenure, carrying a recognized certification concretely validates my technical capacity for specialized instructional roles."

"Previously, I doubted my ability to align with professional industry benchmarks. Acquiring this credential gave me the professional voice needed to navigate technical interview inquiries with absolute certainty."

"While the applicant pool was saturated with standard education majors, my technical credential provided a distinct competitive edge for targeted teaching assignments."

Theme 6: Global Mobility and Career Versatility

Beyond immediate local employment, technical certifications foster long-term professional agility and international marketability. Participants highlighted that these credentials align their capabilities with broader global standards, making them highly attractive to overseas institutions that require educators to seamlessly alternate between academic lecturing and practical demonstration. Furthermore, this dual qualification prevents professional stagnation by opening pathways outside the traditional classroom. Respondents noted that their recognized competencies allow for supplementary income streams and career expansion through part-time industry consulting, technical services, and specialized workshop facilitation.

"Numerous overseas educational institutions actively recruit professionals who seamlessly blend academic qualifications with verifiable technical expertise."

"Because the certification verifies my alignment with standardized benchmarks, my professional credibility is strengthened for both local and cross-border employment."

"This certification exponentially increased my professional agility, allowing me to manage specialized classes while simultaneously pursuing external industry contracts."

Discussion

The findings reveal that acquiring National Certificate (NC) competencies fundamentally alters how educators conceptualize their professional readiness. Rather than pointing to uniform curricular outcomes, respondents noted that hands-on training directly heightened their grasp of practical pedagogy and real-world workplace demands. Because exposure to these certifications varied across academic programs, the perceived advantages stemmed largely from personal engagement rather than a universally applied institutional curriculum. Ultimately, this technical training serves as an essential layer of human capital, fortifying both teaching adaptability and overall workforce preparedness ^[3]. As teachers recognize the growing necessity to merge pedagogical theory with technical execution, especially in vocational contexts, their instructional confidence naturally grows ^[11]. Moving from abstract academic concepts to concrete classroom applications reflects a critical transition into true professional capability, a shift accurately described by Human Capital Theory as the deliberate accumulation of professional value and instructional efficacy ^[5].

Beyond classroom preparedness, participants view these certifications as pivotal tools for elevating their status within the labor market. Through the lens of Human Capital Theory, such credentials function as visible markers of heightened productivity and specialized readiness ^[4]. Even without measuring verified employer data, the educators themselves felt that possessing an NC deeply influenced their self-assurance during job interviews and teaching demonstrations. This internalized "credential confidence" acts as a powerful form of professional capital. Believing that technical mastery perfectly complements their academic degrees, participants felt substantially more credible when discussing applied skills. Furthermore, acquiring these multidisciplinary capabilities expanded their vision of potential career trajectories beyond conventional teaching assignments, reinforcing the idea that continuous skill development fosters sustained career mobility ^[13]. Ultimately, the certifications act as powerful symbolic assets that empower candidates to confidently position themselves within a highly competitive hiring landscape.

When analyzed through the framework of human capital development, the data illustrates a sequential trajectory: the initial investment in technical skills translates directly into elevated instructional legitimacy, which in turn solidifies perceived labor-market advantage ^[10]. Participants viewed their technical competencies not merely as static achievements, but as catalysts for lifelong learning and professional resilience, aligning with modern imperatives for continuous educational development ^[9]. Interestingly, the reported benefits depended heavily on how actively individuals engaged with the certification process, highlighting that professional capital is actively self-constructed rather than automatically conferred by universities. Empowered by expanded skill sets, educators demonstrated increased professional agency, enabling them to seamlessly navigate diverse roles across both academic and industry sectors, a versatility that is essential for surviving today's rapidly shifting educational paradigms ^[14]. In sum, the integration of technical-vocational credentials provides a coherent mechanism for teachers to link their deliberate skill investments with long-term career advancement.

Conclusion

This exploratory qualitative study investigated how current and future educators perceive the integration of National Certificate competencies into traditional teacher education. Ultimately, the findings suggest that acquiring these technical credentials fosters a hybrid professional identity, seamlessly blending theoretical pedagogical knowledge with applied, hands-on mastery. While the study does not claim to measure objective labor-market superiority, it clearly demonstrates that educators internalize these certifications as a profound boost to their instructional confidence and workforce readiness. Grounded in Human Capital Theory, the acquisition of technical skills is viewed by participants as a strategic professional investment. This dual qualification signals technical reliability to employers, reduces anticipated training periods, and expands graduates' career flexibility, particularly within Technical-Vocational-Livelihood environments.

While these insights offer valuable perspectives on professional identity formation, the study is constrained by its reliance on the subjective interpretations of the participants and its specific regional focus within the Philippines, which may limit broader transferability. To build upon this exploratory foundation, future research should incorporate objective employment data, longitudinal tracking of graduates, direct feedback from hiring managers, and comprehensive reviews of institutional curriculum documents.

Drawing from participants' accounts of enhanced credential confidence, teacher education institutions should proactively evaluate how technical competencies can be woven into academic pathways. Rather than mandating uniform technical requirements across all programs, institutions should employ targeted strategies such as curriculum mapping, specialized elective tracks, and enriched practicum experiences. These initiatives must be carefully designed to introduce competency-based learning without diluting the rigorous theoretical foundations of standard teacher preparation. Furthermore, universities should develop a conceptual guide illustrating how the strategic combination of

an academic degree and a technical certification broadens a graduate's instructional versatility. Serving as an advisory tool rather than an employment guarantee, this framework would help students navigate interdisciplinary career pathways and embrace lifelong skill development. To ensure these curricular innovations remain relevant and standardized, higher education institutions must also engage in continuous dialogue with regulatory bodies, notably the Commission on Higher Education and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority. Collaborative alignment will ensure that graduates meet both academic expectations and shifting industry demands.

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