

The Experiences of Senior High School Technical Vocational Learners in Taking the Tesda National Certificate Assessment

Jo Ann C. Cossid¹; Dr. Remigilda Gallardo²

¹Researcher, ²Co-Researcher:

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Abstract: This study explored the experiences of Senior High School Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (SHS-TVL) learners in taking the TESDA National Certificate Assessment. The research employed a qualitative phenomenological design, and the data were gathered from 25 participants using a semi-structured interview questionnaire. The results revealed that learners encountered several challenges during the assessment process, including pressure in answering the test, lack of confidence in their practical skills, and feelings of nervousness during the examination. In order to cope with the difficulties, the learners employed the following strategies: seeking help from teachers, using time management strategies, and apply relaxation techniques while answering the exam. Meanwhile, some of the insights gained from the experiences include handling pressure with grace, valuing the importance of support from teachers for learners, and maintaining a positive attitude towards taking assessments. These findings provide important implications for strengthening the preparation strategies and support systems for senior high school TVL learners undergoing TESDA certification.

TESDA may consider integrating pre-assessment readiness programs that focus on emotional resilience, confidence-building, and stress management alongside technical practice. Teachers may adopt pragmatic, performance-based teaching methods that simulate actual TESDA assessment conditions. Integrating peer collaboration, formative assessments, and reflective discussions can help students build confidence and mastery.

Keywords: Senior High School, Technical Vocational Learners, TESDA National Certificate Assessment.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority National Certificate examination served as an important milestone for technical vocational learners, as it marked the completion of training and validated competencies aligned with industry standards. Under the Technical Vocational Livelihood track of the Senior High School K to 12 curriculum, the goal was to develop employable skills through hands on training and competency based assessment leading to National Certification. However, observations from a TESDA Representative showed that some Senior High School learners, particularly in Shielded Metal Arc Welding, took the assessment despite insufficient practical training, as schools sometimes endorsed them mainly to meet completion requirements. This gap between training and assessment readiness raised concerns about learner preparedness for actual work environments, prompting the study to examine these issues and propose strategies to ensure adequate training before national certification.

The literature highlighted that vocational education and training played a vital role in addressing global skill shortages and supporting economic growth by developing a competent and productive workforce. Across international and local contexts, technical vocational education aligned training with industry needs through competency based and skills focused curricula, yet it continued to face challenges such as inadequate facilities, limited hands on training, low student motivation, stigma, and gaps in resources and teacher competence. Studies emphasized that pragmatic and competency based approaches helped bridge the gap between theory and practice, improving certification readiness and employability. In the Philippines, despite high enrollment in technical vocational programs, issues such as overcrowding, financial constraints, and limited training institutions affected assessment outcomes, particularly in local settings like Padada, Davao del Sur, where lack of equipment and resources hindered students' preparedness for the TESDA National Certificate Examination.

This study sought to examine the lived experiences of technical vocational students who took the TESDA National Certificate Examination using a phenomenological approach. It focused on understanding how students perceived the challenges they encountered and the strategies they used to cope with them. By presenting these real experiences, the study aimed to inform improved teaching practices and guide future policies that support technical vocational educators in enhancing student outcomes.

This study aimed to examine the experiences of students who took the TESDA National Certificate Examination by focusing on the challenges they faced, the coping mechanisms they used, and the insights they gained throughout the process.

- What are the experiences of senior high school learners under the technical vocational track in taking the TESDA National Certificate Assessment?
- What coping mechanisms do senior high school learners under the technical vocational track employ to counter these challenges?
- What insights can be generated from the experiences of senior high school learners under the technical vocational track in taking the TESDA National Certificate Assessment?
- From the literature cited, the TESDA National Certificate Assessment served as an important credential for validating technical vocational skills, but its attainment was limited by challenges such as inadequate facilities, equipment, learning materials, outdated teaching methods, insufficient instructor training, and limited funding. Learners also faced issues related to assessment unfamiliarity, curriculum misalignment, and reduced hands on training, which were intensified by the shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these difficulties, learners relied on perseverance, self confidence, time management, consistent practice, and support from teachers and peers to succeed. The findings highlighted the need for improved resources, teaching strategies, and structured support to better prepare learners for certification and employment.

This study was grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and supported by recent self-efficacy and coping frameworks to explain the experiences of technical vocational students taking the TESDA National Certificate assessment. The framework highlighted how personal beliefs, behaviors, and learning environments interacted to build learners' confidence, resilience, and performance, with self-efficacy playing a central role in persistence and adaptability. Observational learning and social support from teachers, peers, and family further strengthened skill development and emotional regulation. Additionally, modern coping theories showed that students used flexible strategies that combined practical preparation and emotional management to handle the demands of high-stakes certification.

II. METHOD

The study was grounded in a qualitative and constructivist assumption that reality was socially constructed and that understanding students' experiences in taking the TESDA National Certificate Examination required exploring diverse personal perspectives. It emphasized that these experiences could not be reduced to quantitative measures, but had to be understood through individual narratives shaped by context, beliefs, and experiences. This assumption supported the use of a phenomenological approach to capture the depth and meaning of participants' lived experiences.

This study examined the experiences of technical vocational learners taking the TESDA National Certificate Assessment using a qualitative and constructivist framework that emphasized key philosophical assumptions. Ontologically, it recognized that learners' experiences were shaped by multiple realities influenced by personal and contextual factors. Epistemologically, knowledge was viewed as co constructed through meaningful interaction between the researcher and participants. Strong emphasis was placed on axiology, where the researcher acknowledged the value laden nature of qualitative research and upheld reflexivity, transparency, and ethical responsibility to ensure respect, integrity, and sensitivity toward participants. Methodologically, the study employed a phenomenological approach using semi structured interviews and thematic analysis to capture in depth and authentic accounts of learners' lived experiences, supported by clear, culturally appropriate language to accurately represent their realities.

This study employed a qualitative, phenomenological research design to examine the lived experiences of students taking the TESDA National Certificate Examination. Phenomenology was used to understand how learners perceived, described, and interpreted their assessment experiences, allowing the study to capture meanings that could not be obtained through quantitative methods. By focusing on the essence of these experiences, the approach provided in depth insights into students' challenges, coping strategies, and learning processes. The use of bracketing enabled the researcher to set aside personal assumptions and fully engage with participants' perspectives, ensuring that the findings reflected authentic student voices. This design proved appropriate in revealing how learners navigated the demands of the TESDA NC assessment and developed essential skills throughout the process.

The study involved 25 technical vocational learners who had taken the TESDA National Certificate Assessment at TESDA Carmelo C. Delos Cientos Sr. National Trade School, including 12 students from Paligue, Padada, Davao del Sur. This number was appropriate for a qualitative phenomenological study, as it allowed for an in depth yet manageable exploration of learners' experiences, consistent with recommended sample sizes for phenomenological research. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling to ensure they could provide rich and relevant accounts of their assessment experiences.

Inclusion criteria required that participants were technical vocational students, had completed the TESDA National Certificate Examination, and were willing to take part in in depth, semi structured interviews. This approach ensured that all participants had direct and meaningful experience with the phenomenon, with no anticipated vulnerability concerns, as participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and interactions were conducted in a respectful and comfortable manner.

This study used a semi structured interview guide as its primary research instrument to explore students' experiences in taking the TESDA National Certificate Examination. The guide consisted of open ended questions aligned with the study's objectives, allowing participants to share detailed and reflective responses while giving the researcher flexibility to ask follow up questions for deeper understanding. This approach ensured that key topics were consistently covered while maintaining a natural flow of conversation suitable for qualitative inquiry. Prior to data collection, the interview guide

underwent validation through expert review to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research goals, thereby strengthening the credibility and reliability of the data gathered.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings showed that students experienced significant emotional challenges during the TESDA National Certificate Assessment, particularly pressure, lack of confidence, and nervousness, which affected their focus and performance. Pressure arose from time limits, comparison with faster examinees, and the presence of assessors, often impairing memory recall and task execution. Many students also reported low confidence, which they associated with limited practice, insufficient resources, and difficulty balancing speed and accuracy during performance tests. Nervousness was commonly felt at the start of the assessment or when being closely observed, though some students gradually adapted and felt a sense of pride after completing the exam.

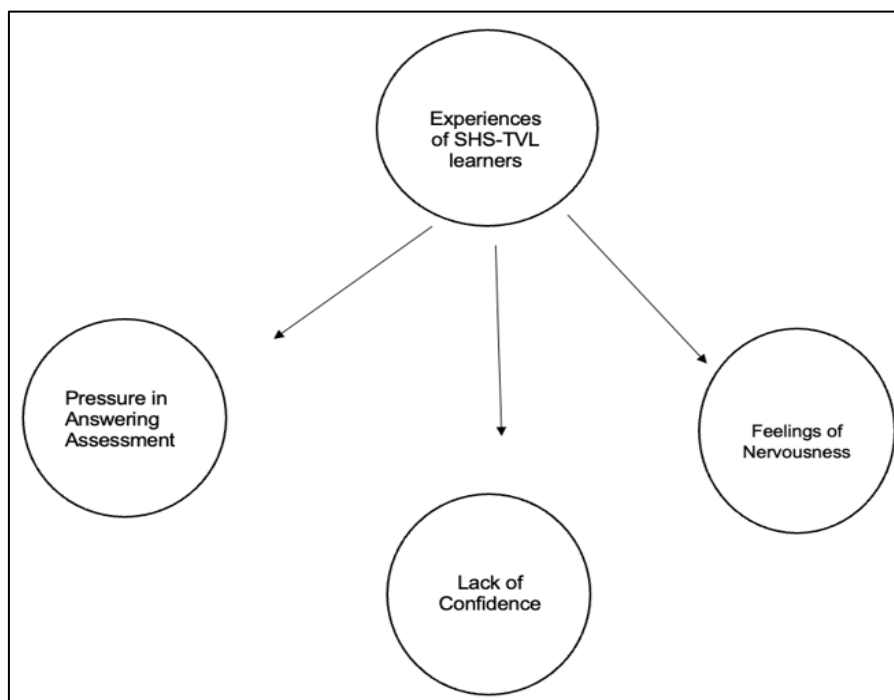


Fig 1 Challenges Faced by students in Answering the TESDA National Certificate Assessment

The findings showed that technical vocational students used various coping mechanisms to manage the demands of the TESDA National Certificate Assessment, with strong emphasis on social support, time management, and relaxation strategies. Many students sought help from teachers and classmates by studying together, asking for advice, and learning from peers who had already passed the examination, which enhanced motivation, understanding, and confidence. Effective time management also emerged as an important strategy, as students planned their preparation, regulated their emotions, and reduced stress through organized study schedules and self discipline. In addition, students applied relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, short mental breaks, mindfulness, and prayer to manage nervousness and maintain focus during the assessment.

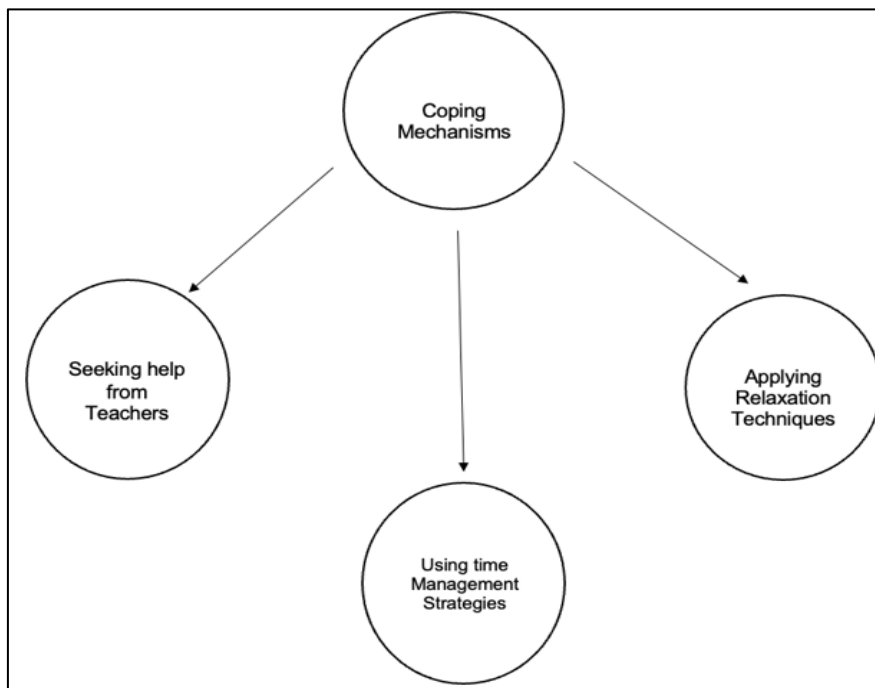


Fig 2 Coping Mechanisms Used by TVL Learners in Facing the Challenges in Answering the TESDA National Certificate Assessment

The findings revealed that students developed important personal and emotional strengths while taking the TESDA National Certificate Assessment, particularly in managing pressure, valuing teacher support, and maintaining a positive mindset. Many participants learned to regulate their emotions, stay calm, and remain focused despite stress, which helped them perform more effectively and build resilience. Teacher support emerged as a crucial factor, as guidance, encouragement, and emotional reassurance from instructors boosted students’ confidence and helped them cope with assessment pressure. In addition, students recognized that having a positive attitude, self-confidence, patience, and perseverance greatly influenced their performance and overall success. These results emphasized that beyond technical skills, emotional regulation, supportive teacher–student relationships, and a strong, positive mindset were essential contributors to success in high-stakes vocational assessments.

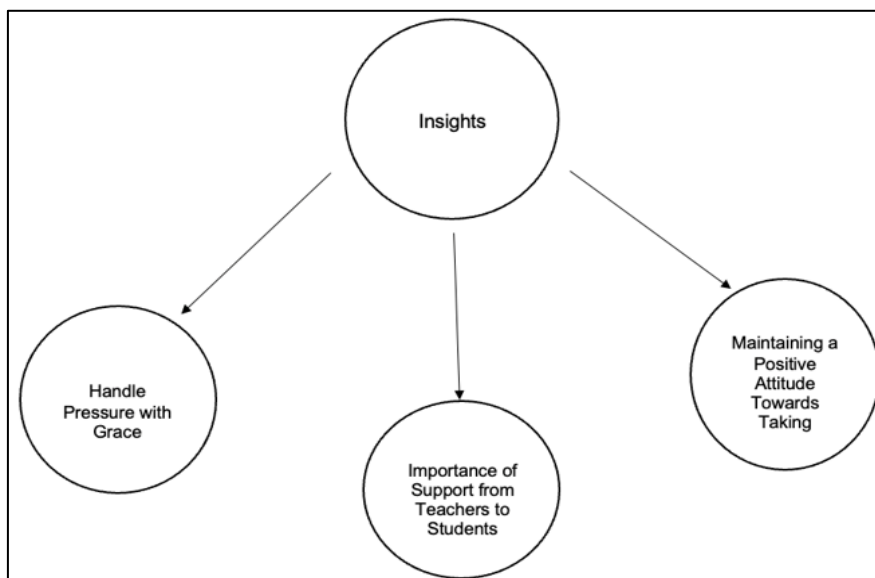


Fig 3 Insights Gained form the Findings

The study examined the lived experiences of Senior High School Technical Vocational Livelihood learners who took the TESDA National Certificate assessment using a qualitative phenomenological approach. The findings showed that learners encountered a combination of psychological, technical, and environmental challenges, including pressure,

anxiety, nervousness, and lack of confidence caused by time limits, the presence of assessors, comparison with other examinees, and insufficient practical training and resources. These challenges often affected students’ concentration, confidence, and ability to recall procedures, highlighting that emotional readiness and psychological stability were just as

important as technical skills in determining performance during vocational certification assessments.

The findings indicated that Senior High School Technical Vocational Livelihood learners experienced significant emotional and practical difficulties during the TESDA National Certificate assessment, particularly pressure, nervousness, and low confidence. These results implied the need for stronger preparation and support systems that address both technical skills and emotional readiness. Schools and TESDA accredited institutions were encouraged to implement structured assessment readiness programs, including mock examinations, orientation activities, and greater exposure to actual tools and procedures, to reduce anxiety and increase familiarity with the assessment process. In addition, integrating stress management, mindfulness, and emotional regulation activities into pre assessment preparation could help learners cope more effectively with pressure.

The study also emphasized the importance of adequate hands on training, teacher mentorship, and confidence building strategies. Ensuring sufficient practical training hours, access to equipment, and industry related experiences could improve learners' skill mastery and self-assurance. Teacher support emerged as a key factor in motivating learners and helping them manage stress, highlighting the value of mentorship oriented teaching, collaborative learning, and continuous professional development for educators. Furthermore, promoting effective coping strategies such as time management, peer collaboration, and relaxation techniques, along with fostering positive attitudes, perseverance, and emotional resilience, could better prepare learners not only for certification but also for future employment challenges.

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