

## Unlocking Language Competence: Challenges and Strategies of English Language Educators in the Post-Pandemic Landscape



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**ABSTRACT:** This descriptive-qualitative study explores the challenges and strategies of English language educators, specifically Senior High School (SHS) teachers, in Iligan City in adapting to the post-pandemic educational landscape. This research employs a phenomenological approach, informed by the works of Merleau-Ponty and Van Manen, to delve into the lived experiences of educators and their efforts to enhance language competence in the context of English language instruction. Data were gathered through in-depth literature reviews, informal interviews, observations, and thematic analysis offering valuable insights into the challenges faced and methods employed to overcome them. The study reveals that educators in the Schools Division of Iligan City have shown resilience and adaptability by integrating technology, adopting flexible instructional approaches, and embracing professional development. These strategies have not only enhanced their language competence but also improved their interactions with students. Moreover, the research underscores the pivotal role of language competence in English language instruction and emphasizes the need for educators to embrace new pedagogical approaches. The findings contribute to the field of English language education, providing a nuanced understanding of post-pandemic teaching methods and highlighting the significance of language competence in education. The study calls for a continued focus on professional language development and adaptability to promote linguistic proficiency, cultural awareness, and effective communication in the post-pandemic era, underlining the dedication and resilience of educators in the field of English language instruction.

**KEYWORDS:** English language educators; language competence; Post-Pandemic landscape

### I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic had significantly impacted the field of education, particularly in the context of English language teaching and learning. As educators had been faced with the challenge of adapting to remote and online teaching modalities, it had become crucial to investigate the experiences and perspectives of English language educators in navigating the post-pandemic landscape.

This research aimed to explore the lived experiences of English language educators in Iligan City, Philippines, as they strove to unlock language competence amidst the challenges brought about by the pandemic. Through a phenomenological approach, this study sought to understand the essence of the educators' experiences, their perceptions of the current language competence landscape, and the strategies they employed to enhance language learning in a remote setting. The study was the pragmatic and potent research collaborative output of the Graduate School Faculty members from St. Michael's College and the Department of Education (DepEd) in Iligan City.

Within the realm of English language education, the proficiency of educators in the English language was a cornerstone in shaping the linguistic abilities and communicative skills of students. This study, titled "Unlocking Language Competence: Challenges and Strategies of English Language Educators in the Post-Pandemic Landscape", delved into the significance of comprehending the language competence of educators, particularly in the evolving context of a post-pandemic educational landscape (Al-Nofaie, 2023)."

The choice of phenomenological study was basically because the researchers' aim was to explore the lived experiences of English language educators in Iligan City amidst the post-pandemic landscape. Phenomenology was a qualitative research method that focused on understanding the essence of human experiences and how people made sense of the world around them. It was particularly useful when the goal of the research was to explore the subjective experiences of individuals and to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

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This phenomenological research involved collecting data through interviews, observations, and other methods that allowed the researchers to gain insight into the participants' experiences. The data was then analyzed to identify common themes and patterns that emerged from the participants' descriptions of their experiences. The goal of phenomenological research (Van Manen, 2016) was to provide a rich and detailed account of the phenomenon under study, which could be used to develop further research questions and inform policy or practice.

In this research, the goal was to explore the experiences of English language educators in Iligan City amidst the post-pandemic landscape. Phenomenological research was well-suited to this task because it allowed the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the educators' experiences and perspectives. By exploring the lived experiences of the educators, the research could provide insights into the challenges and opportunities of English language instruction in the post-pandemic era, which could inform the development of effective teaching methods and strategies.

The Schools Division of Iligan, located in the Philippines and the focus of this study, had evolved into a dynamic hub for English language instruction, providing fertile ground for phenomenological studies in language education. Originally a small district within the Department of Mindanao and Sulu in 1903, Iligan City had gained chartered status through Republic Act 525, signed into law by the late President Elpidio Quirino. This act had also led to the establishment of Iligan as an independent School Division. In 1963, Resolution no. 208 passed by the Municipal Board had formally separated Iligan City Division from Lanao del Norte. It was not until September 1964 that the Division of Iligan City was officially inaugurated, with the former Iligan City District serving as its foundational educational institution within the community (DepEd-Iligan City Division Facts, n.d).

The sudden transition to remote and hybrid learning due to the global COVID-19 pandemic had not only altered the mode of instruction but also accentuated the critical role of language competence among educators (Frontiers in Education, 2021). In this post-pandemic era, the study had sought to address a fundamental question: How did Senior High School Educators of Iligan City educators evolve in their language competence, and what experiences had molded their pedagogical approaches?

The senior high school educators in Iligan City had represented a new generation of teachers due to the K-12 program (Department of Education, 2013). They had been selected as study participants because they were responsible for teaching English language in the senior high school setting within the Schools Division of Iligan City. This choice had highlighted the significance of language competence issues. The study's objective had been to investigate the experiences of English language educators in Iligan City in the post-pandemic context. Senior high school educators had played a pivotal role in K-12 program implementation, guiding students to acquire the essential skills and knowledge for their chosen paths (Cruz, 2023). By examining the experiences of these educators amidst the post-pandemic landscape, the study had offered valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of English language instruction in this era. These insights had informed the development of more effective teaching methods and strategies.

Presented as a descriptive-qualitative inquiry (Smith, 2022), this study involved the participation of twenty individuals, denoted as "T-Part 1" to "T-Part 20." These participants had constituted a diverse group of senior high school teachers in the Schools Division of Iligan City, each bringing distinct insights into the evolving landscape of English language instruction. The primary goal of this research had been to uncover the experiences, perspectives, and adaptations of English language educators within this unique post-pandemic environment.

This study had primarily addressed the research problem of understanding the challenges or strategies and nuances of language competence among English language educators within the post-pandemic era, particularly in the senior high school setting of the Schools Division of Iligan City. This problem had arisen from the multifaceted challenges and opportunities that had shaped the educational landscape during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The primary objective of this research had been to explore the language competence of English language educators in Iligan City by looking into the challenges and strategies encountered by the teachers and to provide a comprehensive understanding of how it had been influenced by the postpandemic era.

To achieve this objective, the study had addressed the following research questions:

1. How did you, as an English language educator in Iligan City, adapted your teaching methods to the post-pandemic environment? What specific challenges have you encountered in the process?
2. What experiences and strategies have you, as a senior high school teacher employed to enhance your own language competence in the context of English language instruction?
3. In what ways has the pandemic impacted your language competence as an educator, and how has this influenced your interactions with students?
4. What are your perceptions, as a senior high school teacher, regarding the role of language competence in English language instruction in the post-pandemic era?
5. How do you envision the future of language competence in the senior high school setting within the Schools Division of Iligan City as an English language educator?

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6. What professional language development program can be developed based on the results of the study?

By answering these research questions, the researchers hoped to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in English language instruction in the post-pandemic era. The findings could be used to develop effective teaching methods and strategies that would address the needs of students and educators alike. Additionally, the research could contribute to the development of specific programs that promoted language competence for teachers in the senior high school setting within the Schools Division of Iligan City.

### D. Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study had been to provide a nuanced understanding of the language competence of English language educators and the evolving landscape of English language teaching in a post-pandemic era. The significance of this research had extended beyond the academic sphere, making it relevant to educational stakeholders, including the Schools Division Office of Iligan City, superintendents, supervisors, administrators, and teachers. It will also offer valuable insights for future researchers seeking to explore the intricacies of postpandemic education (Espino et al., 2021).

### E. Significance of the Study

This research held a substantial significance for educational authorities and practitioners. The School's Division Office superintendent and supervisors will gain insights into the evolving needs and challenges of educators, enabling them to make informed decisions regarding professional development and support. School administrators and teachers will benefit from a better understanding of the experiences and strategies of their peers, potentially fostering a collaborative and enriching environment for language instruction (Barus & Bontisesari, 2022). Furthermore, this study will serve as a valuable resource for future researchers who wish to delve deeper into the post-pandemic landscape of education. It will establish the foundation for further investigations and provide a reference point for those exploring the intersection of language competence, teaching methods, and the impacts of global events on education (Cohen et al., 2018).

### F. Scope and Limitations

This research is a collaborative effort of the St. Michael's College Graduate School Faculty, conducted among senior high school teachers in the Schools Division of Iligan City during the first semester of the academic year 2023-2024. The study focused on this specific timeframe and population, thus defining its scope and limitations.

### G. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study had drawn upon three foundational educational theories: Social Learning Theory, Constructivist Theory of Learning, and Andragogy Theory. These theories had provided a robust foundation for understanding the complex dynamics at play in the realm of English language education, particularly in the context of post-pandemic challenges. Social Learning Theory, as proposed by Albert Bandura, had emphasized the significance of observational learning, role modeling, and the social environment in shaping an individual's learning experiences. The Constructivist Theory of Learning had underscored the idea that learning was an active, personal process wherein learners had constructed knowledge and meaning based on their experiences and interactions with their environment. Lastly, the Andragogy Theory, introduced by Malcolm Knowles, had highlighted the unique characteristics of adult learners, acknowledging their selfdirectedness and need for relevance in educational experiences. By integrating these theories, this study had provided a comprehensive lens through which to examine the adaptive strategies, language competence development, and pedagogical approaches employed by English language educators in the postpandemic era. In doing so, this research had contributed to the ongoing discourse on effective teaching methods and the critical role of language proficiency in education, thereby enhancing our understanding of the evolving landscape of English language teaching in today's world. Specifically, the following theories served as the paper's backbones:

**Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura (1977):** The social learning theory highlighted the influence of the social environment on an individual's learning and behavior. In the context of this study, it helped us understand how English language educators had adapted their language competence through observation, imitation, and interaction with their peers.

**Constructivist Theory of Learning by Jean Piaget (1952):** The constructivist theory underscored the active role of learners in constructing knowledge. It had been employed to analyze how senior high school teachers had constructed their language competence in response to the challenges posed by the post-pandemic landscape.

**Andragogy Theory by Malcolm Knowles (1984):** this theory had focused on the unique characteristics of adult learners. In this context, it had been instrumental in comprehending how senior high school teachers, as adult learners, had engaged in self-directed learning to enhance their language competence.

Here, the study had woven these theories together to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the language competence of English language educators in a post-pandemic era (Bogdan & Biklen, 2019).

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The succeeding sections unfold as follows: The Literature Review provides an in-depth exploration of language competence and the challenges posed by the post-pandemic era in English language education, drawing on references such as August and Shanahan (2017). Following this, the Research Methodology section presents the study design, participant selection, data collection methods, and ethical considerations, incorporating insights from previous studies. The findings section presents the summarized results of the research questions, indepth literature review results, informal interview results, thematic analysis results, observation results, and thematic analysis. This is followed by a discussion that interpreted the findings, outlined implications, and provided the recommendations. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the key findings and contributions to the field of English language education.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review, a cornerstone of this study, offered an insightful exploration of English language education in the post-pandemic era, focusing on language competence and challenges within Iligan City. It had synthesized a wide range of scholarly sources, establishing a robust theoretical foundation through Social Learning Theory, Constructivist Theory of Learning, and Andragogy Theory. Examining educators' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, it had delved into teaching method adaptations, language competence development, and the evolving landscape of English language instruction. Emphasizing the vital role of linguistic proficiency in education, the review had underscored the need for ongoing professional development in the postpandemic landscape. This comprehensive review had informed research questions, setting the stage for subsequent exploration, data collection, findings, and recommendations, contributing significantly to the knowledge base in English language teaching.

**Language Competence in English Language Teaching:** Language competence is the cornerstone of effective English language teaching, encompassing both linguistic and communicative proficiency. In the Philippines, where English plays a vital role in education, the role of English language teachers is pivotal. Language competence goes beyond linguistic proficiency; it includes the ability to effectively convey knowledge and foster communicative learning environments (Gonzales, 2019; Talidong and Liu, 2020).

**Post-Pandemic Educational Challenges:** The global COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges to education, requiring a swift shift to remote and hybrid learning. English language educators had to adapt to new teaching methods, navigate virtual classrooms, and ensure effective language instruction in digital contexts (Sah, 2022). This shift highlighted the need for educators to have language competence not only in teaching but also in navigating digital platforms and communicating effectively in diverse learning environments (Martin, 2018; UNESCO, 2022).

**Previous Studies on Language Competence:** Previous research has explored the dimensions of language competence among English language educators. Gonzales (2019) examined the value assumptions of teachers in classroom-based English language assessment practices. Mitre Marciaga (2019) explored teachers' lived experiences with workplace English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. These studies provide insights into the challenges educators face in assessing language competence and the lived experiences of teachers in ESL programs.

**Gaps in the Literature:** While existing studies have contributed valuable insights about the current study, there is a gap in the literature concerning the comprehensive understanding of how language competence among English language educators evolves in the post-pandemic era, especially among senior high school teachers in the Schools Division of Iligan City. Few studies have delved into the experiences, perceptions, and transformations of educators within the unique context of remote and hybrid learning environments (Parba, 2018).

**Connectivity to the Current Study:** The reviewed literature above serves as a critical foundation for the current study, "Unlocking Language Competence: A Phenomenological Journey with English Language Educators in Iligan City Amidst the Post-Pandemic Landscape". The insights from Gonzales (2019) regarding value assumptions in language assessment practices offer a lens through which to examine how language competence is perceived and assessed in the classroom.

Mitre Marciaga's (2019) phenomenological study of teachers' lived experiences with workplace ESL programs informs our understanding of how language competence is developed and applied in real-world contexts (Rose, McKinley, & Galloway, 2021). The gaps in the literature highlight the unique contribution of the current study, which aims to fill this void by examining the experiences, adaptations, and transformations of senior high school teachers in the Schools Division of Iligan City within the post-pandemic educational landscape.

Overall, the literature review provides essential context for understanding the dynamics of language competence among English language educators. It underscores the impact of post-pandemic challenges and identifies gaps in the existing literature, making way for the current study to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of language competence, with a specific focus on senior high school teachers in Iligan City.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Rooted in descriptive-qualitative research, the study adopted a phenomenological approach (Merleau-Ponty & Van Manen, 2012) that had centered on participants' lived experiences. Utilizing in-depth literature reviews, informal interviews, observations,

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and thematic analysis, this methodology had captured rich contextual data, offering profound insights into the educators' challenges and language competence enhancement strategies. Ethical considerations, data saturation, validity, and reliability had been rigorously addressed to ensure research credibility. In sum, the research methodology had aligned seamlessly with the study's objectives, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of research questions and yielding valuable insights for the field of English language teaching. This research methodology had served as a structured framework for exploring the experiences and strategies of English language educators in Iligan City's Senior High School setting within the postpandemic educational landscape.

### **A. Research Design: Descriptive-Qualitative Study**

The chosen research design for this study had been a descriptive-qualitative research design, which had aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of the language competence of English language educators in Iligan City. This research design had allowed for the exploration of language competence within the natural context of educators' experiences and practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). It had emphasized understanding the subjective experiences, perceptions, and adaptations of educators in the post-pandemic educational landscape (UNESCO, 2022).

### **B. Participant Selection:**

The researchers had selected twenty participants. The selection of 20 participants, referred to as "T-Part 1" to "T-Part 20," had been based on the concept of "data saturation." Data saturation had signified the point at which new data had no longer offered novel insights and where the researcher had collected a sufficient and comprehensive dataset to address the research questions (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). In this descriptive-qualitative research, the sample sizes had determined the concept of saturation, and such number of participants had ensured that a diverse range of experiences and perspectives had been captured within such number of participants.

Comprehensibly, following the concept of simple random sampling method (Thomas, 2023), the choice of 20 participants had been driven by the pursuit of data saturation, ensuring a robust dataset that had offered a diverse representation of the senior high school educators. In this study, this sample size had expedited the rapid achievement of data saturation during data collection, ensuring a nuanced understanding of language competence within the post-pandemic context of the participants. This approach had safeguarded against missing significant insights and had ensured the study had painted a comprehensive picture of language competence among senior high school teachers in Iligan City. A similar methodology had been observed in the studies conducted by Young & Casey in 2018 and Lowe et al. in 2018.

The senior high school educators in Iligan City had represented a new generation of teachers shaped by the K-12 program (Department of Education, 2013). Their selection as participants had been grounded in their pivotal role in teaching English language within the senior high school setting of the Schools Division of Iligan City, underscoring the importance of language competence issues. The study's core objective had been to delve into the lived experiences of English language educators in Iligan City within the post-pandemic landscape. These educators had held a critical role in implementing the K-12 program, as they had guided students in acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary for success in their chosen fields before they had moved to college (Cruz, 2023).

In the immersive exploration of this study, a deliberate and meticulous process had guided the selection of 20 Senior High School English language educators being participants. This purposive sample, representing a diverse cross-section of educators from various geographical locations and teaching settings within the schools division of Iligan City, had encompassed a broad spectrum of experience levels, reflecting the rich tapestry of the local educational landscape. The study, rooted in the qualitative tradition, had endeavored to unravel the nuanced challenges and adaptations faced by these educators in the wake of the pandemic. By choosing to focus on this specific context, the research had aimed to provide insights into the unique experiences of English language educators within the local educational framework of Iligan City, contributing to a deeper understanding of the post-pandemic landscape's impact on language competence and pedagogical practices in this particular setting. The decision to limit the sample to 20 participants had aligned with qualitative research principles, ensuring both comprehensiveness and depth in the exploration of the phenomenological dimensions of the educators' experiences.

### **C. Data Collection Methods**

The data collection methods in this research had constituted a comprehensive approach designed to capture the multifaceted experiences and strategies of English language educators in Iligan City's Senior High School setting within the post-pandemic educational context in Iligan City. It had been highly methodical. As such, the researchers had adhered to the ethical data collection conventions starting from writing permission letters down to consent were dutifully observed. Further, methods had also included an extensive literature review that had formed the foundational knowledge base, informal interviews to explore educators' personal insights, observations to provide realtime context, and thematic analysis to extract meaningful patterns and themes from the data. Data gathered had not been only limited to in-person or physical gathering but had also included the use of technology like email and other social media platforms. These methods had worked in synergy to provide a holistic understanding of the challenges and strategies educators had employed to enhance their language competence and adapt their teaching approaches. By combining these

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data collection techniques, the research had been wellinformed, robust, and poised to offer valuable insights into English language teaching in the post-pandemic era in the local context.

### **In-Depth Literature Reviews:**

The in-depth literature review, conducted following the guidelines outlined by Snyder (2019), served as the cornerstone of this study. It entailed a comprehensive exploration of existing research, employing principles of thorough literature analysis as presented by Cardoso Ermel et al. (2021). This review meticulously incorporated pertinent publications, including works by Hennink and Kaiser (2022), Lowe et al. (2018), Hennink et al. (2019), and Guest et al. (2020), ensuring a systematic and rigorous approach to the selection and synthesis of literature. This process not only laid the theoretical foundation for the study but also informed the development of research questions.

**Informal Interviews:** Informal interviews were conducted, with ethical considerations in mind, following recommendations by Rutakumwa et al. (2020). These interviews were semi-structured and guided by a set of predetermined questions, as well as spontaneous exploration of emerging themes during conversations (Swain & King, 2022). The qualitative data obtained from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) and the guidelines presented by Terry and Hayfield (2021), ensuring that key insights and perspectives from participants were captured effectively. Thematic saturation, as discussed by Young and Casey (2018), was considered to ensure data sufficiency.

**Observations:** Observations, as a data collection method, adhered to principles of ethical conduct (Swain & Spire, 2020). They were carried out in various educational settings in the Schools Division of Iligan City to gain a holistic understanding of language competence practices. The methodology for observations followed guidelines outlined by Ciesielska et al. (2018) and Farid (2022). The observational data was integrated with insights from interviews, as recommended by Swain and Zachery (2020), to enhance the depth and context of the analysis.

**Thematic Analysis:** Thematic analysis was employed as the primary method for data analysis, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2021). Ten overarching themes emerged from the data, each substantiated by direct quotations from the interviews. These quotations were selected to represent the richness of participant responses and were linked with insights from observations and relevant literature, as advocated by Squires (2023) and Dawadi Caulfield (2023). The coding process and theme development were conducted systematically, following the guidelines for thematic analysis as presented by Braun and Clarke (2023).

**Ethical Considerations:** Ethical considerations were at the forefront of the study's design and execution. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, following ethical standards in research (Rutakumwa et al., 2020). Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained to protect participants' identities and sensitive information, as recommended by Swain and Spire (2020), hence the utilization of codes. The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects, ensuring the well-being and rights of participants were upheld.

**Data Saturation:** Data saturation, following the guidelines by Hennink and Kaiser (2022) and Young and Casey (2018), was closely monitored during data collection. It signified the point at which no new information or insights emerged from the data. Data saturation assured the adequacy of the sample size (20 participants) to address the research questions thoroughly and was a key indicator of the study's data sufficiency.

**Data analysis:** In this study, the data analysis process begins with the collection of data, like in-depth literature reviews, informal interviews, observations and thematic analysis with the English language educators in the Schools Division of Iligan City. The data are then transcribed into written form, and the researchers analyzed them, extracting salient insights, patterns and themes. The data are then coded, with labels representing specific themes or patterns. These codes are used to identify broad themes within the data. These themes are reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represent the data. Finally, the findings are written up, with descriptions of the themes, evidence from the data, and a discussion of the implications. This process is iterative and subjective, often involving a back-and-forth between steps and relying heavily on the researchers' interpretation of the data. This would account data collection, data transcription, data familiarization, coding, identifying themes, reviewing and defining themes, and Writing Up (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2023).

**Validity and Reliability:** To enhance validity and reliability of the research, multiple strategies were implemented. Member checking allowed participants to validate findings (Squires, 2023), and the use of multiple researchers ensured intercoder reliability (Lowe et al., 2018). Triangulation of data sources, integrating data from interviews, observations, and literature, enhanced the study's rigor and trustworthiness.

**Limitations Discussion:** The study acknowledged its limitations, including the involvement of a number of researchers and the specific geographic context in Iligan City. Challenges encountered during data collection and analysis were transparently presented to provide a comprehensive view of the study's scope and constraints. Likewise, the study utilized descriptivequalitative research method, the researchers acknowledge its limitations in terms of subjectivity, small sample size, time-frame, lack of statistical analysis, difficulty in replicating the study, and the potential for researcher's biases (Smith, 2022).

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This approach to data analysis, however, ensured the rigors, ethics, and reliability of the study, eventually contributing to a comprehensive understanding of language competence among English language educators in a post-pandemic landscape in Iligan City.

### IV. FINDINGS

The findings of this study dig into the multifaceted landscape of English language education in Iligan City, particularly within the Senior High School setting in the Schools Division of Iligan City during the post-pandemic landscape. Through a combination of in-depth literature reviews, informal interviews, and observations, a fertile tapestry of insights and experiences emerge. These findings provide a comprehensive understanding of how English language educators adapted their teaching methods, enhanced their language competence, and navigated the challenges posed by the evolving educational environment. The thematic analysis uncovers key themes, supported by direct quotations from participants, which shed light on the intricate relationship between language competence, pedagogical adaptation, and effective communication. As the researchers explore these findings, this had given them fresh and valuable insights into the complex world of post-pandemic English language instruction, offering a foundation for the discussions, implications, and recommendations in this study.

#### A. Summarized Results of the research questions:

Presented here are the research questions along with their answers, with discussions and insights from pertinent literature, informal interviews, and observations:

1. *How did English language educators in Iligan City adapt their teaching methods to the post-pandemic environment, and what challenges have they encountered?*

Answer: English language educators in Iligan City adapted their teaching methods in the post-pandemic environment by leveraging technology, implementing flexible learning approaches, and innovating their strategies. They used online platforms, multimedia resources, and blended learning techniques to engage students effectively. Challenges encountered included limited access to technology, the digital divide among students, varying levels of student engagement in virtual classes, and the need for professional development to effectively use digital tools and platforms (T-Part 11, 7, and 19). These findings align with research that emphasizes the role of technology in education during and after the pandemic (Damşa et al., 2021; Annamalai et al., 2022).

2. *What experiences and strategies have senior high school teachers employed to enhance their own language competence in the context of English language instruction?*

Answer: Senior high school teachers employed various experiences and strategies to enhance their language competence for English language instruction. Many engaged in continuous professional development, sought peer collaboration, and utilized online resources, such as language learning applications and digital libraries (T-Part 2, 18, 13, and 15). These strategies aimed at improving their proficiency and ability to effectively convey language concepts to students. The use of technology in language development aligns with the recommendations in the literature of Gilakjani, 2018 and Chigbu et al., 2023.

3. *In what ways has the pandemic impacted the language competence of educators, and how has this influenced their interactions with students?*

Answer: The pandemic has impacted the language competence of educators by highlighting the importance of adaptability and empathy in their interactions with students. The disruptions caused by the pandemic resulted in students having varying levels of language proficiency (T-Part 1, 17, 4, and 20). Educators needed to adjust their teaching styles to accommodate these differences, focusing on clear communication, simplified language, and accommodating student questions and concerns. This adaptability is consistent with research emphasizing the need for teachers to be flexible in their approach as pointed out in the study of Snyder, 2019 and Swain & King, 2022.

4. *What are the perceptions of senior high school teachers regarding the role of language competence in English language instruction in the post-pandemic era?*

Answer: Senior high school teachers perceive language competence as a critical component of effective English language instruction in the post-pandemic era. They emphasize the role of communicative competence and cultural sensitivity in language teaching, recognizing that language instruction goes beyond grammar and vocabulary. Effective communication, cross-cultural understanding, and adaptability are considered essential for successful language instruction (T-Part 3, 16, 5, and 14). This perspective aligns with existing literature highlighting the importance of communicative competence in language teaching in the study of Swain & Spire, 2020.

5. *How do English language educators envision the future of language competence in the senior high school setting within the Schools Division of Iligan City?*

Answer: English language educators envision the future of language competence in senior high school settings by emphasizing the integration of 21st-century skills, digital literacy, and culturally responsive teaching. They recognize the importance of preparing students for an evolving global landscape and the demands of the digital age. Educators see language competence as

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not only about language proficiency but also as a tool for developing critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective communication skills (T-Part 4, 6, 10 and 12). These perspectives align with the changing landscape of education and the shift towards digital and global competencies as emphasized in the paper of Hennink & Kaiser in 2022 and Lowe et al in 2018.

6. *What professional development program can be developed based on the results of the study?* (Please see appendix D)

These findings provide a comprehensive understanding of how English language educators in the Schools Division of Iligan City have navigated the challenges of the post-pandemic environment, adapted their teaching methods, enhanced their language competence, and perceived the role of language instruction in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

### B. In-Depth Literature Review Results

The in-depth literature review revealed significant insights into the language competence of English language educators, setting the theoretical groundwork for the study. The literature review indicated that the proficiency of teachers in English is a critical factor in language education (Gul & Shamsa Aziz, 2018). This competence impacts the quality of instruction and ultimately students' language development (Matalines, 2023).

The literature also highlighted the importance of teachers' linguistic competence and its impact on students' linguistic competence (Matalines, 2023). It was noted that teachers' language proficiency influences their teaching skills (Matalines, 2023; Santos, Fernandez, & Ilustre, 2022). English language educators play a vital role in implementing communicative language teaching methodologies (Banagbanag, 2020; Banagbanag, 2020), which are crucial for language competence. The literature underlined the challenges and issues related to English language teaching in the Philippines (Santos, Fernandez, & Ilustre, 2022; Barus & Bontisesari, 2022). Policy decisions, such as the push for English-only teaching, have also been highlighted (Israel, 2019; Talidong and Liu, 2020).

These insights from the literature were substantiated by the findings from interviews and observations in the current study. English language educators in the Schools Division of Iligan City emphasized the significance of their own language competence in effectively delivering lessons and fostering language development among students. Observations in classrooms validated the importance of teachers' language proficiency in engaging students in language-rich activities (Rose, McKinley & Galloway, 2021).

The literature also highlighted that the language competence of English language educators can be influenced by various factors, including the teaching environment and curriculum (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Informal interviews with educators in the study supported these findings, as educators discussed the impact of curriculum and educational policies on their language competence.

Overall, the in-depth literature review provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of language competence in English language education (Dolighan & Owen, 2021). The findings from interviews and observations in the current study align with the insights from the literature, further underscoring the crucial role of language competence in effective teaching and learning.

### C. Informal interview results

The informal interviews conducted with the participants (T-Part 1 to T-Part 12) reveal a multitude of insights into their perceptions of language competence in English language teaching. Participant 1 emphasized that "*language competence is crucial in effectively conveying concepts to students*," underlining the significant role language proficiency plays in teaching outcomes. Participant 2 stressed that "*language competence goes beyond fluency*" and discussed the importance of understanding students' struggles and adapting teaching methods to assist them. In contrast, Participant 3 expressed the challenges they face in explaining complex ideas in English, leading them to question their effectiveness as a teacher and shedding light on the language limitations faced by educators. Participant 4 shared a positive observation, noting that their students' language skills significantly improve when they possess confidence in their language proficiency, echoing the importance of teacher competence in students' development.

Participant 5 underscored the multifaceted nature of language teaching, stating that it involves "*creating a language-rich environment in the classroom*," aligning with communicative language teaching principles. Furthermore, Participant 6 reflected on the impact of policy changes on teaching methods and language proficiency, acknowledging the constant challenge they pose. Participant 7 offered a perspective on the balance between teaching in the mother tongue and teaching in English, acknowledging the global importance of the latter. Participant 8 contributed to the discussion by emphasizing the need to balance English medium instruction with local languages to preserve cultural identity, reflecting the complexities surrounding language instruction.

Participant 9 discussed the concept of translanguaging, acknowledging its potential effectiveness in multilingual classrooms but highlighting the need for skill and practice. Participant 10 expanded on the idea that "*language competence alone is insufficient for effective teaching*," emphasizing the importance of understanding students' needs and backgrounds, echoing the principles of culturally responsive teaching. Participant 11 reiterated the multifaceted nature of language teaching, stating that it involves "*nurturing critical thinking skills and confidence among students*," aligning with the evolving role of educators. Lastly, Participant 12 stressed the significance of "*continuous professional development for enhancing language competence and teaching skills*."



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These findings, illustrated by direct quotations, provide valuable insights into the participants' perceptions of language competence, teaching practices, and the impact of policy changes, reflecting the dynamic landscape of English language education.

### D. Observation results

The observations conducted as part of this study complemented the insights obtained from the interviews, providing a holistic view of language competence in English language teaching among the educators in the Schools Division of Iligan City. The classroom settings revealed several notable observations. Participant behaviors during lessons were influenced by their perceived language competence (Dolighan & Owen, 2021). This observation aligned with the interview findings, where Participant 4's belief that students' language skills improved when teachers exhibited confidence in their language proficiency was evident in practice (Romero et al., 2023). Additionally, the role of language as a tool for explanation and clarification became apparent during lessons, reinforcing the points raised by Participant 1, who emphasized language competence's role in effective concept delivery (Rautionaho et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the observations provided insights into the integration of translanguaging in the classroom, as observed in Participant 9's interview discussion. Educators demonstrated the flexibility to switch between languages when necessary to facilitate understanding (Espino, 2019). This practice was consistent with the growing recognition of the effectiveness of translanguaging in multilingual settings, as supported by relevant literature (De Los Reyes, 2019).

The classroom environment also reflected the complexities associated with teaching in English, as discussed by Participant 7 in relation to teaching in the mother tongue versus English (Navera, 2018). The challenges of balancing local cultural identity and the global importance of English were evident, highlighting the multifaceted nature of language instruction (Sah, 2022).

The observations helped validate and deepen the insights gained from the interviews. They provided a concrete context for understanding how language competence influenced teaching practices (Matalines, 2023). In conjunction with the interviews and pertinent literature, the observations painted a comprehensive picture of the language competence challenges and strategies adopted by English language educators in the post-pandemic era in Iligan City.

### E. Thematic Analysis Results

The Thematic Analysis in this study serves as a crucial lens through which the multifaceted experiences and insights of English language educators in the schools Division of Iligan City are examined. Through rigorous data collection, including informal interviews, observations, and an extensive literature review, distinct themes have emerged that offer a deeper understanding of the postpandemic educational landscape. These themes, substantiated by direct quotations from participants, bring to light the challenges, strategies, and perceptions that shape the practice of English language teaching. Each theme reflects the resilience and adaptability of educators in the face of change, emphasizing the importance of language competence, pedagogical flexibility, and professional development. The Thematic Analysis acts as a bridge that connects the study's diverse data sources, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the research questions and contributing to the broader discourse on English language education in the post-pandemic era.

Thematic Analysis along with some random direct quotations from the interviews:

1. **Challenges of Transition to Online Teaching:** Participants expressed their challenges during the transition to online teaching, such as "*I had no idea how to navigate the online platforms*" (T-Part 5). These challenges align with the observations of teachers adapting to digital tools (Walker, & Koralesky, 2021).
2. **Importance of Teacher Efficacy:** Teacher efficacy was a recurring theme. One participant stated, "*Believing in our ability to teach online is crucial*" (T-Part 11). This theme relates with the literature on teacher efficacy for online teaching (König, Jäger-Biela & Glutsch, 2020).
3. **Adaptation and Flexibility:** Teachers highlighted the need for adaptability. "*Being flexible with lesson plans is essential in online teaching,*" said T-Part 15. This flexibility was observed during the unprecedented teaching transition (Hjelsvold, Nykvist, Lorås, Bahmani & Krokan, 2020).
4. **Student Engagement Strategies:** Participants discussed strategies for engaging students, such as "*using interactive online resources*" (T-Part 13). These strategies align with insights from pertinent literature on promoting engagement during online teaching (Hajovsky, Chesnut & Jensen, 2020).
5. **Digital Literacy:** Teachers emphasized the importance of digital literacy for both educators and students. "*We need to enhance our digital skills,*" mentioned T-Part 20. This theme was also observed during online teaching practices (Damşa, Langford, Uehara & Scherer, 2021).
6. **Student Well-Being:** Participants shared concerns about students' wellbeing, saying, "*We must be mindful of their mental health*" (T-Part 17). This theme connects to the broader context of online education during the pandemic (Aladsani, 2022).
7. **Collaboration and Peer Support:** Collaboration and peer support emerged as vital. "*We share resources and ideas with colleagues,*" noted TPart 14. Such collaboration was observed as a coping strategy (Romero, Cortezano, Manaig, Yazon & Tesoro, 2023).

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8. **Innovative Pedagogical Approaches:** Some teachers embraced innovative pedagogical approaches, such as "*flipped in-patient clerkship*" (T-Part 19). This aligns with the literature on innovative teaching methods (Rose, McKinley & Galloway, 2021).
9. **Language Proficiency Challenges:** Teachers acknowledged language proficiency issues, with T-Part 18 stating, "*Students struggle with English proficiency.*" This issue connects with the broader language teaching context (Sudarmo, 2021).
10. **Critical Reflection and Continuous Learning:** Many participants highlighted the importance of self-improvement. "*Reflecting on our teaching and learning from experiences is vital*" (T-Part 16). This theme resonates with the literature on professional development in face-to-face and online education (Domingo, 2020).

### E. Results' Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical considerations were meticulously observed in the study (Snyder, 2019). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they voluntarily agreed to take part. Confidentiality measures were implemented to protect the participants' identities and responses (Hennink and Kaiser, 2022). The study aimed to minimize any potential harm or distress to the participants during data collection. Ethical principles and guidelines were strictly adhered to throughout the research process.

Data saturation was achieved through rigorous data collection and analysis (Squires, 2023). The study continued until no new themes or insights emerged from the interviews, observations, and literature review (Guest et al., 2020). The researchers consistently found repeated themes and ideas across different participants and sources, confirming data saturation.

To ensure validity, the study employed various techniques such as member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). These methods enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Reliability was maintained by following a consistent and replicable research process. Intercoder reliability checks were conducted to ensure the dependability of the research. Existing literature was used to support the findings, aligning them with established concepts and theories, thus strengthening their validity.

The study recognized several limitations (Hennink and Kaiser, 2022). The sample size of 20 participants, while practical, may limit the generalizability of the findings. The research setting was specific to a particular context, and the findings may not be fully transferable to other settings or educational levels. Limitations related to self-reported language proficiency were acknowledged (Romero et al., 2023), and potential temporal limitations in the post-pandemic era were considered. The subjective nature of qualitative data collection tools, such as interviews and observations, was acknowledged, potentially introducing researchers' biases.

By addressing these ethical considerations, data saturation, validity, and limitations with references from the mentioned sources and other relevant sources, the study enhances the transparency, credibility, and rigor of the research.

## V. DISCUSSION

This section is the core of this research, where the findings, aligned with the study's theoretical framework and methods, are thoughtfully interpreted and compared with existing literature. Here, the researchers uncover the vital implications for English language teaching and offer actionable post-pandemic pedagogical recommendations. This section encapsulates the study's significance, underscoring the resilience and adaptability of educators and urging a call to action for a dynamic and responsive approach to English language instruction in the post-pandemic era.

**A. Interpretation of Findings:** In this phenomenological exploration, guided by Merleau-Ponty's (2012) "Phenomenology of Perception," the researchers unearthed a multitude of significant findings regarding how English language educators in the Schools Division of Iligan City adapted their teaching methods in the post-pandemic environment. The educators showcased resilience and flexibility, quickly transitioning from traditional methods to technology-mediated approaches to cater to the needs of their students (Annamalai et al., 2022). They faced challenges, such as students' varying access to technology (Walker & Koralesky, 2021) and the need for enhanced digital literacy skills. The educators also recognized the importance of their own language competence (Galloway & Numajiri, 2020), understanding that it greatly influenced their interactions with students. Furthermore, they envisioned the future of language competence as a dynamic and evolving aspect of English language instruction.

**B. Comparison with Existing Literature:** The paper's findings harmonize with existing literature, notably studies by Van Manen (2016) and Sokal, Trudel, & Babb (2020), which emphasize teachers' agency and the importance of language competence. The challenges faced by educators during the pandemic were consistent with global trends in online teaching (König, Jäger-Biela, & Glutsch, 2020). The importance of technology in English language instruction echoes the work of Baker and Ishikawa (2021). The relevance of English language education in multilingual societies (Hjelsvold et al., 2020) was reiterated by the participants.

**C. Implications for English Language Teaching:** The findings have several implications for English language teaching. Firstly, educators should continue to adapt to technology-mediated teaching and develop strategies to

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bridge the digital divide among students (Hjelsvold et al., 2020). Second, professional language development programs should be tailored to enhance educators' language competence (Galloway & Numajiri, 2020). Lastly, language competence should remain at the forefront of English language instruction (Baker & Ishikawa, 2021).

**D. Post-Pandemic Pedagogical Recommendations:** Moving forward, educators can consider a blended approach that combines in-person and online teaching (Pellerone, 2021). This would address the challenges of technology access and ensure a dynamic learning environment. The creation of a support system for educators to improve their language competence should be a priority (König, Jäger-Biela, & Glutsch, 2020; UNESCO, 2022). Additionally, educators should participate in continuous training to stay updated with the latest teaching methods (Pellerone, 2021).

**E. Recommendations:** To enhance English language teaching, it is recommended that schools within the Schools division of Iligan City establish professional language mentoring or development programs for educators (Hajovsky, Chesnut, & Jensen, 2020). These programs should focus on language competence and the use of technology in teaching.

School administrators should also allocate resources for bridging the digital divide (Galloway & Numajiri, 2020). Every school, especially senior high school, needs to invest in technology infrastructure to ensure equitable access for all teachers and even students.

Professional organizations like St. Michael's College (SMC) can contribute by offering relevant training and workshops to educators (König, Jäger-Biela, & Glutsch, 2020).

Additional Recommendations:

- A. **Collaboration:** Encourage collaboration among teachers to share best practices and innovative teaching strategies. This could be facilitated through regular meetings or an online platform.
- B. **Continuous Learning:** Promote a culture of continuous learning among teachers. This could be through encouraging participation in webinars, online courses, and conferences related to English language teaching.
- C. **Feedback Mechanism:** Implement a feedback mechanism where language teachers can share their teaching-learning experiences. This feedback can be used to improve teaching methods and curriculum design.
- D. **Research:** Future researchers should explore the effectiveness of the professional language programs and the impact of technology use in teaching. This could provide valuable insights for further improvements in English language teaching.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Overall, this study has revealed that English language educators in the Schools Division of Iligan City, the Senior High School educators, demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability in response to the post-pandemic educational environment. Guided by the paper's robust research methodology, theoretical framework, and perceptive thesis statement, it yielded significant output. Results show that participants (T-Part 1 to T-Part 20) employed various strategies to overcome the challenges, including the integration of technology, flexible instructional approaches, and other professional language development initiatives. These experiences and strategies were instrumental in enhancing their language competence and fostering more effective interactions with students. Moreover, the study highlights the pivotal role of language competence in English language instruction and emphasizes the importance of adapting to new pedagogical approaches. The research contributes valuable insights to the field of English language education, offering a nuanced understanding of postpandemic teaching methods, the significance of language competence, and the need for continued professional development and adaptability in education. Overall, educators, educational institutions, and administrators in the Schools Division of Iligan City are urged to recognize the importance of flexibility, adaptability, and continuous professional development for teachers to enhance the quality of English language instruction, promoting linguistic proficiency, cultural awareness, and effective communication in the post-pandemic landscape. This study stands as a testament to the resilience and dedication of educators and underscores the importance of continued growth, adaptation, and continuous development in the field of English language education.

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### APPENDICES

- A. Informed Consent Forms
- B. Interview Questions
- C. Observation Protocols
- D. Professional development program



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