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Navigating Digital Demands: A Phenomenological Study of Teachers with Limited Digital Competence

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Abstract. Teachers are expected to use digital tools for instruction, assessment, communication, and administrative reporting. Most research on teachers' digital competence has measured competence levels with surveys or has examined emergency remote teaching during the pandemic, so little is known about how teachers who perceive their own digital competence as limited experience these demands in ordinary school life. This study explored the lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of teachers with limited digital competence, and the recommendations they offered to colleagues. A qualitative phenomenological design was used. Fifteen teachers of one public secondary school in Don Carlos, Bukidnon, Philippines, who perceived themselves as having limited skills or confidence in required digital tasks, were purposively sampled during School Year 2026–2027. Data were gathered through audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews supplemented by field notes, transcribed verbatim, anonymized, and analyzed thematically. Four themes emerged: (1) teachers navigated digital demands through struggle, adaptation, and gradual growth; (2) their struggles arose from the interaction of limited skills, technological conditions, and professional expectations; (3) they built digital confidence through persistent learning, social support, and adaptive coping; and (4) they recommended supportive collaboration, continuous hands-on learning, and inclusive school practices. Participants linked anxiety, embarrassment, and reduced confidence to unfamiliar applications, unstable connectivity, and overlapping deadlines, and they coped by rehearsing procedures, asking trusted colleagues, and keeping personal guides and printed backups. Their accounts tied these difficulties to workplace conditions as well as to individual skill. Participants considered hands-on training with follow-up, peer mentoring, reliable equipment, sufficient time, and freedom to ask for help without embarrassment necessary. The findings describe 15 teachers in one school and are not intended for generalization.

Keywords: Coping Strategies; Digital Competence; Digital Demands; Phenomenology; Philippines

Introduction

The increasing integration of digital technology into education has transformed teachers' responsibilities in instructional delivery, assessment, communication, and administrative work. Teachers, however, differ in their confidence, familiarity, and proficiency with digital tools. Those who perceive themselves as having limited technological skills may find it difficult to adapt to digital demands while maintaining their regular teaching responsibilities. Akram et al. (2022) identified inadequate infrastructure, limited training, and insufficient technological experience as barriers to technology integration, and Bui (2022) emphasized the influence of teachers' technological competence, pedagogical beliefs, and professional development on digital technology use. Teachers' experiences with technology therefore need to be understood in relation to both their individual capabilities and their working environments.

In the Philippine context, studies have documented teachers' experiences of technology-supported instruction and the challenges of online teaching. Montebon (2022) explored Filipino teachers' experiences during the new normal, and Jaurigue-Sublay (2023) examined the challenges and benefits that Technology and Livelihood Education teachers experienced in facilitating online learning. Internationally, Smestad et al. (2023) reviewed research on teachers' digital competence and noted continuing concerns about how it is conceptualized and developed. Research on technostress points in the same direction: reviews have examined the coping mechanisms teachers use and have highlighted the role of technological complexity and organizational support in teachers' technology-related stress (Mat Nang et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2025). Further

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Original Article

exploration is nevertheless warranted on how teachers who perceive themselves as less technologically proficient experience everyday digital responsibilities and develop coping strategies beyond the specific circumstances of emergency remote teaching.

In the province of Bukidnon, teachers may encounter varying conditions in digital resources, internet connectivity, technical assistance, and professional development. Existing studies in the province have largely used surveys to measure competency levels. Ayunar et al. (2024) found, among 1,275 public school teachers, that higher educational attainment was associated with higher ICT proficiency whereas longer teaching experience was associated with lower proficiency. Lambunao (2024) reported intermediate-level ICT competencies among elementary teachers in one district and recommended interviews and focus groups to understand teachers' concerns more fully. Teachers' own accounts of everyday digital demands therefore warrant investigation rather than assumption, particularly as teachers continue to navigate technology-related expectations during School Year 2026–2027. A phenomenological approach was appropriate because it allows participants to describe their experiences and the meanings they attach to navigating digital demands in their actual school environments.

This study explored the lived experiences and coping strategies of teachers with limited digital competence in a public secondary school in Bukidnon during School Year 2026–2027. Specifically, it sought to describe how the teachers experienced digital demands, the challenges they encountered, the strategies they used to manage these demands, and the recommendations they offered to colleagues in similar situations. The findings were intended to inform context-sensitive teacher development, peer mentoring, and school-based technical assistance that respond to teachers' expressed needs.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What were the lived experiences of teachers with limited digital competence as they navigated digital demands in their teaching practice?
2. What challenges did these teachers encounter in meeting the digital demands of their teaching responsibilities?
3. What coping strategies did these teachers use to manage their digital difficulties and the embarrassment or perceived judgment associated with them?
4. What recommendations did the participants offer to other teachers experiencing similar struggles with digital demands in teaching?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study explored how teachers with limited digital competence experienced and responded to digital demands in their work at San Nicolas National High School, Don Carlos District III, Don Carlos, Bukidnon, during School Year 2026–2027. The phenomenon was the teachers' encounter with digital tasks in instruction, assessment, communication, and administrative reporting, particularly when their perceived technological proficiency was limited. The study addressed four concerns: the teachers' lived experiences in navigating digital demands, the challenges they met, the coping strategies they used to manage their difficulties and the embarrassment or perceived judgment attached to them, and the recommendations they offered to colleagues in similar situations. The study was bounded by its participants, setting, and design. It involved 15 teachers from a single public secondary school, selected through purposive sampling on the basis of their self-perceived limited digital competence; digital competence itself was not measured with a test or rating scale. Data came from semi-structured interviews and field notes. The study did not include teachers who considered themselves digitally proficient, teachers from other schools or districts, school heads, students, or parents, and it did not assess teachers' actual digital skills or the effectiveness of any training program. The findings describe the experiences of these 15 teachers and were not intended to be generalized to other teachers, schools, or divisions.

Literature Review

Digital Demands on Teachers

The pandemic made digital work a basic part of teaching. Schools moved to what Hodges et al. (2020) called emergency remote teaching, a temporary shift in delivery that differed from planned online learning. Teachers had to change their methods quickly, often with little preparation. Trust and Whalen (2020) surveyed K-12 educators in the first weeks of school closures and found that many learned unfamiliar tools while teaching, with limited institutional support. König et al. (2020) found that prior competence and training shaped how early-career teachers in Germany adjusted to online teaching. Both studies describe the emergency period itself. Digital demands have continued since. UNESCO (2023) observed that technology in education

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https://ijroms.com
Original Article

keeps expanding faster than the supports that teachers and systems have in place, and later work points the same way: Yang et al. (2025) reviewed research on technostress among teachers, and Forsström and Amdam (2026) found that teachers' professional digital competence develops through interconnected relationships among colleagues, school leaders, professional development, teaching practices, and technological resources. Teachers are therefore expected to keep using digital tools whether or not they feel ready, and their competence depends on conditions in the school as well as on the teacher.

Teachers' Digital Competence and Perceived Limited Competence

Falloon (2020) argued that teacher digital competence goes beyond operating devices and includes using technology for learning, ethical practice, and professional growth. Smestad et al. (2023), in a review of 116 articles, noted that the concept is still understood in different ways across studies. Studies that measured competence mostly used questionnaires. Cabero-Almenara et al. (2020) validated a DigCompEdu-based questionnaire in a university context, Portillo et al. (2020) reported that educators rated their own digital competence differently across educational stages, and Perifanou et al. (2021) found gaps in teachers' digital skills readiness during the pandemic. Zhao et al. (2021) reviewed digital competence research in higher education, and Sánchez-Cruzado et al. (2021) described teacher digital literacy as an indisputable challenge after COVID-19. Scherer et al. (2021), who profiled higher education teachers' readiness for online teaching, added that readiness depends on a mix of attitudes, perceived usefulness, and access to support, not on skill alone. These studies differ in setting, from university teachers to educators across educational stages, but they share a focus on measurement: they describe levels of competence in numbers. They do not describe what it is like to be a teacher who sees himself or herself as lacking technological skill, which is the experience this study examines.

Experiences of Strain, Stress, and Emotional Cost

Several studies link digital demands to emotional strain. Panisoara et al. (2020) found that burnout and technostress mediated the relationship between teachers' motivation and their intention to continue online instruction. Estrada-Muñoz et al. (2021) reported technostress among Chilean teachers who worked remotely during the pandemic. Sokal et al. (2020) found that attitudes toward change, efficacy, and burnout were closely related among Canadian teachers. Marek et al. (2021) described the difficulties of converting classes to distance learning, and Espino-Díaz et al. (2020) wrote about the pandemic's effects on education professionals, including how it pushed them toward ICT. Reviews published since then show that the concern has not faded: Mat Nang et al. (2022) reviewed teachers' technostress and coping mechanisms during the pandemic, and Yang et al. (2025) highlighted the role of technological complexity and organizational support in teachers' technology-related stress. Taken together, these studies, many of which relied on surveys or reviews, suggest that digital demands can wear on teachers who feel unprepared, and that the strain reaches their confidence and well-being. They treat stress as something to measure. They say little about how teachers who doubt their own skills describe it, or about how embarrassment before colleagues figures in it.

Philippine Studies on Teachers and Technology

In the Philippines, early studies of teachers during the pandemic documented the challenges they faced. Alea et al. (2020) examined teachers' awareness, distance learning experiences, and views on institutional readiness, and Toquero (2020) discussed the challenges and opportunities that the crisis brought to Philippine higher education. Talidong and Toquero (2020) looked at Filipino teachers' practices for dealing with anxiety during the pandemic. Qualitative studies add detail on lived experience. Cahapay and Labrador (2021) studied the perspectives of Filipino English language teachers and identified barriers such as poor internet connection, unfamiliarity with remote instructional design, and lack of skill with remote technologies. They also identified enablers such as self-directed learning of technology, instructional accommodations, and school and community support. Montebon (2022) used a transcendental phenomenological design with Filipino teachers and reported three themes: the challenges they met, the coping strategies they used, and their use of technology. His themes match the structure of the present study. The difference is that his participants were teachers in general and did not form a group chosen for limited technological confidence. More recent Philippine work looks at the conditions around teachers' technology use. Jaurigue-Sublay (2023) examined the challenges and benefits that Technology and Livelihood Education teachers experienced in facilitating online learning. Delgado and Dayaganon (2024) examined the relationship among technostress, ICT competencies, and coping strategies of secondary school teachers. Magtoltol and Oropa (2025) identified inadequate infrastructure, unstable internet connectivity, limited training, and insufficient technical support as barriers to teachers' digital literacy, and Chin et al. (2022) reported that time and financial constraints and limited logistical support restricted Filipino teachers' access to needed professional development.

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https://ijroms.com
Original Article

Local Context: Bukidnon and Mindanao

Studies in Bukidnon show that the digital divide among teachers is a local concern. Ayunar et al. (2024) surveyed 1,275 public school teachers in Bukidnon using the DigCompEdu questionnaire. They found that higher educational attainment was associated with higher ICT competency, while longer teaching experience was associated with lower competency, and they recommended stronger training and support from schools. This suggests that experienced teachers, who are valuable in the classroom, may be the ones most pressed by digital requirements. Lambunao (2024) reported intermediate-level ICT competencies among elementary teachers in one Bukidnon district and recommended interviews and focus groups to understand teachers' concerns more fully. These findings are quantitative, so they show the pattern and not how teachers experience it. Van Dijk (2020) described the digital divide as a matter of motivation, skills, and usage as well as physical access, and this view helps explain why teachers in the same school with the same devices can have very different digital experiences.

Coping Strategies

Across the literature, teachers cope in several ways. They teach themselves, ask colleagues for help, and use informal peer support, as Cahapay and Labrador (2021) and Montebon (2022) described. Trust and Whalen (2020) and König et al. (2020) pointed to the value of professional learning and institutional support. Talidong and Toquero (2020) described emotional coping strategies that teachers used alongside practical ones. Most of these studies were done during the height of the pandemic. Later reviews place coping within a wider set of resources. Yao (2026) identified personal psychological resources and coping, digital competence, and social or institutional support among the recurring themes in research on teacher resilience and adaptation in digital teaching, and Gyasi and Sun (2026) reviewed the relationship between digital technology and teacher resilience, including the challenges of adapting to technology-supported work. Reviews synthesize findings across many settings, so they are not designed to show how an individual teacher who doubts his or her skills handles the embarrassment of asking for help. Less is known about how teachers cope now that digital tools are a permanent part of the job and no longer an emergency measure.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences and coping strategies of teachers with limited digital competence in navigating digital demands. The phenomenon of interest was teachers' encounter with digital demands in their instructional and administrative responsibilities, particularly when their perceived technological proficiency was limited. The design allowed the researchers to examine the challenges teachers experienced, their emotional and professional responses, the strategies they used to manage technological difficulties, and the support they considered necessary. In this study, teachers with limited digital competence were operationally defined as teachers who perceived themselves as having limited skills or confidence in performing the digital tasks required in their teaching. The definition rests on the teachers' self-perception; no test or rating scale of digital competence was administered.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at San Nicolas National High School, Don Carlos District III, San Nicolas, Don Carlos, Bukidnon, Division of Bukidnon. The school offers education from Grade 7 to Grade 12 and is considered one of the large public schools in the Division of Bukidnon.

Research Participants

The participants were 15 teachers with limited digital competence at San Nicolas National High School, Division of Bukidnon, regardless of subject specialization. They are identified in this report as K1 to K15.

Research Instrument

The researcher-developed, semi-structured interview guide was used to explore the lived experiences and coping strategies of teachers who experienced difficulties in using digital technologies for instructional and administrative tasks. The guide consisted of open-ended questions aligned with the research questions, focusing on technological challenges, emotional and professional experiences, coping strategies, and perceived institutional support. Before its use, the interview guide was reviewed by three experts: one with a background in qualitative research, one with expertise in educational technology, and one experienced in secondary education and research supervision. The experts evaluated the guide using a validation rating form and written comments, focusing on the clarity, relevance, appropriateness, and alignment of each question with the study's objectives. Based on their feedback, revisions were made to simplify ambiguous wording, remove overlapping

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https://ijroms.com
Original Article

questions, improve the sequence of questions, and add follow-up prompts to encourage participants to describe their experiences in greater depth. The revised interview guide was pilot-tested with two teachers who met similar characteristics to the target participants but were not included in the final sample to assess the clarity, flow, and appropriateness of the questions. Minor adjustments were made based on the pilot-test feedback before the actual interviews were conducted. Thus, interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and supplemented by field notes to ensure accurate documentation of their accounts. The flexible interview format allowed participants to describe their experiences in depth while maintaining consistency across interviews.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher secured approval from the appropriate education authorities and school administrators before conducting the study. Qualified participants were identified through purposive sampling and informed about the purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations of the study. After informed consent was obtained, semi-structured interviews were conducted at mutually agreed times and locations. With participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented with field notes. The recordings were transcribed verbatim, anonymized to protect participants' identities, and securely stored for thematic analysis.

Results and Discussions

The four themes below were derived from the thematic analysis described in the Methodology. Each theme answers one research question and is followed by a discussion that compares the findings with earlier studies.

Research Question 1: What were the lived experiences of teachers with limited digital competence as they navigated digital demands in their teaching practice?

On the Lived Experiences in Navigating Digital Demands

Participants described digital tasks as time-consuming when the applications were unfamiliar. One teacher "spent more time learning the steps than organizing the content" (K1), and K12 explained that procedures learned once were sometimes forgotten after several weeks and that demonstration with repeated practice helped more than written instructions. These difficulties were accompanied by frustration, nervousness, and pressure. K2 was "afraid of making mistakes, especially when the deadline is approaching" (K2), and K11 became "anxious whenever I am asked to use a new digital tool during an actual class" (K11).

Some participants also felt embarrassed or compared themselves with colleagues. K3 reported, "I sometimes feel embarrassed when I have to ask younger teachers to help me with technology" (K3), and K13 noted that comparing skills "makes me doubt my ability" (K13). Technical problems in front of students affected teaching itself: K4 felt pressured and sometimes returned to traditional teaching methods, K11 prepared printed materials as a backup, and K5 realized, "I also need to adjust my teaching plans whenever technical problems occur" (K5).

Digital tasks were also experienced as added workload. K10 felt that technology "creates additional responsibilities instead of making my work easier" (K10), and K14 felt "overwhelmed when several digital tasks have to be completed simultaneously" (K14). Despite these experiences, participants described gradual gains. K15 observed that "being less familiar with technology does not mean that I cannot improve" (K15), and K13 said, "every time I successfully complete a digital task, I gain a little more confidence" (K13).

Emerging Theme: *Navigating digital demands through struggle, adaptation, and gradual growth.*

This theme was formed from codes on the time spent learning unfamiliar applications, fear of mistakes, nervousness during live classes, embarrassment before colleagues, added workload, and gradual gains in confidence. The accounts show that the teachers' difficulties were not only a matter of individual proficiency; access to resources, training, and institutional support also shaped them. This interpretation aligns with Mat Nang et al. (2022), who examined teachers' technostress and coping mechanisms, and Yang et al. (2025), who highlighted the role of technological complexity and organizational support in teachers' technology-related stress. It also resembles the Philippine work of Delgado and Dayaganon (2024), who examined the relationship among technostress, ICT competencies, and coping strategies of secondary school teachers. Those studies measured stress and competence or reviewed such measures. The participants here described in their own words how the strain felt and where it appeared, for example in front of students or near a deadline. Their accounts also bring in a social side that the technostress studies reviewed above did not foreground: K3 and K13 linked their difficulty to comparison with colleagues. K3's reluctance to ask younger teachers for help may relate to the survey finding of Ayunar et al. (2024) that longer teaching experience was associated with lower

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https://ijroms.com
Original Article

ICT proficiency, but this study did not collect participants' years of service and cannot test the link. For this school, the accounts point to practice time and alternative instructional resources, such as the printed backups K11 prepared, as ways to manage technical problems without interrupting lesson delivery. The study did not test whether they work.

Research Question 2: What challenges did these teachers encounter in meeting the digital demands of their teaching responsibilities?

On the Challenges and Struggles With Digital Demands

Participants' challenges centered on tools, infrastructure, social conditions, and workload. Unfamiliar applications were a recurring difficulty: K8 knew the lesson content but struggled with "formatting slides, inserting videos, and arranging visual elements" (K8), and K13 could accomplish basic tasks but struggled with "advanced features or unfamiliar applications" (K13). Equipment and platforms posed further problems. K2 found it difficult to "operate projectors, connect laptops, and troubleshoot technical problems" (K2), and K3 feared "clicking the wrong option or submitting an incorrect file" (K3) and therefore rechecked work repeatedly.

Connectivity was another barrier. K4 explained that "a slow or unstable connection prevents me from uploading files, accessing learning materials, or communicating promptly with students" (K4). Social concerns were also present; K5 worried that younger colleagues "might think I am incapable" (K5). Changes in requirements added to the strain. K7 said, "Just when I become familiar with one application, another system or procedure is introduced that requires me to learn again" (K7), while K9 found it hard to monitor instructions arriving through different online channels.

Competing responsibilities and the transfer of training were the last group of challenges. K14 considered "learning new tools while managing lesson preparation, assessment, and documentation" (K14) exhausting, and K10 felt pressure when report deadlines overlapped with classroom duties. K15 described the gap between training and practice: "I may understand the demonstration during a seminar, but when I work independently, I sometimes forget the procedures" (K15).

Emerging Theme: *Struggles emerged from the interaction of individual skill limitations, technological conditions, and professional expectations.*

This theme was formed from codes on unfamiliar applications, equipment and platform problems, unstable connectivity, fear of judgment, changing requirements, overlapping deadlines, and difficulty carrying training over to independent work. The accounts are consistent with international research that identifies technological complexity and workplace conditions as major sources of teacher technostress (Mat Nang et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2025). Connectivity problems also appear in earlier Philippine studies: Cahapay and Labrador (2021) listed poor internet connection among the barriers faced by English language teachers, and Magtoltol and Oropa (2025) identified unstable internet connectivity and inadequate infrastructure as barriers to teachers' digital literacy. K10's and K14's accounts of overlapping deadlines and competing tasks resemble the time constraints that Chin et al. (2022) found to limit Filipino teachers' access to professional development. The studies above were largely set in the emergency period. K7's account of systems that kept changing and K9's account of instructions arriving through several channels suggest that comparable strain continued in School Year 2026–2027, after the emergency had ended. The findings come from 15 teachers in one school and do not show how common these problems are elsewhere. Within this school, the teachers themselves tied their difficulties to connectivity, time for digital tasks, and the availability of technical support.

Research Question 3: What coping strategies did these teachers use to manage their digital difficulties and the embarrassment or perceived judgment associated with them?

On the Coping Strategies of Teachers With Limited Digital Competence

Participants relied on personal, social, and practical strategies. Several rehearsed before using a tool in class: K11 checked "the projector, laptop, and presentation files ahead of time" (K11), and K1 repeated the steps "until I become familiar with the process" (K1). K7 focused on learning one application at a time, beginning with basic functions. Social support was prominent. K2 preferred asking "someone I am comfortable with because I feel less embarrassed" (K2), K14 shared digital materials with other teachers, and K8 asked colleagues to demonstrate procedures because "I learn better when I can see the actual steps" (K8).

Participants also built their own resources. K3 saved tutorial videos on a phone, and K6 wrote procedures in a notebook that served as "my personal guide" (K6). Others planned for failure: K4 and K11 prepared printed lessons, and K4 said that having an alternative "helps me remain calm and continue teaching even when technology does not cooperate" (K4). K9 scheduled specific times for digital tasks because

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https://ijroms.com
Original Article

"Organizing my tasks helps me avoid feeling overwhelmed" (K9). Mindset mattered as well. K5 eventually realized that "asking for help is part of learning" (K5), and K15 reminded themselves that "technology is a skill that can be developed through patience and consistent effort" (K15).

Emerging Theme: *Building digital confidence through persistent learning, social support, and adaptive coping*.

This theme was formed from codes on rehearsing before class, learning one function at a time, asking trusted colleagues, saving tutorials and writing personal guides, preparing printed backups, scheduling digital tasks, and changes in mindset. The strategies resemble those that Cahapay and Labrador (2021) identified as enablers among Filipino English language teachers, namely self-directed learning of technology and school and community support, and those that Montebon (2022) reported under coping. They also add two details. K2's choice to ask only a colleague with whom K2 felt comfortable shows how embarrassment shaped help-seeking, and contingency planning such as the printed lessons of K4 and K11 addressed the risk of equipment failure in front of students, a kind of planning that was not prominent in the studies reviewed above.

Internationally, Gyasi and Sun (2026) reviewed the relationship between digital technology and teacher resilience, including the challenges of adapting to technology-supported work. Yao (2026), in a systematic review, identified personal psychological resources and coping, digital competence, and social or institutional support among the recurring themes in research on teacher resilience and adaptation in digital teaching. The persistence, patience, and view of mistakes as learning voiced by K5, K13, and K15 fit the personal-resource theme in those reviews, and the participants' reliance on colleagues fits the social-support theme. The strategies reported here were mostly individual or informal. These data do not show whether they would reduce the fear of judgment on a larger scale.

Research Question 4: What recommendations did the participants offer to other teachers experiencing similar struggles with digital demands in teaching?

On the Recommendations of Teachers With Limited Digital Competence

Participants' advice to other teachers combined personal attitudes with school-level changes. On the personal side, K1 urged colleagues, "Do not feel ashamed if you cannot immediately understand an application" (K1), and K13 advised teachers to "treat mistakes as opportunities to learn" (K13). K4 recommended regular practice "even for a few minutes each day" (K4), and K9 advised teachers to "avoid waiting until the deadline to learn a new application" (K9). K11 recommended preparing "alternative instructional materials" (K11) in case the internet or equipment fails, and K7 suggested using "online tutorials and other learning resources that they can access anytime" (K7).

On the school side, K8 proposed "creating a peer mentoring system in school" (K8), and K12 stated that "Practical demonstrations and follow-up assistance are more helpful than training sessions that only explain concepts" (K12). K5 called on administrators to establish an environment where teachers can "discuss their digital difficulties without fear of criticism" (K5). K15 asked teachers and school leaders to work together in "making digital expectations realistic and manageable" (K15), with access to reliable equipment, internet connectivity, and enough time.

Emerging Theme: *Fostering digital empowerment through supportive collaboration, continuous learning, and inclusive school practices.*

This theme was formed from codes on personal attitudes toward mistakes and learning, regular practice, advance preparation, and requests for peer mentoring, practical demonstration with follow-up, a school climate free of criticism, realistic expectations, and reliable resources. The participants' preference for demonstration and follow-up over seminars that only explain concepts matches the difficulty K15 described in the second theme, remembering procedures after a seminar when working alone. It also agrees with Philippine evidence on barriers. Magtoltol and Oropa (2025) identified inadequate infrastructure, unstable internet connectivity, limited training, and insufficient technical support, and Chin et al. (2022) reported that time and financial constraints and limited logistical support restricted Filipino teachers' access to needed professional development. International evidence points to a similar combination of conditions: Forsström and Amdam (2026) found that teachers' professional digital competence develops through interconnected relationships among colleagues, school leaders, professional development, teaching practices, and technological resources. What the present participants add is their own advice, which links personal effort to school-level conditions, as in K5's call for a setting where difficulties can be discussed without fear of criticism. These recommendations came from 15 teachers in one school and were not tested. The study did not examine whether mentoring or hands-on training reduces teachers' difficulties.

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Ethical Considerations

The researcher secured approval to conduct the study from the Schools Division Office of Bukidnon and the school head of San Nicolas National High School before data collection. The research protocol was also submitted to the Institutional Research Ethics Committee for review to ensure that the study adhered to established ethical principles for research involving human participants. The committee assessed the study's procedures concerning informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, privacy, and the protection of participants from potential harm. Data collection commenced only after the necessary approvals and ethics clearance had been obtained. The approval dates, ethics clearance number, and authorization reference numbers were recorded in the relevant documents. All participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, their right to decline or withdraw without penalty, and the measures implemented to protect their identities. Written informed consent was obtained before conducting the interviews, and participants were identified using codes K1 to K15 to maintain confidentiality throughout data analysis and reporting. Recordings and transcripts were anonymized, and participants were identified only by codes (K1 to K15) in all reports of the findings. No personally identifiable information was disclosed in the data analysis or research report, and all data were handled in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173). Digital recordings, electronic transcripts, and research documents were stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. Any printed documents were kept in a secured, locked cabinet to prevent unauthorized access. The collected data were used solely for research purposes and retained for five years after the completion of the study, or for the period required by the applicable institutional research ethics committee and school research policies, whichever is applicable. After the retention period, digital audio recordings and electronic transcripts will be permanently deleted using secure deletion procedures, while printed documents will be shredded or otherwise destroyed to prevent the recovery of confidential information. Any backup copies containing research data will also be deleted. These measures were implemented to protect participants' privacy and maintain the confidentiality and security of the research data. To minimize possible emotional discomfort during the interviews, the researcher ensured that the interview process was conducted in a safe, respectful, and supportive environment. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could decline to answer any question, request a break, or discontinue the interview at any time without penalty. When a participant showed signs of discomfort, the researcher paused the interview, allowed sufficient time for the participant to compose themselves, and asked whether they wished to continue. Follow-up questions were asked sensitively, without pressuring participants to disclose information they were uncomfortable sharing. If a participant experienced significant emotional distress, the interview would be stopped, and the participant would be offered appropriate support through the school's guidance personnel or a qualified professional, with the participant's consent. The researcher also maintained confidentiality and respected each participant's emotional well-being throughout the data collection process. These safeguards helped minimize potential harm and ensured that the participants' dignity, autonomy, and welfare remained a priority.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study found that teachers with limited digital competence in a Bukidnon secondary school experienced digital demands as a source of instructional difficulty, emotional pressure, and added workload. Their difficulties came from unfamiliar applications, unstable connectivity, equipment problems, changing requirements, and competing workloads, and were accompanied by anxiety, embarrassment, and reduced confidence. Participants responded through practice, peer support, self-made learning resources, contingency planning, task scheduling, and persistence, and they gradually gained confidence. Their recommendations emphasized patience, collaboration, hands-on training, and school-level support. The study adds an account, in the teachers' own words, of digital demands as experienced by teachers who doubted their skills, in a province where earlier evidence was mostly survey-based. For school heads and those who plan teacher professional development, the accounts show that participants considered training most useful when it included demonstration, repeated practice, and follow-up (K12, K15), and that they described asking for help as easier where it carried no fear of criticism (K5). These conclusions rest on 15 teachers in one school and should not be extended beyond them.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following actions are suggested, with the people who would be responsible for each. They are drawn from the accounts of 15 teachers in one school, and the study did not test whether they work. School heads and the school's ICT coordinator may organize hands-on training around the tasks teachers say they find difficult, with follow-up sessions or on-site assistance after each training. School heads may set up peer mentoring in which a teacher can choose a colleague to demonstrate procedures, and may

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Original Article

make clear that asking for help is expected. The ICT coordinator, with the school head, may provide accessible technical support for equipment and platforms, such as a fixed time or a named person to approach. School heads and division officials may work toward reliable equipment and internet connectivity, and school heads may review overlapping report deadlines so that teachers have sufficient time for digital tasks. School heads may monitor the effect of the training and mentoring through teacher feedback and a brief assessment of digital competence before extending them to other teachers. Future studies may include teachers from other schools and districts, compare experiences across career stages, or examine whether school-based mentoring and hands-on training reduce teachers' digital difficulties.

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