



## The Essence of Competency-Based Learning: Lived Experiences of Trainees in the TESDA Bread and Pastry Production Training Program

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### Abstract

Competency-based training is a foundational element of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), providing learners with industry-relevant knowledge and practical skills. Although prior research has primarily assessed competency-based programs through employment outcomes and technical skill acquisition, there is limited understanding of trainees lived experiences within these. This study investigated the lived experiences of trainees who completed the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) Bread and Pastry Production National Certificate II (BPP NC II) training, aiming to clarify the essence of competency-based learning as reflected in their shared experiences. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory provided the conceptual framework, and Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological approach guided the methodology. The study purposively selected six Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education (BTLED) students majoring in Home Economics from the Polytechnic University of the Philippines-Quezon City Campus who completed BPP NC II training at TESDA-accredited centers between 2023 and 2025. Data collection involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and analysis followed transcendental phenomenological procedures to extract shared meanings from participants' accounts. The results indicated that trainees encountered competency-based learning challenges in developing technical skills, limited training duration and resources, increased competence and self-confidence, and the emergence of practical and economic opportunities. Overall, competency-based learning was identified as a transformative process in which authentic hands-on engagement fostered technical competence, enhanced confidence, and aspirations for employment and entrepreneurship. The extent of this development was influenced by the availability of time, resources, practice opportunities, and support within the training environment. These findings broaden the understanding of competency-based TVET by emphasizing the interplay between experiential learning, learner development, and the contextual factors that facilitate or hinder mastery.

**Keywords:** *Competency-Based Learning, Phenomenology, Bread and Pastry Production Training, Lived Experiences, Technical and Vocational Education and Training*

### INTRODUCTION

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has become a strategic pillar of workforce development, enabling countries to address rapid technological advancement, shifting labor market demands, and persistent skills mismatches. As industries increasingly require workers to demonstrate practical competence rather than theoretical knowledge alone, competency-based learning has emerged as a leading educational approach that emphasizes mastery of occupational standards through authentic, performance-based experiences. As a result, governments worldwide continue to invest in competency-based TVET systems to improve employability, foster entrepreneurship, promote lifelong learning, and enhance national economic competitiveness. In addition to preparing individuals for employment, contemporary TVET is

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recognized as an educational pathway that develops learners' confidence, adaptability, and capacity to navigate evolving workplace environments.

In the Philippines, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) is the primary government agency responsible for implementing competency-based technical and vocational education aligned with national industry standards. Among its training qualifications, the Bread and Pastry Production National Certificate II (BPP NC II) provides learners with competencies in preparing bakery and pastry products, applying food safety and quality assurance practices, utilizing industry-standard tools and equipment, and developing entrepreneurial capabilities for employment or self-employment (Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA, 2019). As a competency-based qualification, the program provides a pathway for developing occupational skills that may support employment, entrepreneurship, and livelihood opportunities, consistent with the broader objectives of Philippine TVET (Edralin & Pastrana, 2023).

Competency-based technical and vocational education and training (TVET) have been shown to enhance practical competence and workplace readiness by providing authentic learning experiences, qualified trainers, and supportive instructional environments (Daud et al., 2024; Rohanai et al., 2024). Nevertheless, factors such as limited facilities, insufficient practice opportunities, time constraints, and discrepancies between training and workplace conditions can impede competency development (Edralin & Pastrana, 2023). Therefore, competency-based learning encompasses not only attaining occupational standards but also engaging with the conditions that facilitate competence development.

Existing research on TVET predominantly emphasizes measurable outcomes, including competency attainment, certification, employability, and program effectiveness. However, understanding of how trainees experience the process of becoming competent remains limited, particularly in relation to navigating technical challenges, practical tasks, performance demands, training constraints, and the personal and practical significance of acquired competencies. This experiential dimension remains underexplored in the context of Philippine TVET and TESDA Bread and Pastry Production training.

This study employed Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology to investigate the lived experiences of trainees who completed TESDA Bread and Pastry Production training, aiming to elucidate the shared essence of competency-based learning. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory was utilized as a sensitizing framework to interpret learning through experience, reflection, understanding, and application. In accordance with the principle of epoche, Kolb's categories were not imposed as predetermined themes; instead, participants' accounts were first analyzed for phenomenological meanings prior to interpretation in relation to experiential learning.

The study addressed the overarching question: What is the essence of competency-based learning as experienced by trainees who completed the TESDA Bread and Pastry Production Training Program? Specifically, it examined: (1) the challenges encountered by trainees; (2) their experiences of competency and personal development; (3) the practical, career, and economic opportunities associated with acquired competencies; and (4) the improvements recommended based on their training experiences.

By foregrounding trainees lived experiences, this study extends outcome-oriented TVET research by examining how trainees experience and interpret competency-based learning. It also offers learner-informed insights for TESDA, training institutions, higher education institutions, trainers, and policymakers seeking to enhance competency-based training.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Competency-Based Learning in Technical and Vocational Education

Competency-based learning has emerged as a central pedagogical approach in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), emphasizing demonstrated competence through authentic tasks, repeated practice, feedback, and performance-based assessment. In the Philippine context, competency-based TVET is intended to align training with occupational standards and workplace requirements (Edralin & Pastrana, 2023). Studies of vocational and work-based learning likewise emphasize authentic engagement and practical performance as central to the development of occupational competence (Daud et al., 2024; Rohanai et al., 2024). Thus, competency-based learning is concerned not only with acquiring theoretical knowledge but also with demonstrating the ability to apply that knowledge in realistic vocational contexts.

### Learners' Experiences in Competency-Based Learning

Learners' experiences in competency-based education extend beyond technical skill acquisition. Authentic practice, competency assessment, and opportunities to apply learning can shape trainees' confidence, motivation, perceived capability, and preparation for future work (Minghat et al., 2020; Ujah, 2024). At the same time, performance-based learning may be demanding because trainees must demonstrate skills under conditions involving accuracy, time pressure, observation, and uncertainty. These experiences indicate that becoming competent is both a technical process and a personally meaningful developmental experience.

### Competency development is also shaped by the conditions in which training occurs

Access to equipment, adequate instructional time, repeated hands-on practice, and supportive training arrangements influence whether learners can personally perform and refine required competencies. Geda (2021) identified limitations in practical skill acquisition associated with training conditions, while Cabutihan et al. (2024) and Cornelia and Carale (2025) documented how inadequate equipment and facilities can restrict opportunities for practical learning. Accordingly, the effectiveness of competency-based education depends not only on curricular expectations but also on whether institutions provide sufficient opportunities and resources for mastery.

### Outcomes of Competency-Based Learning

Competency-based learning can contribute to personal, professional, and economic development by integrating occupational knowledge, practical skills, attitudes, and workplace values. TVET research has linked practical competence with employability and workplace readiness (Daud et al., 2024; Mariano & Tantoco, 2023), while vocational learning experiences can also create pathways toward employment and entrepreneurship (Oswald-Egg & Renold, 2021; Talento et al., 2022). These outcomes suggest that the value of competency-based education extends beyond certification to learners' ability to apply acquired competencies in employment, livelihood, and everyday contexts.

### Theoretical Framework

#### *Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory*

Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory defines learning as transforming experience through four interrelated modes: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Concrete experience refers to direct engagement in an activity. Reflective observation entails examining the experience and its outcomes. Abstract conceptualization involves developing or refining understanding based on reflection. Active

experimentation consists of applying that understanding to subsequent situations.

This framework is particularly relevant to competency-based Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), as trainees develop occupational competence through practical engagement, reflection on performance, understanding of technical principles, and subsequent application. In Bread and Pastry Production training, learners perform technical tasks, identify errors and successful outcomes, relate these experiences to relevant procedures and principles, and refine their performance through continued practice.

In this study, Kolb's theory functioned as a sensitizing and interpretive framework rather than as a predetermined coding structure. Consistent with Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology, the study did not impose theoretical categories on participants' accounts. Meanings and themes were first derived phenomenologically, and Kolb's framework was subsequently used to interpret how participants experienced practical engagement, reflection, learning, and application. This approach maintains the phenomenological emphasis on participants' lived experiences while offering a theoretical lens for understanding the experiential nature of competency development.

### **Synthesis and Research Gap**

Existing literature suggests that competency-based TVET develops through authentic practice within learning environments shaped by instructional time, equipment and facilities, trainer support, and opportunities for repeated engagement (Geda, 2021; Daud et al., 2024; Rohanai et al., 2024). Such programs are associated with practical competence, workplace readiness, and employment or livelihood opportunities (Mariano & Tantoco, 2023; Oswald-Egg & Renold, 2021). Nevertheless, much of the literature evaluates competency-based programs through observable outcomes such as competency attainment, certification, employability, or program effectiveness.

Less attention has been given to how trainees experience becoming competent, how training conditions shape that experience, and what competency development means to learners themselves. The present study addresses this gap through transcendental phenomenology by examining the lived experiences of trainees who completed TESDA Bread and Pastry Production training and elucidating the shared essence of competency-based learning.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This qualitative study utilized Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology to investigate the lived experiences of trainees who completed the TESDA Bread and Pastry Production (BPP) Training Program and to clarify the shared essence of competency-based learning. Transcendental phenomenology prioritizes participants' descriptions of experience and employs epoche, or bracketing, to set aside researchers' preconceptions and identify meanings common to the phenomenon.

### **Research Participants**

The researchers used purposive sampling to recruit six Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education (BTLEd) students majoring in Home Economics at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines–Quezon City, each with direct and recent experience of the phenomenon. All participants completed TESDA-accredited Bread and Pastry Production National Certificate II (BPP NC II) training between 2023 and 2025 at TESDA-accredited training centers. All six reported having no baking experience prior to entering BPP NC II training.

Inclusion criteria required participants to be bona fide BTLEd Home Economics students, proficient in Filipino, willing to participate voluntarily in an in-depth interview and audio recording, and able to provide proof of BPP NC II training completion. The homogeneous six-participant sample was appropriate for the phenomenological approach, which seeks rich, detailed accounts of a shared experience rather than statistical representation. Interviews were conducted primarily in Filipino and were translated into English for analysis and manuscript presentation.

**Table 1.** Participant Profile

| <b>Participant</b> | <b>BPP NC II<br/>Completion<br/>Year</b> | <b>Training Centre<br/>Type</b>         | <b>Baking Experience<br/>Prior to BPP NC II<br/>Training</b> | <b>Interview<br/>Language</b> |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| P1                 | 2024                                     | TESDA-<br>accredited<br>training center | No prior baking<br>experience                                | Filipino                      |
| P2                 | 2023                                     | TESDA-<br>accredited<br>training center | No prior baking<br>experience                                | Filipino                      |
| P3                 | 2023                                     | TESDA-<br>accredited<br>training center | No prior baking<br>experience                                | Filipino                      |
| P4                 | 2024                                     | TESDA-<br>accredited<br>training center | No prior baking<br>experience                                | Filipino                      |
| P5                 | 2025                                     | TESDA-<br>accredited<br>training center | No prior baking<br>experience                                | Filipino                      |
| P6                 | 2025                                     | TESDA-<br>accredited<br>training center | No prior baking<br>experience                                | Filipino                      |

### Research Locale

The study was conducted at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines–Quezon City Campus. Participants were enrolled in the BTLEd Home Economics program and completed BPP NC II training at TESDA-accredited centers while pursuing their undergraduate studies. This arrangement provided a consistent educational context for examining competency-based learning.

### Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews using open-ended questions that explored participants' training challenges, competency and personal development, practical applications and opportunities, and recommendations for program improvement. Subject matter experts reviewed the interview protocol to ensure relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study objectives. The interview guide comprised nine core questions with follow-up probes. The complete guide is reproduced in Appendix A.

### Data Collection Procedure

After obtaining ethical approval, eligible participants received information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality protocols, and their rights

before providing written informed consent. Each face-to-face interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

The interviews were conducted primarily in Filipino, allowing participants to describe their experiences in the language in which they were most comfortable. Interviews were audio-recorded using Clipto and transcribed in the original language. Filipino responses selected for analysis and manuscript presentation were translated into English. The researchers reviewed the English translations against the original Filipino transcripts and audio-recorded responses and made corrections where necessary to preserve participants' intended meanings. Original-language statements and their corresponding English translations were retained throughout the analysis to facilitate verification of meaning.

Researchers maintained reflective journals to document methodological decisions, personal reflections, and potential assumptions, thereby supporting epoche during data collection and analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Interview transcripts were analyzed following Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological procedures. Researchers first engaged in epoche to identify and bracket prior assumptions. Through horizontalization, researchers identified statements relevant to competency-based learning and initially treated them as equally valuable. Researchers then clustered significant statements into meaning units, consolidating repetitive expressions while retaining distinct experiential meanings.

Meaning units were organized into themes, which informed the development of textural descriptions of participants' experiences and structural descriptions detailing how and under what conditions those experiences occurred. The textural and structural descriptions were then synthesized into a composite essence representing participants' shared meaning of competency-based learning.

### **Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were used to ensure trustworthiness. Credibility was supported through verbatim transcription, sustained engagement with the data, and member checking. After preliminary analysis, participants were provided with summaries of the interpreted meanings derived from their interview accounts and were invited to confirm whether the interpretations accurately represented their experiences and intended meanings and to identify any needed clarification or correction. Any clarifications provided during this process were considered in finalizing the interpretations. Dependability was ensured through an audit trail documenting interview procedures, coding decisions, theme development, methodological decisions, and analytic reflections. Confirmability was enhanced through reflective journaling, epoche, and continued reference to the original participant accounts. Transferability was facilitated through detailed descriptions of the participants, institutional context, training setting, and experiences.

### **Ethical Considerations**

University ethics clearance was secured with code CM-QC-BTLEDHE-2025-009 prior to the conduct of interviews. All participants were provided with written informed consent and were notified that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. Participant codes (P1–P6) were assigned to protect identities, and interview data were handled confidentially and used exclusively for research purposes

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Challenges in Skill Development

Participants described the early stages of competency development as both demanding and uncertain. Their narratives indicated that mastering Bread and Pastry Production involved more than memorizing procedures; it required translating unfamiliar technical knowledge into precise performance while adhering to expectations for accuracy, timing, and competency assessment. These experiences involved two related dimensions: limited technical knowledge during the initial training phase and heightened anxiety when performing or demonstrating newly acquired skills. Participants contributing direct accounts to this theme included P1 and P2 (n = 2).

#### *Limited Knowledge and Technical Skills*

Participants reported entering the training program with limited prior knowledge of bread and pastry production, which made acquiring technical skills both challenging and demanding. They described difficulties in recalling baking procedures, applying accurate measurements, selecting appropriate techniques, and executing practical tasks with precision during laboratory activities. These challenges were most pronounced during the initial stages of training, when participants were required to perform unfamiliar tasks that demanded precision and consistency.

Participant 1 described the technical and logistical challenges encountered during the practical sessions and competency assessment:

*"Both the hands-on activities and the competency assessment were challenging. During the practical sessions, baking itself was difficult because every measurement had to be precise. The assessment was even more demanding due to time pressure and the limited number of mixers—there were only five or six mixers for twelve trainees. We had to compete for the available equipment, and if you were last in line, your work was delayed. I also felt anxious because I did not know what questions would be asked during the assessment. You really needed to understand the entire process and procedures to answer correctly."* Participant1

Participants also linked early technical difficulty with uncertainty about whether they were sufficiently prepared to demonstrate the required competencies. Participants indicated that developing competence required repeated exposure to unfamiliar procedures, mistakes, corrective actions, and ongoing practice. Instead of viewing competence as an immediate outcome of instruction, trainees described it as a skill that became increasingly manageable through accumulated practical experience.

From a phenomenological perspective, limited technical knowledge signified more than a lack of baking skills; it marked the participants' progression from novice learners to competent practitioners. The unfamiliarity with baking procedures required trainees to engage repeatedly in authentic learning experiences, transforming mistakes into opportunities for reflection and improvement. Interpreted through Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, these experiences underscore the significance of direct engagement with technical tasks, followed by reflection and iterative efforts to enhance performance. Participants' narratives indicate that encountering practical difficulties contributed to the learning process, as trainees identified errors and modified their approaches in subsequent activities. These findings also support previous research indicating that competency-based learning necessitates sustained opportunities for authentic practice before learners develop confidence and technical proficiency (Daud et al., 2024; Rohanai et al., 2024). The present study extends this literature by demonstrating that trainees viewed limited technical knowledge not only as an instructional challenge but also as a natural and meaningful stage in the process of becoming competent within a competency-based learning environment.

### *Performance Anxiety During Tasks and Assessment*

In addition to technical challenges, participants consistently reported experiencing nervousness, pressure, and self-doubt during practical activities and competency assessments. Unlike traditional classroom learning, competency-based education required public demonstration of skills under time constraints and adherence to industry standards. As a result, assessment was perceived not only as a measure of competence but also as an emotionally demanding process that tested both technical ability and personal confidence.

Participant 2 described the uncertainty and nervousness associated with demonstrating competence during assessment:

*"During the assessment, I was really nervous because although I thought we were performing the tasks correctly, I felt that we had not been fully trained yet."* Participant 2

These accounts indicate that performance anxiety was an integral aspect of the participants' competency development. Their anxiety arose not only from fear of making mistakes but also from the expectation to demonstrate competence accurately, efficiently, and confidently under authentic assessment conditions. Factors such as time constraints, equipment shortages, uncertainty about assessment questions, and instructor observation heightened feelings of pressure, often undermining confidence even when the requisite knowledge had been acquired.

Participants experienced competency assessment as both a technical and emotional event. Nervousness, uncertainty, time pressure, and the expectation to demonstrate skills heightened their awareness of their level of preparation. Consequently, assessment became more than an evaluation of technical performance; it also became a moment when trainees confronted their confidence, preparedness, and perceived capability.

These findings align with previous studies showing that authentic performance-based assessments may initially provoke anxiety because learners must apply knowledge in realistic workplace contexts (Minghat et al., 2020; Ujah, 2024). The present study further demonstrates that these experiences contributed to learners' reflective growth. In accordance with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, the emotional challenges encountered during competency assessment became concrete learning experiences that fostered reflection, adaptation, and improved performance in subsequent tasks.

### **Insufficient Program Duration and Resource Allocation**

Competency development was significantly influenced by the structural conditions of the training environment. While participants valued the program's practical nature, they noted that limited training time, equipment shortages, and group-based task arrangements often reduced opportunities for repeated, independent practice. These findings indicate that trainees perceived competence as requiring sufficient time and opportunity for personal engagement with the necessary skills, rather than merely completing prescribed training activities. Participants contributing direct accounts to this theme included P1, P4, and P5 (n = 3).

### *Time Constraints and Training Duration*

Participants consistently identified the limited duration of the training as a significant barrier to competency development. They reported that the compressed schedule hindered their ability to repeatedly practice baking techniques, complete all required activities, and receive adequate guidance from trainers. Given that competency-based learning emphasizes mastery through repeated performance, participants perceived the available training period as insufficient for developing confidence in industry-standard baking procedures.

As P1 explained:

*"We were under a lot of time pressure. We were given only four hours to prepare four different types of bread. It was difficult because there were five of us working in one group." P1*

Similarly, P4 reflected on the overall duration of the program:

*"I think the training period was too short. We had about twenty-four days of training, with eleven days of online lectures and eleven days of face-to-face sessions. It felt insufficient because there were some parts of the training that we were not able to complete." P4*

These narratives illustrate that participants viewed competency development as a process extending beyond the completion of scheduled activities. They emphasized the necessity of sufficient time to repeat procedures, correct errors, and gradually build confidence in independently performing baking tasks. The compressed schedule restricted opportunities for repeated practice and individualized feedback, both of which are fundamental to competency-based education.

From a phenomenological perspective, time was experienced as an opportunity for mastery, not merely as a schedule. Limited training duration reduced opportunities for full engagement in the learning process, leading to feelings of incompleteness despite program completion. Their accounts indicate that competency was perceived as developing progressively through sustained engagement, rather than within fixed instructional timelines.

According to Experiential Learning Theory, limited opportunities for repeated practice can restrict learners' ability to transition between experience, reflection, conceptual understanding, and subsequent experimentation. Participants' accounts indicate that the experiential cycle depends on the availability of structured opportunities for personal, repeated engagement with practical tasks.

When time constraints limit opportunities for repeated practice, learners have fewer chances to reflect on and refine their performance. Previous studies similarly demonstrate that sufficient instructional time is essential for competency mastery, as repeated engagement enhances technical proficiency and professional confidence (Winget & Persky, 2022; Daud et al., 2024). The present study contributes to this literature by illustrating how trainees experienced limited training duration as a barrier to achieving the objectives of competency-based learning.

#### *Limited Resources and Unequal Practice Opportunities*

In addition to limited training time, participants identified inadequate resources and unequal opportunities for practical engagement as significant constraints on competency development. As competency-based learning relies on authentic, hands-on experience, participants believed that limited equipment and group-based task assignments diminished their opportunities to independently perform essential baking procedures.

P5 explained how group assignments and limited opportunities to use equipment restricted individual practice:

*"There were five of us in each group, and we were assigned specific bread products to prepare. I was not able to make the other types of bread because we had to work simultaneously to finish everything within four hours. The training felt insufficient because there were parts of the activities that we could not personally perform." P5*

From a phenomenological perspective, access to equipment represented more than the mere availability of physical resources; it symbolized learners' opportunities to engage directly with the competencies they were expected to master. Similarly, unequal participation in group activities affected participants' sense of preparedness, as competence was regarded as something that must be personally experienced rather than simply observed.

The account provided by P5 demonstrates that participation in group activities does not guarantee individual engagement with every competency. Resource limitations and task distribution consequently limited access to authentic practice. Comparable issues have been documented in contexts where insufficient equipment and facilities constrain practical learning opportunities (Cabutihan et al., 2024; Cornelia & Carale, 2025).

Overall, the findings suggest that competency development depends not only on learner effort but also on the adequacy of the training environment in terms of time, resources, and opportunities for individual practice.

### **Skill and Personal Development**

Although participants faced challenges during training, they reported significant changes in their perceptions of both their technical abilities and their identities as learners. Through hands-on engagement, participants became more familiar with baking concepts and procedures and gained confidence in tasks that initially seemed challenging. These findings indicate that competency development occurred through both technical learning and personal growth. Participants contributing direct accounts to this theme included P1, P2, and P5 (n = 3).

#### *Acquisition of Baking Concepts and Practical Competencies*

Participants consistently described the Bread and Pastry Production (BPP) Training as offering meaningful opportunities to develop both conceptual understanding and practical competence in baking. Through repeated hands-on activities, they gradually acquired knowledge of baking principles, ingredient measurements, production techniques, and the appropriate use of baking equipment. Notably, participants emphasized that their knowledge gained significance because it was continuously reinforced through practical application rather than classroom instruction alone.

As P2 shared, continued practice after gaining access to an oven helped refine skills developed through training:

*"I think everything changed after we finally had an oven. From that point on, I baked almost every day, and through that constant practice, I felt that my baking skills became more refined."* P2

Similarly, P5 reflected on the practical knowledge gained through the training:

*"I learned how to bake and how to properly estimate the amount of flour and other ingredients needed in baking."* P5

Participants associated repeated practical engagement and successful task completion with a growing awareness of their own capability. As their accounts shifted from descriptions of uncertainty to statements about being able to perform tasks more independently, confidence emerged as a key dimension of how they experienced becoming competent.

The account demonstrates how access to practical experience enabled continued skill development. Participants linked repeated practice to greater familiarity with procedures and

increased independence. This reflects the experiential nature of competency-based learning, in which practical engagement and subsequent application contribute to progressively refined performance (Kolb, 1984; Rohanai et al., 2024).

#### *Increased Confidence and Self-Realization*

In addition to technical competence, participants consistently described the training as a catalyst for increased confidence and personal growth. Successfully completing practical tasks, overcoming initial challenges, and demonstrating competency during assessments enabled them to recognize abilities they had not previously believed they possessed. Consequently, the training fostered both technical proficiency and a stronger sense of self-confidence and future aspirations. P1 reflected on how the program influenced both personal and professional development:

*"The training taught us how to start a business in the future. Personally, it allowed me to explore my skills and gave me the background knowledge I needed. There are now several types of bread that I can prepare even without following a written procedure. Professionally, it has been a great help." P1*

Likewise, P2 described a moment of self-discovery during the competency assessment: *"It was during the competency assessment that I realized I was actually capable of doing it." P2*

Confidence developed as participants recognized their ability to perform tasks that initially appeared challenging. This finding should be interpreted as participants' reported experience of growing capability, rather than as evidence that competency training statistically or causally resulted in increased confidence.

The theme indicates that competency-based learning encompassed both technical skill development and self-realization. Achieving competence also entailed greater awareness of the ability to perform tasks independently and apply newly acquired skills.

These findings further support Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which asserts that successful performance and reflective evaluation of experiences contribute to increasingly sophisticated understanding and future action. As learners repeatedly completed authentic tasks, they developed both technical competence and confidence in their ability to address new challenges. Previous studies have similarly reported that competency-based learning enhances self-efficacy, motivation, and career readiness through authentic workplace experiences (Minghat et al., 2020; Ujah, 2024). The present study offers additional insight by demonstrating that competency-based learning also facilitates self-realization, enabling learners to redefine their self-perceptions and future possibilities.

#### **Economic and Practical Opportunities**

Participants described the value of their acquired competencies as extending beyond formal training. They linked baking skills to potential income generation, entrepreneurship, future employment, teaching, and practical household use. Competence therefore acquired meaning not only through the ability to perform prescribed baking tasks but also through participants' recognition that these skills could be applied in situations that mattered to their personal and future lives. Participants contributing direct accounts to this theme included P2, P3, and P6 (n = 3).

#### *Entrepreneurial and Income Opportunities*

Participants recognized that the competencies acquired during training created opportunities for entrepreneurship and income generation. Beyond acquiring baking skills, they

reported increased confidence in transforming technical competencies into productive economic activities. Some envisioned establishing small baking businesses, while others viewed their skills as a means to supplement income or secure future employment in the food service industry.

As P3 shared:

*"The opportunity for this is that I can sell cookies and crinkles. It gives me the opportunity to have extra money for my own expenses."* P3

Similarly, P6 emphasized the entrepreneurial orientation embedded within the TESDA program:

*"TESDA also teaches entrepreneurship. You can apply what you have learned by starting a business, and even after completing the training, they continue to provide opportunities such as job updates and employment information."* P6

From a phenomenological perspective, entrepreneurship represented more than the potential for additional income. It symbolized participants' growing sense of agency and their capacity to transform newly acquired competencies into meaningful economic opportunities. As trainees recognized the market value of their skills, they began to envision themselves as future entrepreneurs and professionals capable of creating their own opportunities.

Participants therefore viewed competence as a resource that could support economic agency and future livelihood possibilities. This aligns with research linking TVET competencies to entrepreneurship and employment opportunities (Mariano & Tantoco, 2023; Oswald-Egg & Renold, 2021; Talento et al., 2022). Importantly, these were perceived opportunities rather than measured employment outcomes.

#### *Real-Life and Household Application of Skills*

Beyond economic aspirations, participants described integrating their newly acquired competencies into everyday life. They applied baking skills to prepare food for family celebrations, experiment with recipes at home, and reduce household expenses by producing baked goods themselves. These experiences enabled participants to continuously practice and refine their competencies outside the formal training environment while contributing to their families' daily needs.

P2 explained how the training encouraged continued learning beyond the classroom:

*"Whenever I come across baking videos, I feel encouraged to try making cookies or brownies myself."* P2

Likewise, P3 reflected on applying the acquired competencies during family celebrations:

*"Whenever we celebrate a birthday, I prepare our cakes myself to help reduce our family's expenses."* P3

From a phenomenological perspective, the application of baking skills in everyday life represented the integration of learning into participants' personal identities. Baking was no longer experienced solely as a vocational competency but as a meaningful life skill that enabled contributions to household well-being, creative expression, and the strengthening of family

relationships. This transfer of learning illustrates how competency-based education extends beyond occupational preparation to influence everyday decision-making and problem-solving. These experiences align with the active experimentation dimension of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, in which learners apply prior learning to new situations and refine it through experience. Participants' experimentation with recipes at home and use of baking competencies for family needs illustrate how learning continued beyond the formal training setting. Their accounts suggest that competency acquired greater meaning when it became transferable to everyday, entrepreneurial, and professional contexts. Likewise, existing literature indicates that competency-based education promotes the transfer of learning by encouraging learners to apply occupational competencies in authentic situations beyond formal instruction (Daud et al., 2024). The present study expands this understanding by revealing that trainees experienced competency-based learning as a practical resource that enriched both their economic aspirations and their everyday lives.

**Table 2.** Illustrative Examples of the Phenomenological Analysis Process

| Participant's Response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Meaning Unit                                                        | Theme                                                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| P2: <i>"During the assessment, I was really nervous because although I thought we were performing the tasks correctly, I felt that we had not been fully trained yet."</i>                                                                                                                                                                               | Anxiety and uncertainty when demonstrating competence               | Theme 1: Challenges in Skill Development                       |
| P4: <i>"I think the training period was too short. We had about twenty-four days of training, with eleven days of online lectures and eleven days of face-to-face sessions. It felt insufficient because there were some parts of the training that we were not able to complete."</i>                                                                   | Insufficient time for completing and practicing required activities | Theme 2: Insufficient Program Duration and Resource Allocation |
| P5: <i>"There were five of us in each group, and we were assigned specific bread products to prepare. I was not able to make the other types of bread because we had to work simultaneously to finish everything within four hours. The training felt insufficient because there were parts of the activities that we could not personally perform."</i> | Group arrangements restricted individual hands-on practice          | Theme 2: Insufficient Program Duration and Resource Allocation |
| P2: <i>"I think everything changed after we finally had an oven. From that point on, I baked almost every day, and through that constant practice, I felt that my baking skills became more refined."</i>                                                                                                                                                | Repeated practice associated with refinement of baking competence   | Theme 3: Skill and Personal Development                        |
| P2: <i>"It was during the competency assessment that I realized I was actually capable of doing it."</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Recognition of personal capability through competency performance   | Theme 3: Skill and Personal Development                        |
| P3: <i>"The opportunity for this is that I can sell cookies and crinkles. It gives me the opportunity to have extra money for my own expenses."</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Acquired competencies perceived as potential sources of income      | Theme 4: Economic and Practical Opportunities                  |

**Textural Description**

Across their accounts, participants experienced competency-based learning as a progression involving difficulty, practice, growing competence, increased confidence, and recognition of the practical value of acquired skills. They initially encountered unfamiliar baking procedures, precise measurements, performance expectations, and anxiety about competency assessment. They also faced limitations due to short training periods, insufficient equipment, and unequal opportunities to perform some tasks independently. At the same time, participants described gaining practical baking knowledge, becoming more capable of performing procedures, feeling more confident in their abilities, and applying their competencies in entrepreneurial, professional, and household contexts.

**Structural Description**

Competency development was primarily facilitated through direct engagement with practical baking tasks, repeated practice, competency assessment, reflection on mistakes and outcomes, and applying acquired skills beyond the training context. Structural conditions such as limited time, equipment shortages, group-based assignments, unequal opportunities for individual practice, and performance pressure shaped the quality and depth of these experiences and sometimes limited opportunities for mastery.

Conversely, hands-on engagement, opportunities to repeat tasks, access to equipment, instructional guidance, and chances to apply acquired skills helped participants build familiarity, independence, and confidence. Competency-based learning therefore occurred through an interaction between individual engagement and the conditions that either enabled or constrained authentic practical experience.

**Composite Essence of Competency-Based Learning**

Competency-based learning centers on a gradual progression toward capability through authentic practice. Participants transitioned from uncertainty and dependence to increased competence, confidence, independence, and purposeful application by engaging in hands-on tasks, learning from mistakes, reflecting on performance, and practicing repeatedly.

Training conditions shaped this development. Adequate time, equipment, individual practice opportunities, instructional support, and authentic engagement enabled deeper learning, while limited resources, compressed schedules, group-based task arrangements, and performance pressure constrained opportunities for mastery. Competency-based learning was therefore experienced as an interaction between learner engagement and the learning environment.

Ultimately, participants understood competence as more than completing training requirements or obtaining certification. It became meaningful when they could apply acquired skills to employment, entrepreneurship, teaching, household needs, and continued learning. The essence of the experience thus lay in transforming practical engagement into competence, competence into greater confidence, and acquired capability into meaningful possibilities beyond the training setting.

**CONCLUSION**

This study examined the lived experiences of trainees who completed the TESDA Bread and Pastry Production NC II program, with a focus on competency-based learning. Participants developed competencies through technical challenges, performance expectations, limited time and resources, repeated practice, increasing competence and confidence, and recognition of the practical and economic value of their skills. The central finding was that becoming capable was a gradual process achieved through authentic practice, where competence and confidence emerged

from meaningful engagement in environments that could either facilitate or restrict opportunities for mastery.

The findings indicate that competency-based learning involves more than demonstrating prescribed occupational skills. Participants described competence as a progression toward increased independence and purposeful application of abilities in entrepreneurial, professional, and daily contexts. Additionally, their experiences revealed that competency development was influenced by access to adequate training time, equipment, opportunities for individual practice, and instructional support.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The findings support Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory by showing that participants' experiences included practical engagement, reflection on performance, developing understanding, and subsequent application. The study further underscores the significance of structural conditions that enable experiential learning. Access to training time, equipment, practice opportunities, and instructional support shaped participants' ability to engage in experiential learning processes. Therefore, experiential learning in competency-based technical and vocational education and training (TVET) should be conceptualized not only as an individual process but also as one shaped by the broader conditions in which experience and practice take place.

### **Practical Implications and Participant Recommendations**

Participants' experiences highlight several areas for enhancing competency-based training. TESDA and training centers are encouraged to review training schedules to ensure sufficient time for repeated practice and individual competency development, and to provide adequate equipment and opportunities for trainees to perform required tasks independently. Trainers should strengthen individualized feedback and balance theoretical or online instruction with hands-on activities.

For higher education institutions, especially those integrating TESDA qualifications into teacher-education or livelihood programs, enhanced coordination with accredited training centers can help ensure that students receive sufficient practical exposure and that vocational competencies complement academic preparation. Policymakers and program administrators should continue to monitor training resources, facilities, instructional conditions, and opportunities for authentic practice to ensure that competency-based programs prioritize genuine mastery over mere completion of prescribed requirements.

In summary, the findings show that meaningful competency-based learning depends not only on the competencies taught but also on the extent to which learners have adequate opportunities and conditions to practice, refine, demonstrate, and apply those competencies in meaningful ways.

### **LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH**

This study has several limitations. First, it involved six BTLEd Home Economics students from the Polytechnic University of the Philippines–Quezon City who completed TESDA Bread and Pastry Production training as part of their undergraduate curriculum. Consistent with transcendental phenomenology, the study prioritized depth of experience over statistical representation; therefore, the findings are context-specific and not intended to be generalized to all TESDA trainees or TVET programs. Participants' experiences may also differ from those of trainees in community-based, enterprise-based, or other institution-based programs, as well as from individuals with different educational, demographic, or employment backgrounds.

Second, the study focused exclusively on trainees lived experiences. The study did not include the perspectives of trainers, competency assessors, training administrators, employers, and industry stakeholders. Incorporating these stakeholders in future research could yield a more comprehensive understanding of competency-based training and the conditions that facilitate competency development.

Future research may examine trainees from different TESDA qualifications, training modalities, institutions, and geographical locations. Comparative studies across training centers could further explore how institutional and training conditions shape competency development. Studies that include trainers, assessors, employers, and industry partners may also offer multiple perspectives on competency-based education.

Other qualitative approaches, including case study, narrative inquiry, and grounded theory, may examine dimensions of competency-based learning beyond its phenomenological essence. Mixed-methods studies could investigate relationships among trainees' experiences, competency assessment outcomes, employment, and entrepreneurial activities. Longitudinal research following graduates after certification would be particularly useful for examining how they apply acquired competencies over time in employment, entrepreneurship, and continued learning.

In summary, further research involving diverse participants, settings, and methodological approaches can deepen understanding of competency-based learning and guide enhancements in the design and delivery of TVET programs.

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#### APPENDIX A. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following nine open-ended questions were used to guide the interviews. Follow-up probes were used as needed to clarify participants' responses.

1. What challenges or difficulties did you encounter while completing the program?
2. Which parts of the training (lecture, hands-on, assessment) were most challenging for you? Why?
3. Was the amount of time allotted for hands-on practice sufficient for you to master the required skills?
4. What opportunities or positive experiences did you gain from the training?
5. How has the program helped you personally or professionally after completion?
6. Share an example of a time when you directly applied a BPP skill or technique you learned in the program to a real-world situation.
7. What improvements would you suggest for the TESDA Bread and Pastry Production Training Program?
8. What specific part of the BPP curriculum or program structure would you most strongly recommend changing or adding?
9. In what ways can TESDA or the training center enhance the delivery of the Bread and Pastry Production Program?