



A QUALITATIVE ACTION RESEARCH ON LICENSED PROFESSIONAL TEACHERS' REFLECTIONS AND COPING STRATEGIES IN BALANCING GRADUATE STUDIES AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT NEGROS ORIENTAL STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative action research explored the reflections, challenges, and coping strategies of licensed professional teachers balancing graduate studies and continuing professional development (CPD) at Negros Oriental State University Graduate School, with the aim of identifying reflective and practical interventions to support teachers' well-being, academic performance, and professional growth. Eight (8) licensed professional teachers enrolled in a Master of Arts program were purposively selected, with four (4) participating in a focus group discussion and four (4) in individual in-depth interviews. Data were collected using a validated interview guide and thematically analyzed, yielding two themes describing lived experiences, four themes outlining challenges, three themes reflecting coping strategies and reflective practices, and two themes presenting proposed interventions. Findings indicated that teacher-learners face substantial academic, professional, and emotional demands but remain engaged through sustained motivation, strong support networks, and intentional strategies for balancing responsibilities. Participants highlighted the value of flexibility, peer collaboration, and technology-enabled systems in managing dual academic and professional roles. The study recommends strengthening personal strategies such as structured time management, reflective practice, and peer support, alongside institutional mechanisms including flexible scheduling, blended CPD modalities, mentoring, and improved academic advisement. It further underscores the importance of context-sensitive CPD policies and workload-considerate requirements to ensure the sustainability and accessibility of graduate education for working teachers.

Keywords: *lived experiences, role balance, CPD, Licensed Professional Teachers*

INTRODUCTION

Teachers in the Philippines increasingly face the challenge of balancing full-time teaching responsibilities with ongoing academic and professional advancement. Licensed professional teachers are required to comply with Continuing Professional Development (CPD) mandates under Republic Act No. 10912 while many simultaneously pursue graduate studies to enhance pedagogical competence, career mobility, and professional identity. Although these requirements promote lifelong learning, they also intensify teachers' workloads, creating competing demands across academic, professional, and personal domains. Studies consistently show that Filipino teachers experience heightened stress, emotional exhaustion, and time pressure as a result of expanded teaching duties, administrative work, and academic obligations (Sanchez & Mananquil, 2024; Amata, 2023; Aquino, 2022).

Research on teacher stress and coping highlights that adaptive strategies such as time management, self-regulation, peer collaboration, and social support are essential for sustaining motivation and psychological well-being. Teachers who resumed in-person and blended teaching after the pandemic reported increased emotional and mental strain due to lesson preparation, performance monitoring, and workload intensification (Sanchez & Mananquil, 2024). Similar findings from studies on distance and blended learning contexts emphasize that coping mechanisms and reflective practices help mitigate stress and prevent burnout among educators (Aquino, 2022; Amata, 2023). These studies underscore the importance of understanding how teachers actively respond to stressors rather than viewing workload pressure as a purely structural issue.

Beyond classroom responsibilities, the requirement to engage in CPD further compounds the challenges faced by teacher-learners. While educators generally recognize CPD as vital to teaching quality and professional renewal, participation is often constrained by time limitations, institutional expectations, and personal obligations (Sabid, 2024; Tulo & Lee, 2022). Camral (2025) found that limited organizational support and inflexible institutional arrangements significantly contribute to teacher burnout and reduced work engagement, reinforcing concerns that CPD frameworks are frequently implemented without sufficient consideration of teachers' lived realities (CHED, 2019; PRC, 2019; DepEd, 2024). These findings indicate that professional development initiatives must be contextually aligned with teachers' actual working conditions to remain effective and sustainable.

Teachers who pursue graduate studies alongside CPD face additional academic and emotional demands. Graduate teacher-students often struggle to balance coursework, research requirements, and instructional responsibilities, particularly during periods of educational disruption and reform. Qualitative studies reveal that sustaining work–study balance requires strong intrinsic motivation, emotional resilience, reflective practice, and institutional support (Salubayba, 2022; Honra, 2022; Castaño, 2023). Carandang and

Santos (2025) similarly reported that postgraduate teacher-students encounter significant role conflict and time pressure but achieve personal and professional growth through reflective practice and social support. Reflective practice, in particular, has been identified as a key mechanism through which teachers process challenges, adapt strategies, and strengthen professional identity (Abelilla, 2024). However, most existing studies examine either graduate study or CPD participation in isolation, rather than as simultaneous, intersecting experiences.

Anchored in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Reflective Practice Theory, and Work Engagement and Organizational Support Theory, this study addresses this gap by exploring how licensed professional teachers manage the combined demands of graduate studies and CPD. These theoretical lenses emphasize the roles of cognitive appraisal, reflection, coping strategies, and institutional support in shaping teachers' well-being and engagement (Aquino, 2022; Amata, 2023; Evitananda et al., 2025; Camral, 2025). Through a qualitative action research approach, this study examines the reflections, challenges, and coping strategies of licensed professional teachers enrolled in the Master of Arts program at Negros Oriental State University Graduate School, with the aim of generating reflective and practical interventions that support academic persistence, professional growth, and sustainable teacher well-being.

Research Questions

This qualitative action research aimed to explore the reflections and coping strategies of licensed professional teachers currently enrolled in the Master of Arts program at Negros Oriental State University Graduate School. It sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do licensed professional teachers describe their experiences in balancing their roles as graduate students and fulfilling CPD requirements?
2. What specific challenges (academic, professional, personal) do they encounter in managing these simultaneous commitments?
3. What coping strategies and reflective practices do they employ to sustain academic success, professional compliance, and personal well-being?
4. What practical, reflective actions or interventions can be developed to support these teacher-learners in navigating the dual demands more effectively?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative action research design to explore the lived experiences, reflections, and coping mechanisms of licensed professional teachers who were simultaneously pursuing graduate studies and engaging in Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Qualitative inquiry enables an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives within their natural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018), while

action research emphasizes reflective inquiry aimed at improving professional practice and growth (Mills, 2020). Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological method, following a systematic process of repeated reading of interview transcripts, extraction of significant statements, formulation of meanings, clustering of themes, and synthesis into an exhaustive description and fundamental structure of the phenomenon. These descriptive findings served as the diagnostic phase of the action research cycle, providing the empirical basis for identifying and developing practical interventions. To ensure rigor and credibility, the researchers remained faithful to participants' original meanings, engaged in peer review throughout the analytic process, and returned the findings to participants for validation. This integrated design and analytic approach provided a coherent and trustworthy account of how teachers navigate overlapping academic and professional demands while fostering reflective awareness and practical strategies for balance.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Negros Oriental State University Graduate School (NORSU-GS), located in Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental, Philippines. NORSU-GS offers a variety of master's and doctoral programs catering to professionals, including many licensed teachers from both public and private institutions. The locale was selected because it represents a diverse population of working educators who are concurrently enrolled in graduate studies, providing rich insights into the challenges and strategies of balancing multiple professional roles.

Research Participants

The participants of this study consisted of licensed professional teachers currently enrolled in the NORSU Graduate School. A purposive sampling technique was used to identify 8 participants who met the following criteria: (1) currently teaching in public or private schools; (2) officially enrolled in a master's degree program; and (3) actively participating in CPD activities mandated by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC). This sampling ensured that participants could authentically share reflections and coping mechanisms relevant to both graduate study and CPD engagement. The participants represented different levels of teaching experience, from early-career educators to veteran teachers, allowing the researchers to capture varied perspectives on the balance between academic advancement and professional work.

Research Instrument

The primary data collection instruments were a validated semi-structured interview guide and a focus group discussion (FGD) protocol. The guide was specifically designed to elicit in-depth personal reflections, coping strategies, and perceptions of institutional support. It was structured into thematic areas focusing on time management, stress mitigation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and reflective learning practices. To ensure the instrument's appropriateness and clarity, it underwent expert validation prior to administration.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection was carried out from October to December 2025. Prior to the commencement of the study, formal permission was secured from the Dean of the NORSU Graduate School. Participants were provided with informed consent forms detailing the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights—specifically emphasizing voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. To ensure data integrity, all interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded with the participants' explicit consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Furthermore, field notes were maintained throughout the process to document non-verbal cues and contextual observations that enriched the primary data.

RESULTS

The results of the study were derived from a rigorous and systematic analysis of the participants' narratives, wherein all recorded interviews were carefully transcribed, repeatedly read, and examined to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the data. Significant statements directly related to the phenomenon were identified and extracted, from which formulated meanings were derived and organized to reveal underlying insights. A total of one hundred sixty (160) formulated core meanings emerged and were clustered into eight (8) initial themes, which were further refined and reorganized into eleven (11) emergent themes. These themes were grouped under four overarching domains: experiences in balancing roles, challenges encountered, coping strategies and reflective practices, and practical and reflective interventions. The thematic framework, articulated through descriptive, metaphoric, and poetic expressions, provides a rich and nuanced account of teacher-learners' lived experiences, capturing how they navigate complex academic and professional responsibilities, cultivate resilience, and envision supportive practices for their dual roles. The following sections present each emergent theme in detail, illustrated through participants' narratives and metaphoric interpretations, offering a coherent and comprehensive understanding of the complexities and triumphs inherent in balancing teaching, graduate studies, and Continuing Professional Development.

I. Experiences in Balancing Roles

From the responses of the participants, two themes related to their experiences as teacher-learners navigating dual roles have emerged. The following themes are:

Theme 1: Walking Two Suns: The Rhythm of Dual Horizons

This theme captures the experiences of participants as they navigated the dual demands of teaching and graduate studies, moving between two equally important but sometimes competing responsibilities. Participants often experienced a sense of urgency and pressure, reflecting the intensity of managing classroom duties alongside academic tasks. Participant 1 illustrated this tension, stating, *"It's a busy week that needs to be manage well. From the assignments that need to finished before Saturdays to the job tasks with*

very fast approaching deadlines, time managements really matter (IDI1:SS1).” Participant 2 described their experience as *“A kind of intense life schedule with demanding paperwork and plenty of assignments (IDI2:SS1).*” Highlighting the overwhelming workload associated with dual roles. Meanwhile, Participant 5 offered a weekly perspective, *“Monday to Friday. I balance my teaching and studying of the lesson. By Friday evening I am preparing a light study for my MAEM especially if there’s a report (FGD5:SS1).*”

These statements collectively illustrate the continuous balancing act between the immediate, bright demands of teaching and the quieter, equally consuming responsibilities of graduate studies. The metaphor of “Walking Two Suns” embodies this dual rhythm, emphasizing how teacher-learners strive to harmonize their roles under intense time pressures while maintaining commitment, performance, and growth in both domains.

Theme 2: Bridges Over Tides: Weaving Teaching, Learning, and Becoming

This theme captures how participants actively integrate their teaching responsibilities with their graduate studies, creating a dynamic interplay between professional practice and academic growth. Participants often expressed a sense of fulfillment, determination, and cautious optimism as they described how they connected experiences from one role to enhance the other.

Participant 1 shared a typical rhythm of balancing tasks: *“I usually finished my teaching tasks or responsibilities in school during daytime. I also prefer answering and doing anything related to my coursework during weeknights (IDI1:SS2).*” illustrating a disciplined division of time between professional and academic duties. Participant 4 highlighted the importance of seeking support and creating personal space, saying,

“Help, connections, focus. I ask help from my students especially in classroom management that leads me to saving time and energy. I take courage in asking my colleagues for tips and questions if I have. Focus, I intentionally isolate myself in the library during lunch breaks and vacant times for me to have time for relaxation, reflection and studies (IDI4:SS2).”

Meanwhile, Participant 6 reflected on the emotional and motivational aspects of managing dual roles:

“Balancing teaching and graduate studies is never easy, but I’ve learned to manage it with patience, disciplined and with a purpose. I focus on my pupils during school hours or days and work on my graduate tasks in the evening or weekends. There are times I feel exhausted, yet I remind myself that every effort helps me grow as a teacher. With proper time management and passion to learning. I’m able to fulfill both roles while continuing to improve myself for my studies or even future (FGD6:SS2).”

These statements collectively illustrate the metaphor of “Bridges Over Tides,” emphasizing how teacher-learners intentionally construct connections between teaching

and learning. Despite fatigue and competing demands, they employ strategies, focus, and support to maintain balance, transform challenges into growth opportunities, and continue advancing both professionally and academically.

II. Challenges Encountered

Based on the participants' narratives, four themes reflecting the challenges they face in balancing professional teaching, graduate studies, and CPD requirements have emerged. The following themes are:

Theme 3: Storms Beneath the Lantern: The Weight and Weather of Academic Life

This theme reflects the emotional turbulence experienced by teacher-learners as they navigate the demanding landscape of graduate studies while fulfilling their professional responsibilities. Participants often expressed feelings of overwhelm, fatigue, and strain, describing their academic journeys as storms that persist beneath the steady glow of their commitment to teaching. Despite their determination, the pressures of deadlines, financial concerns, and competing responsibilities created a weight that repeatedly tested their resilience.

Participant 3 spoke candidly about this burden, sharing, *“The academic challenges I faced and am still currently facing are time-management, competing deadlines for academic and work activities, exhaustion, and financial struggles (IDI3:SS6).”* Participant 6 echoed this experience, noting, *“The main academic challenges I face are managing time for readings, assignments and research while handling teaching duties sometimes heavy workload and meeting deadlines fell overwhelming but I stay organized and focused to overcome them (FGD6:SS6).”* Similarly, Participant 7 emphasized the emotional toll of their dual roles, stating, *“Heavy workload, time management, stress and fatigue and also financial (FGD7:SS6).”*

These accounts illuminate the metaphor of “Storms Beneath the Lantern,” portraying how teacher-learners endure continual pressures while striving to maintain clarity, direction, and purpose. Despite the emotional and physical strain, their persistence becomes the lantern that guides them through the storms of academic life.

Theme 4: Climbing the Quiet Mountain: Academic Demands and Inner Endurance

This theme reflects the participants' experiences of facing the steady, often solitary challenges of academic life—an uphill journey marked by discipline, reflection, and a quiet but persistent strength. Unlike the chaotic storms of deadlines and pressure, this “quiet mountain” represents the internal demands of perseverance, focus, and emotional resilience required to keep moving upward. Participants expressed feelings of mental strain, ongoing self-discipline, and the need for inner grounding as they worked to balance the expectations of graduate studies alongside their professional roles.

Participant 4 offered a glimpse into the personal foundations that support this climb, sharing,

“Well, I’m blessed for having very supportive and understanding guardians all along this journey. I don’t have to explain to them about my business at work or at NORSU. I can go home from work and just sleep before making necessary preparations for the next day’s class. Since I’m single at 29, so I don’t have much responsibilities as an adult at home, except for responsibly budgeting my salary, informing them about my schedules (IDI4:SS8).”

This sense of gratitude and stability becomes part of the inner strength that helps sustain academic effort. Participant 5 highlighted the mental discipline involved, stating, *“I need to balance it well and focus throughout my studies and my professional duties (FGD5:SS12).”* revealing how concentration and persistence become essential tools on the ascent. Meanwhile, Participant 8 emphasized the emotional mindset needed to endure the journey, saying, *“Just mindset, be positive and pray (FGD8:SS12).”* pointing to faith, positivity, and mental resilience as anchors during challenging moments.

Together, these accounts illustrate the metaphor of “Climbing the Quiet Mountain,” where teacher-learners continue their ascent through internal endurance, steady focus, and the support that surrounds them. Their journey is not loud or dramatic, but deeply personal—marked by determination, gratitude, and the quiet strength that propels them forward.

Theme 5: Roots Seeking Rain: The Pursuit of CPD and Evolving Expertise

This theme reflects how participants experience Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as both a source of growth and a strain on their well-being. Much like roots reaching through dry soil in search of nourishment, teacher-learners described moments of fatigue, burnout, and emotional heaviness as they struggled to meet CPD requirements alongside the demands of graduate studies and teaching. The tension between wanting to grow professionally and feeling overwhelmed by the process created an emotional landscape marked by perseverance, weariness, and the constant search for relief.

Participant 1 shared the emotional weight of this pursuit, saying, *“Yes, and whenever I feel these emotions I pause and take a short break from what I am doing. These will give me peace and relaxation (IDI1:SS9).”* revealing how exhaustion pushed them to seek small moments of restoration. Participant 2 echoed this emotional strain, simply stating, *“Yes, when it’s too much to handle (IDI2:SS9).”* capturing the raw feeling of being pushed beyond one’s limits. Participant 5 further highlighted this burden, admitting, *“I experienced right now and then the burnout, stress and fatigue. But we having nothing to do, but to continue always (FGD5:SS9).”* illustrating both the heaviness of the journey and the sense of inevitability that comes with fulfilling professional obligations.

Collectively, these voices depict CPD as a demanding but necessary path—one where teacher-learners stretch themselves toward professional growth while enduring emotional and physical fatigue. “Roots Seeking Rain” symbolizes their hope for renewal, balance, and deeper nourishment as they continue forward amid the pressures of continuous development.

Theme 6: The Circle of Hands and Spirits: Anchors in Unsteady Times

In the quiet spaces between work deadlines, classroom noise, and graduate school requirements, teacher-learners often find themselves stretched across competing demands—pulled by responsibilities that do not pause for one another. These moments of overwhelm reveal not just the weight of their obligations, but also the delicate balance required to stand steady amid unsteady times. For many, navigating this journey means confronting pressures that collide, overlap, and occasionally swallow their sense of calm. Yet in these turbulent moments, their strength becomes visible—not only in their endurance, but in the support systems, inner resilience, and small acts of grounding that keep them moving.

Participant 3 captures this tension vividly, sharing how *“My work requires fixed hours and immediate deadlines while my graduate school classes have their own demanding due dates and activities sometimes creating conflict of priorities (IDI3:SS10).”* Participant 4 echoes this intensity, listing the layered roles that weigh heavily on an educator’s day-to-day.

“Advisory roles. Work overload as an English teacher plus paperworks as an adviser at work. Handling students with different backgrounds, connecting with parents, calculation of grades, cards, classroom management etc. My strict school principal sometimes seems to give me heart attacks in school. Toxic discussions among colleagues about issues here and there distracts me too (IDI4:SS10).”

These struggles are not isolated. Participant 6 adds to this chorus, describing how *“Large class sizes, heavy administrative tasks and tight deadlines make it challenging to balance teaching and graduate studies. Limited support and busy schedules also add pressure, requiring extra effort to manage both roles effectively (FGD6:SS10).”*

Together, their voices reveal more than hardship—they uncover the fragile yet powerful networks of coping, resilience, and silent perseverance that sustain teacher-learners in the midst of unsteady tides. Beneath every deadline met and every class handled with patience lies an internal scaffolding shaped by personal strength, moments of rest, quiet prayers, and the occasional comforting presence of mentors, colleagues, or family. These unseen anchors hold them steady when responsibilities collide, when noise becomes overwhelming, and when exhaustion threatens to blur their purpose. In these shared stories, what emerges is not merely struggle, but the quiet heroism of individuals who continue to give, guide, and grow—even when the world around them demands more than they feel they can offer.

III. Coping Strategies and Reflective Practices

From the participants’ descriptions, three themes highlighting the strategies, routines, and reflective practices they employ to manage dual responsibilities have emerged. The following themes are:

Theme 7: Fires That Do Not Go Out: The Quiet Machinery of Motivation

In the relentless rhythm of teaching and studying, motivation often becomes less like a sudden spark and more like a quiet fire—steady, persistent, and carefully tended by small, intentional acts. For many teacher-learners, coping is not about grand breakthroughs but about the daily discipline of choosing what to finish first, deciding where to place one's limited energy, and honoring personal boundaries. Participant 1 highlights this subtle balancing act, prioritizing urgent tasks while still chipping away at those with distant deadlines by saying, *"Well I usually finished or prioritized the one with closer deadline but still do some other task earlier even when its deadline is not that close (IDI1:SS11)."* Participant 3 speaks to a gentler, more strategic persistence by saying *"I break down large goals into smaller, actionable steps and schedule these mini-tasks. I also protect my personal time and learn to say "no" to non-essential requests (IDI3:SS11)."* For Participant 7, *"Time management and self-care (FGD7:SS11)."* motivation is sustained through the essentials: time management and self-care, the twin anchors that keep burnout at bay.

Together, these voices reveal that resilience is not loud; it is a quiet machinery powered by intention, clarity, and the will to keep moving, even slowly, toward what matters.

Theme 8: Threads of Connection: Weaving Support and Resilience

In the quiet pauses between lesson planning, family commitments, and the relentless pace of graduate studies, teacher-learners search for the strands that keep them grounded. These are the moments when resilience is not a grand display of strength, but a gentle weaving of purpose, support, and self-belief—threads that hold them together when life pulls in many directions. Amid the swirl of responsibilities that seldom wait or slow down, they learn to anchor themselves through intention, connection, and small but meaningful acts of perseverance.

Participant 2 reminds us that resilience often begins with clarity—setting an objective and keeping sight of the rewards ahead, a quiet promise that guides their steps even on difficult days as she shared *"Setting first your objective and minding on the rewards (IDI2:SS12)."* Participant 4 adds another thread to this tapestry, drawing strength from the people who surround them by sharing

"I surround myself with positive and driven people at work and at studies. They encourage me to continue and they help me out a lot of the areas I'm not good at. The bills to be paid as well, motivates me to show up at work because I have to earn. My love and enjoyment for learning, I like the feelings of being a learner (IDI4:SS12)."

Subsequently, for Participant 6, resilience takes the form of gentle self-care—revisiting personal goals as a teacher and learner, taking short breaks, nurturing routines, and celebrating small victories across teaching, studies, and family life as she shared, *"I stay motivated by reminding myself of my goals as a teacher and learner. I maintain well-being"*

through short breaks, self-care routines, and celebrating small achievements in both teaching, studies and family (FGD6:SS12)."

Together, their voices reveal that resilience is not a single act, but a woven pattern of intention, connection, and self-kindness—a fabric strong enough to carry them through the unsteady moments and onward toward the goals they hold close.

Theme 9: Harmonizing the Twin Rhythms: Strategies for Daily Balance

Between the competing rhythms of teaching and learning, many teacher-learners navigate each day like a quiet choreography—one step toward their students, another toward their own academic journey. The balance is rarely perfect, often shifting with the demands of time, energy, and unexpected responsibilities. Yet within this delicate dance, they find strategies that allow them not just to endure, but to move with intention, grace, and hope. In these everyday moments of alignment, their resilience becomes visible: in the routines they build, the mindsets they nurture, and the quiet affirmations that keep them steady when life pulls in different directions.

Participant 1 grounds this balance in mindset, sharing how positivity and positive energy become a shield, helping them keep moving while gently pushing away the toxicity that threatens their peace by sharing, *"Positivity, positive energy keeps me going and disregarding any toxicity that comes my way (IDI1:SS15)."*

Participant 3 offers a glimpse of discipline in motion—carving out a non-negotiable block of focused time for studying or demanding professional tasks, paired with short breaks that allow the mind and body to recharge, preventing burnout before it can take hold when she shared,

"I maintain a non-negotiable block of time for focused work to dedicate my attention to either studying or complex professional task. I take short breaks also to ensure I am recharging myself to avoid burnout (IDI3:SS15)."

Meanwhile, Participant 7 highlights the power of structure and self-belief, relying on patient, organized schedules and the steady reminder that "I can do it" to move through each day with purpose, *"Patient, structured schedules, always bear in mind that I can do it (FGD7:SS15)."*

Together, their voices weave a portrait of balance crafted not through perfection, but through intention—small, steady rhythms that help them navigate the dual demands of teaching and learning while protecting their well-being and sense of self. Their stories show that harmony is not found in doing everything at once, but in making mindful choices, setting gentle boundaries, and trusting the quiet practices that allow them to breathe, pause, and continue. In these intentional acts—choosing positivity, structuring their time, believing in their own capability—they carve out a space where both their professional roles and personal aspirations can coexist. It is in these thoughtful rhythms that they rediscover calm, resilience, and a renewed sense of purpose amid the daily pressures they carry.

IV. Practical and Reflective Interventions

Based on the participants' insights, two themes illustrating the institutional, technological, and programmatic interventions they suggest for supporting teacher-learners have emerged. The following themes are:

Theme 10: Wings in a Wired World: Flexibility Through Systems and Technology

In a world where learning extends beyond the walls of a classroom and teaching stretches across shifting schedules, technology has become both a lifeline and a quiet companion for teacher-learners. It offers them room to breathe, spaces to rest, and moments to catch up when life's demands move too quickly. Amid the swirl of responsibilities—papers to check, classes to attend, lessons to prepare—flexible systems become the wings that help them rise above the weight of their routines. Through digital platforms, adaptable schedules, and supportive structures, they find ways to remain committed learners without losing themselves in the process.

Participant 4 captures this evolving reality, noting that the blend of face-to-face and online classes is already unfolding, giving them freedom in different forms—rest and multitasking during online sessions, and the energizing feeling of being fully present and engaged as a learner in face-to-face settings when she shared,

"I think it's already happening, the mixing of face to face and online classes. Online classes, gives me more time to rest or multi-task during classes. Face to face classes allows me to feel more as a learner and I enjoyed it (IDI4:SS16)."

Participant 5 adds that meaningful support must come from the institution itself, emphasizing the need for flexibility, understanding, and accessible resources that allow teacher-learners to navigate their dual roles without constant exhaustion when she shared, *"The kind of support that the university could help is by offering flexibility, understanding and accessible resources (FGD5:SS16)."*

Meanwhile, Participant 6 highlights the power of structured support, describing how flexible class schedules, online learning options, and academic adjustments would make the balance between teaching and studying more manageable. They also point to the value of workshops on time management and mental well-being, recognizing that technology alone is not enough—guidance and care are equally vital when she shared,

"I think flexible class schedules, online learning options, and access to academic adjusting would help me manage both teaching and studies. Workshops and trainings on time management and mental well-being would also provide valuable support (FGD6:SS16)."

Together, their voices remind us that in a wired world, flexibility is more than convenience—it is compassion in motion. It is the system's way of saying: You can keep learning, growing, and striving, even when life becomes heavy. Through adaptable

structures and supportive technologies, teacher-learners rediscover their capacity to soar, supported by both the tools they use and the understanding they receive.

Theme 11: Blueprints for a Kinder Journey: Reimagining Support and Pathways Forward

In the quiet exhaustion that lingers after long teaching days and late-night study sessions, teacher-learners often imagine what their journey might look like if the system held them with a little more gentleness. Their reflections reveal not complaints, but hopes—blueprints for a kinder, more compassionate academic and professional landscape. These hopes emerge from lived strain, from days when responsibilities become too heavy, and from moments when the desire to grow as educators collides with structures that rarely bend. Yet by sharing these aspirations, they sketch pathways forward—visions of support that honor both their dedication and their humanity.

Participant 1 dreams of a workplace that understands the weight they carry, suggesting that flexible work schedules or designated study leaves would ease burdens and allow teachers pursuing graduate studies to breathe, focus, and be more productive without sacrificing their well-being when he shared, *“Providing flexible work schedules or designated study leaves for teachers pursuing graduate studies could help lessen the burden and improve productivity (IDI1:SS17).”* Participant 3 expands this vision, calling for protected and flexible professional development policies, where time spent in training or graduate studies is treated not as a loss but as investment—not deducted from leave credits, but recognized as growth essential to their role, *“Implementing a more flexible and protected professional development policy like time spent on training or graduate studies is not deducted from leave credits (IDI3:SS17).”*

Meanwhile, Participant 8 brings the spotlight to daily realities, expressing a need for fewer ancillary tasks, a simple yet powerful change that would free both time and mental space for meaningful teaching and genuine learning when she said, *“Less ancillary tasks (FGD8:SS17).”*

Together, their voices form a quiet but compelling plea: a call to redesign systems with empathy, foresight, and care. Their visions remind us that a kinder journey is possible—one where teachers are supported not only in their duties, but in their dreams; where policies uplift rather than drain; and where the path forward is shaped by understanding, compassion, and the courage to reimagine what support can truly look like.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that licensed professional teachers navigating graduate studies and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) experience their dual roles as deeply interconnected rather than separate obligations. The themes *Walking Two Suns* and *Bridges Over Tides* illustrate how participants continuously negotiated their identities as teachers and learners, describing both fulfillment and strain as these roles intersected. While overlapping responsibilities intensified pressure, many participants reported that

engaging simultaneously in teaching and learning strengthened their sense of purpose, professional identity, and commitment to growth. These findings align with studies emphasizing that work–study balance is shaped not only by workload but also by meaning-making and identity integration (Bayucot & Grana, 2021; Li & Albattat, 2025).

Participants also reported substantial challenges associated with academic and professional demands, captured in the themes *Storms Beneath the Lantern* and *Climbing the Quiet Mountain*. Academic workload, cognitive fatigue, and emotional strain emerged as persistent stressors, particularly when graduate requirements overlapped with teaching responsibilities and CPD expectations. Despite these pressures, participants demonstrated notable endurance, framing their academic journey as a sustained process requiring discipline, resilience, and inner motivation. These findings echo prior research linking workload intensity and role conflict to stress and burnout, while also highlighting teachers' capacity for persistence when professional goals remain salient (Pakdee et al., 2025; Carraig, 2024; Borres & Paglinawan, 2025).

The pursuit of CPD, reflected in *Roots Seeking Rain*, was viewed as both essential and demanding. Participants recognized CPD as vital to sustaining expertise and responsiveness to evolving educational contexts, yet noted barriers related to time, funding, and institutional constraints. CPD engagement was most meaningful when it aligned with teachers' immediate classroom needs and long-term professional aspirations, reinforcing evidence that agency and contextual relevance shape effective professional development (Zhang et al., 2024; Dayagbil & Alda, 2024). At the same time, the theme *The Circle of Hands and Spirits* underscores that social and organizational support—through colleagues, mentors, family, and institutions—served as a critical buffer against stress, enabling teachers to remain engaged despite cumulative demands (Cao et al., 2024; Fan & Fang, 2025).

Coping strategies and reflective practices emerged as central mechanisms for sustaining balance and motivation. The themes *Fires That Do Not Go Out*, *Threads of Connection*, and *Harmonizing the Twin Rhythms* highlight how intrinsic motivation, reflective self-regulation, supportive relationships, and deliberate time-management strategies enabled participants to manage daily demands. Rather than relying on singular coping techniques, teacher-learners employed interconnected strategies that combined personal discipline, emotional regulation, and social support—findings consistent with literature on teacher resilience and sustained engagement (Heng & Chu, 2023; Maghfirroh & Diah Sari, 2024; Arcenas et al., 2025).

Finally, participants articulated forward-looking interventions through the themes *Wings in a Wired World* and *Blueprints for a Kinder Journey*, emphasizing the importance of flexible systems, technology-enabled learning, and compassionate institutional structures. Digital tools and blended modalities enhanced efficiency and accessibility, while participants called for policies and academic pathways that recognize teachers' multiple roles and well-being. These insights reinforce growing evidence that institutional flexibility, empathetic leadership, and coherent CPD frameworks are essential to sustaining teacher engagement and preventing burnout (Huang et al., 2024; Dreer, 2023;

Martin, 2024). Collectively, the results demonstrate that while balancing graduate studies and CPD presents significant challenges, reflective coping, social support, and responsive institutional systems enable teacher-learners not only to endure but to grow professionally and personally.

Conclusions

This study explored the reflections, coping strategies, and lived experiences of licensed professional teachers enrolled in graduate programs while simultaneously fulfilling Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements. Through qualitative action research and thematic analysis, the study identified eleven emergent themes addressing four primary research questions: balancing professional and academic roles, navigating challenges, employing coping strategies, and utilizing practical and reflective interventions. The findings conclude that teacher-learners experience a complex interplay of stress, motivation, resilience, and institutional support in managing dual commitments. Participants demonstrated adaptive strategies—such as structured time management, reflective practice, peer and social support, and the strategic use of technology—to maintain work-study balance. Moreover, the study highlighted the critical importance of flexible institutional policies, digital tools, and supportive frameworks in enhancing academic persistence, professional growth, and well-being. Collectively, these findings underscore that while dual responsibilities present substantial challenges, they also serve as catalysts for personal and professional development when supported by deliberate strategies and responsive environments.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following evidence-based recommendations are proposed to support teacher-learners in balancing graduate studies and Continuing Professional Development (CPD), enhance their professional growth, and improve institutional support systems:

1. For Teacher-Learners. Educators are encouraged to adopt deliberate and reflective strategies that promote resilience and work-life balance. Engaging in systematic reflective practices, such as journaling or structured peer discussions, can enhance self-awareness, sustain motivation, and reinforce adaptive coping mechanisms. Additionally, implementing effective time management techniques and scheduling practices is essential to navigate concurrent professional and academic responsibilities. Establishing and maintaining supportive professional networks—including colleagues, mentors, and peers—can further strengthen both emotional well-being and professional development.

2. For School Administrators and Graduate Program Coordinators. Educational leaders and program coordinators should implement institutional strategies that accommodate the dual responsibilities of teacher-learners. Flexible scheduling, blended learning opportunities, and adjustments to workload expectations can mitigate stress and enhance academic persistence. The creation of structured mentoring programs and communities of practice is recommended to provide ongoing guidance, peer support, and professional

feedback. Moreover, the integration of technology-enabled platforms can facilitate participation in CPD, streamline academic requirements, and improve communication between educators and administrative bodies.

3. For Higher Education Institutions and Policymakers. Institutions and policymakers are advised to critically evaluate existing CPD policies and graduate program requirements to ensure structural alignment with the professional realities of teacher-learners. Policies that are sensitive to contextual constraints—such as time limitations, workload, and access to resources—can reduce barriers to professional development while promoting sustained engagement in academic programs. Providing accessible support services, including academic advising, mental health counseling, and digital learning resources, is essential for fostering teacher retention and program completion. Additionally, action-research initiatives should be incentivized to encourage reflective practices and evidence-based strategies that support teacher-learners' holistic growth.

4. For Future Research. Future studies should examine the long-term impact of concurrent professional and academic obligations on teacher well-being, career trajectories, and pedagogical competence. Research exploring the effectiveness of specific institutional support mechanisms—such as mentoring frameworks, blended CPD delivery, or workload optimization—can offer actionable insights for enhancing teacher resilience. Comparative studies across different regions or institutional contexts may also provide a deeper understanding of contextual factors influencing the balance between teaching, CPD, and graduate studies.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can foster a more supportive and sustainable environment that enables teacher-learners to thrive academically, professionally, and personally.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study complied with established ethical and trustworthiness standards to ensure rigor, integrity, and participant protection. Trustworthiness was guided by Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, achieved through data triangulation (FGDs, IDIs, and field notes), member checking, prolonged engagement, reflective journaling, thick contextual descriptions, audit trails, peer debriefing, and reflexive practices to minimize researcher bias. Ethical approval was obtained from the Negros Oriental State University Graduate School Dean, and informed consent was secured from all participants, emphasizing voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and the option to decline answering any questions. The study posed no known risks to participants and offered no direct personal benefits; however, participants' contributions may inform improvements in graduate education and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) support for teachers. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained through the use of pseudonyms, secure data storage, and restricted data use in compliance with the APA (7th edition) ethical standards and the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173). For efficiency in preliminary data processing, the AI tool Gemini was utilized solely for

meaning formulation and thematic organization after all identifiable information was removed or pseudonymized, using secured, non-learning models to ensure data privacy and prevent third-party data retention or training.

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