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Pedagogy in practice: a qualitative exploration of English language teaching (ELT) for graduate school using narrative inquiry, instructional material analysis, and observational inquiry

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Introduction: English Language Teaching (ELT) in multilingual graduate classrooms in the Philippines presents pedagogical, linguistic, and institutional complexities that transcend prescriptive models. In regions like Mindanao, where post-conflict reconstruction and linguistic plurality converge, instructors often navigate ELT through improvisation, relational scaffolding, and material adaptation. This study responds to the need for a grounded exploration of graduate ELT as a lived, context-sensitive practice.

Methods: Guided by a multi-theoretical framework—Postmethod Pedagogy, Sociocultural Theory, Critical Pedagogy, Multimodal Theory, Actor-Network Theory, and Activity Theory—the study employed narrative inquiry, instructional artifact analysis, structured classroom observation, and Orange-assisted visualization. Twenty purposively selected graduate instructors and students from St. Michael's College of Iligan, Inc. (SMCII) participated during AY 2024–2025. Data were thematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, with trustworthiness reinforced through member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation.

Results: Ten core themes emerged: (1) strategic pedagogical improvisation, (2) instructional materials as scaffolds and filters, (3) learner identity and linguistic anxiety, (4) observed communicative exchanges, (5) evolving pedagogical identity, (6) digital mediation and multimodal engagement, (7) peer dynamics and collaborative language construction, (8) lexical density and semantic awareness, (9) instructional tensions between coverage and depth, and (10) feedback culture and constructive mediation. Orange visualizations affirmed thematic convergence and lexical clustering, supporting interpretive depth without flattening narrative nuance.

Discussion: Findings affirm graduate ELT as a relational, adaptive, and ideologically charged practice. Instructors act as designers and co-learners, while students bring sociolinguistic trajectories that reshape pedagogy in real time. The study highlights the need for inclusive material design, dialogic feedback, and flexible curriculum frameworks that honor linguistic diversity and emotional nuance. Orange visualization proved valuable in mapping pedagogical rhythms and thematic density, though limited in capturing affective tone.

KEYWORDS

context-sensitive pedagogy, multilingual learning, narrative inquiry, instructional material design, feedback culture, visual qualitative analysis

1 Introduction

English Language Teaching (ELT) at the graduate level in SMCI, Philippines, remains a quietly complex practice, often shaped more by faculty agency and institutional realities than by prescriptive national frameworks. In regions like Mindanao, where multilingualism intersects with post-conflict pedagogical reconstruction, instructors in graduate programs routinely navigate overlapping layers of cultural diversity, language asymmetry, and academic expectation. These classrooms present hybrid linguistic ecologies—where English coexists with Cebuano, Maranao, and Tagalog—demanding teaching strategies that are not only linguistically responsive but philosophically grounded in inclusivity and rigor.

While CHED Memorandum Order No. 15, series of 2019 (Commission on Higher Education, 2019) offers latitude for institutional adaptation, it provides little elaboration on English language instruction in postgraduate settings. Teachers are often left to improvise: selecting texts, constructing syllabi, and curating materials with minimal access to validated resources or cohesive pedagogical guidance. In many cases, academic planning becomes an individual act of sense-making rather than a collective institutional scaffold. This improvisational stance is especially visible in material development, which Niegos et al. (2022) argue is frequently under-theorized and inadequately supported, particularly in tertiary institutions.

The complexities of graduate ELT are not only structural—they are narrative. Teachers carry with them pedagogical histories and philosophies shaped by local tensions and aspirations, while students bring unique sociolinguistic trajectories that complicate linear models of English proficiency. In this regard, narrative inquiry becomes an essential method for surfacing how ELT is conceptualized and enacted (Wei, 2023). It allows the researcher to access the tacit dimensions of teaching—beliefs, improvisations, adaptations—that might otherwise remain invisible. Complementing this, observational inquiry (Tunison, 2023) offers a behavioral lens to examine how intentions translate into practices, and how patterns of engagement unfold in real time.

This paper responds to the need for a grounded exploration of graduate ELT as it is actually lived—in pedagogical conversations, classroom behavior, and instructional design. Through a triangulated qualitative approach that includes teacher narratives, instructional material analysis, and observational inquiry, the study examines how instructors craft and deliver English education under multilayered constraints and aspirations. It builds on the theoretical foundations of communicative and contextualized pedagogy (Richards and Rodgers, 2014), while situating these within the Philippine quality assurance framework articulated in CHED CMO No. 46, series of 2012 (Commission on Higher Education, 2012).

The inquiry also extends into methodological innovation by introducing Orange data visualization as a tool for mapping and interpreting qualitative ELT data. In an environment where pedagogical patterns often go unnoticed or undocumented, visualization offers a new modality for recognizing thematic convergence and instructional rhythms. The study thus explores the feasibility and value of applying visual analytics in educational research, bridging digital methodology with grounded pedagogy.

At the heart of this work lies a conviction: that English language education at the graduate level must be reimagined as a space of dialogic reflection, cultural affirmation, and intentional design. Rather than relying on rote templates or colonial pedagogic inheritance, graduate ELT must foreground agency, multimodality, and context-driven adaptation. The research contends that only by integrating teacher voice, instructional artifacts, and classroom observation—visualized and analyzed through emerging tools—can meaningful shifts occur in how English is taught and learned across graduate programs.

2 Theoretical framework

Understanding the practices and principles of English Language Teaching (ELT) in graduate classrooms requires more than a single lens—it demands a multi-theoretical perspective that captures the complexity of pedagogical adaptation, student agency, and material engagement. At the heart of this inquiry is the idea that no one method can govern all learning encounters, especially in spaces marked by linguistic plurality and pedagogical improvisation.

Kumaravadivelu's (2001) Postmethod Pedagogy provides the conceptual starting point. It reimagines the role of the teacher not as a mere implementer of prescribed methods but as an informed, reflective practitioner who draws from local knowledge, context, and personal experience to design meaningful instruction. In SMCI's graduate ELT, where faculty often operate with limited national guidance and rich classroom diversity, this posture is not optional—it is indispensable. The flexibility and critical consciousness encouraged by Kumaravadivelu empower instructors to move beyond static models and craft pedagogy that meets learners where they are.

Equally central is Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which positions language development as an inherently social process. Here, learning unfolds through interaction—not just with texts and teachers, but with peers, cultural tools, and shared discourse. In multilingual graduate classrooms, this means recognizing the students' varied linguistic backgrounds as assets, not obstacles, and designing scaffolded tasks that stretch their abilities within a supportive zone of proximal development. Graduate ELT becomes less about transmission and more about co-construction.

Freire's (1970) Critical Pedagogy deepens this framing by foregrounding the learner's voice and lived experience. Teaching English, especially in post-pandemic setting, is never neutral. It involves choices about which texts to include, which voices to elevate, and how to engage students as subjects of learning rather than objects of instruction. Freire's insistence on dialogue, empowerment, and critical reflection aligns closely with narrative inquiry, a key method in this study. It reminds us that each story—student or teacher—has pedagogical significance.

To interpret instructional materials, the study turns to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Multimodal Theory. Graduate syllabi, modules, and multimedia content are more than verbal documents—they are visual, spatial, and symbolic artifacts. The way information is arranged, emphasized, or omitted speaks volumes about pedagogical intent and accessibility. Multimodal

analysis offers tools to decode these silent messages and understand how meaning is built through design.

Finally, when visualizing and analyzing the interplay of data across narratives, materials, and classroom behaviors, the study draws from Latour's (2005) Actor-Network Theory and Engeström's (1987) Activity Theory. These frameworks help conceptualize the classroom not as a static environment but as a dynamic network of actors—humans, technologies, texts, spaces—interacting and co-producing learning. Tools like Orange visualization, when integrated into qualitative research, become actors themselves: mediating interpretation, shaping insights, and revealing pedagogical rhythms that might otherwise remain invisible.

Together, these theories guide the analytic heart of this research. They allow a textured understanding of graduate ELT as a lived, relational, and ideologically charged practice—one shaped not just by policy or method, but by human connection, material design, and technological mediation.

3 Methods

This qualitative, exploratory study employed a multi-method approach to investigate English Language Teaching (ELT) practices in graduate classrooms. The design was guided by the understanding that ELT, particularly in linguistically diverse and post-conflict educational contexts, unfolds in complex, layered ways best captured through narrative, observational, and material-based inquiries (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Alejandro and Zhao, 2024).

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a rich tapestry of linguistic backgrounds and academic engagement (Nyimbili and Nyimbili, 2024). The study engaged twenty (20) individuals—graduate instructors and students—who were actively involved in ELT coursework at St. Michael's College of Iligan, Inc. during the first semester of Academic Year 2024–2025. Inclusion hinged on three criteria: current participation in graduate-level ELT, willingness to engage in interviews or classroom observations, and accessibility of instructional materials for review.

Each participant was anonymized using identifiers “Par 1” through “Par 20.” The sampling strategy intentionally reflected disciplinary variation and sociolinguistic diversity, which are hallmarks of the Mindanaoan educational landscape. Saturation was reached by the 20th participant, as no new themes emerged and convergence across interviews, observations, and materials was evident (Saunders et al., 2018). This sample size allowed for analytic depth while preserving the narrative richness of individual experiences.

Data collection unfolded across three concurrent modalities:

- **Semi-structured interviews** were conducted to explore participants' classroom strategies, pedagogical reflections, and personal philosophies of ELT. Each session lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and followed a flexible guide that allowed participants to narrate freely while ensuring thematic consistency. This approach aligns with Creswell and Miller's (2000) emphasis on meaning-making through interpretive frameworks.

- **Instructional materials**—including syllabi, modules, slide decks, and multimedia content—were collected and analyzed to uncover pedagogical themes and multimodal design choices (Jha, 2019). Materials were selected based on relevance to ELT coursework and participant consent.
- **Classroom observations**, both in-person and online, documented interaction patterns, instructional dynamics, and behavioral cues. Observations were conducted using a researcher-developed protocol that included field notes, participation mapping, and reflective memos. These sessions provided critical grounding for the interpretive process and were scheduled across three class meetings per participant.

To organize and interpret the data, thematic analysis was employed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. Coding was conducted manually and iteratively, allowing for emergent patterns and cross-case comparisons. Trustworthiness was reinforced through multiple strategies: member checking (where five participants reviewed preliminary findings), peer debriefing (with two research colleagues), and triangulation across interviews, materials, and observations (Nowell et al., 2017).

An additional layer of analysis was introduced through Orange visualization tools, which helped map co-occurring lexical patterns, instructional focus zones, and learner-reported themes. These visualizations offered a structured, non-statistical lens to support thematic emergence. However, their limitations were acknowledged—particularly in capturing affective tone and nuanced emotional shifts, which were instead interpreted through narrative and observational data. An audit trail documented each visualization step, reinforcing transparency and methodological rigor.

Ethical considerations were embedded throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with assurances of voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time. Anonymity was strictly maintained, and the use of Orange and recording tools was disclosed and accepted prior to data collection (Zupan and Demšar, n.d.). Visual outputs were used solely to aid interpretation—not evaluation—and were shared with participants during the member-checking process.

4 Results

From the mix of interviews, classroom observations, instructional material reviews, and Orange visual mapping, ten (10) core themes emerged. Each narrating a different facet of graduate-level English Language Teaching (ELT) as it unfolds in context-rich, multilingual classrooms in SMCII. These findings reveal not only pedagogical patterns but the lived dynamics of learning, design, and identity formation.

Theme 1: Pedagogical Improvisation and Strategic Language Use

Faculty teaching graduate ELT often found themselves navigating unpredictability—not due to poor preparation, but because learners arrived with varied linguistic repertoires, academic dispositions, and degrees of confidence. As one instructor put it, Par 3, “*You plan with structure, but teach with heart. Sometimes the*

right English word fails, so you shift—to Cebuano, to Maranao, just to spark clarity”.

This form of improvisation aligns with Harmer’s (2015) advocacy for adaptive instruction and reflects the Postmethod sensitivity described by Kumaravadivelu’s (2001), where teachers move fluidly across pedagogic choices rather than adhering to fixed methods. Language choice became tactical: part engagement, part empowerment (Jones et al., 2025).

Observational notes recorded a faculty moment during ELT 216 (Language Testing) where a lesson on academic verbs pivoted into a multilingual semantic drill—blending English keywords with regional equivalents, then back into formal usage. Orange visualizations reinforced this linguistic interplay by clustering recurrent terms like *clarify*, *translate*, and *localize*, mapping their use across transcripts and lesson flows.

Theme 2: Materials as Both Scaffolds and Filters of Linguistic Access

Instructional texts—syllabi, modules, multimedia handouts—carried weight far beyond their printed scope. For some students, they served as lifelines. For others, barriers. One graduate student (Par 9) confessed, “*I re-read the module three times before I understand. It uses words even dictionaries can’t explain fast.*”

This tension reflects Doan et al.’s (2025) insight that material design must walk a fine line between academic rigor and learner accessibility. The shift to digital formats, while promising, did not always translate to inclusive design. Area-Moreira et al. (2023) observed similar fractures in digital material development, where complexity often trumped clarity.

Reviewing the materials through a multimodal lens exposed implicit design inequities: overly dense texts, lack of visual markers, absence of multilingual support. Lea and Bradbery’s (2020) lexical analysis principles were applied to evaluate the cognitive load of sample module passages, revealing stacked academic vocabulary with minimal scaffolding.

Orange visualization illuminated thematic skew: heavy content saturation around *definition*, *framework*, and *policy*, while learner-friendly terms like *example*, *illustration*, or *local case* appeared only sporadically. The imbalance made visible the need for recalibration in material design.

Theme 3: Learner Reflections on Identity, Anxiety, and Academic Language

Beneath the pedagogical surface lay deeply personal learner experiences—stories of linguistic anxiety, academic pressure, and identity negotiation. Students spoke of struggling not just with grammar, but with feeling “enough” in English. Par 14 described, “*I understand the topic. But when I try to speak or write, it feels like I’m dressing my ideas in clothes that don’t fit.*”

Such reflections resonate with Bina’s (2024) narrative inquiry findings, where personal voice often clashes with institutional language expectations. Nation and Macalister (2020) similarly caution that curriculum designers must account for affective filters and identity variables when shaping English learning pathways.

Orange co-occurrence mapping flagged repeated pairing of words like *nervous*, *correct*, *paper*, and *present* across student transcripts—highlighting how performance-oriented tasks trigger linguistic self-consciousness. These patterns underscore the need for safe dialogic spaces, as emphasized by Tarrayo and

Salonga (2022), where English use becomes exploratory rather than performative.

Observation notes captured quiet hesitations—students muttering translations under their breath, pausing before contributing, or seeking peer confirmation before presenting. These were not signs of disengagement; they were markers of internal negotiation.

Theme 4: Observed Classroom Practices and Communicative Exchanges

Live classroom observations captured dynamic pedagogical moments: instructors shifting formats, integrating multimedia, pacing explanation through student cues. ELT 213 involved a visual essay exercise where students first narrated concepts in Cebuano, mapped them to English, then presented aloud with instructor scaffolding. The result: authentic communication, not rehearsed performance.

Instructional routines reflected Harmer’s (2015) call for interaction-rich environments and mirrored Freirean dialogics where learners co-construct meaning. Peer exchanges were notably vibrant during group problem-solving, with code-switching serving not as a crutch but a pedagogical bridge.

Field notes from ELT 213 described a recurring strategy: “*Instructor writes technical term on board. Student translates to local equivalent. Peer builds academic sentence from it. Cycle repeats.*” These iterations amplified comprehension and confidence simultaneously.

Orange visual overlays of instructor focus zones revealed dominant engagement around *feedback*, *rephrase*, and *invite response*. These lexical hotspots pointed toward an intentional pedagogy of relational teaching—a form of praxis where listening shapes delivery.

Theme 5: Longitudinal Teaching Perspectives and Evolving Pedagogical Identity

Several instructors reflected not only on present challenges but on how their teaching philosophies had evolved over time. Teaching ELT at the graduate level was described as a dynamic process—a kind of personal curriculum, constantly revised. Par 7 shared, “*When I taught my first class, I followed the book. Now I follow the learner.*”

These reflections resonate with Eslit’s (2023a,b) view that post-pandemic shifts in ELT demand not just technological adaptation but philosophical recalibration. Harmer (2015) similarly emphasizes that experienced teachers tend to redefine their pedagogical roles—not merely as information providers but as facilitators of academic voice and learner agency.

Field notes described moments when instructors paused mid-lesson to revise a task, redirect a discussion, or share personal reflections about past classroom iterations. This recursive awareness—thinking about teaching while teaching—signaled mature praxis. Orange outputs showed clustering around terms like *revise*, *adjust*, and *reflect*, often paired with *learner*, suggesting the anchoring of pedagogical shifts in student response rather than content fidelity.

Theme 6: Digital Mediation and Multimodal Engagement

Technology use across observed classrooms was often more subtle than flashy—less about slideshows and more about digital layering. Modules embedded hyperlinks to supplemental readings;

instructors referenced online forums, dictionaries, and corpora during discussions; and some students worked collaboratively via shared documents during peer edits.

Area-Moreira et al. (2023) note that digital instructional materials carry multimodal affordances, yet their pedagogical value depends on how well these are curated. In ELT 223 (Grammatical Structure of Grammar), a module included an interactive vocabulary builder—though only half the class accessed it regularly. Par 16 reflected, *“The online tool helped me learn new academic words, but sometimes my signal was weak and I’d just use the printed copy.”*

This uneven access shows that digital materials are powerful but not universally transformative. Orange visual analysis revealed keyword co-occurrence of *module*, *link*, *access*, and *multimedia*, reinforcing both the promise and limitations of digital integration. Nation and Macalister (2020) caution that curricular tools must accommodate infrastructural realities, especially in developing contexts.

Theme 7: Peer Dynamics and Collaborative Language Construction

Observations and transcripts underscored the pedagogical impact of peer interaction—not just during tasks but in shaping learner confidence and output quality. Par 11 shared, *“If I talk first to my seatmate in Cebuano, I can try to say it better in English when I present.”*

Such translational rehearsal aligns with Tarrayo and Salonga’s (2022) findings on blending local languages and global modalities in ELT. Instructors who allowed low-stakes peer exchanges—especially in local languages—reported improved oral fluency and idea development. One classroom noted increased student participation following small-group previews of presentations.

Peer support also softened affective tensions. Par 19 said, *“My partner and I exchange drafts before submitting. It’s less scary when someone checks it first.”* Bina (2024) notes that relational scaffolds in educational spaces can reduce linguistic anxiety and foster co-agency.

Orange heatmaps visualized lexical co-occurrence between *partner*, *group*, *review*, and *speak*, highlighting how collaboration shaped both task execution and emotional comfort.

Theme 8: Lexical Density and Semantic Awareness in Graduate ELT Tasks

Academic writing—theses, response papers, presentations, reports—challenged students not only in form but in lexical expectation. Learners reported grappling with discipline-specific jargon, expected idiomatic patterns, and “unspoken rules” about how formal English should sound. Par 4 stated, *“Sometimes I know what I mean, but I don’t know how to say it in a way that sounds ‘academic enough.’”*

Lea and Bradbery’s (2020) lexical scaffolding tools were referenced by instructors during in-class vocabulary mapping. Some used semantic webs to decode terms like *synthesize*, *critique*, or *reframe* before applying them in writing.

Orange visualizations clustered lexical density around *argument*, *stance*, and *academic tone*, often emerging from observation transcripts rather than direct interviews—suggesting tacit attention to semantics embedded in classroom behavior.

This theme affirms Doan et al. (2025) and Harmer’s (2015) recommendation that vocabulary instruction should be embedded, contextual, and interwoven with meaning-making tasks—especially in graduate spaces where language is both medium and metric.

Theme 9: Instructional Tensions Between Coverage and Depth

One recurring concern among faculty was the pressure to “cover” extensive content within limited time frames—often at the expense of deeper, dialogic engagement. This instructional tension was especially pronounced in thesis-writing courses or advanced grammar modules. As Par 12 remarked, *“We are required to finish the outline, but sometimes students need more time just to grasp what academic tone means.”*

This dilemma reflects what Harmer (2015) describes as the balancing act between curriculum obligation and meaningful learning. Faculty acknowledged CHED-mandated deliverables and institutional pacing guides but often felt conflicted when those timelines clashed with learner readiness.

Orange keyword co-occurrence from observational transcripts showed frequent pairing of *deadline*, *cover*, *confused*, and *revisit*, especially near midterm periods. These lexical clusters signal moments of pedagogical friction—where student need called for re-teaching, but syllabus scope constrained it.

Such findings echo Nation and Macalister’s (2020) recommendation for flexible curriculum design that prioritizes learning outcomes over rigid sequencing. At SMCI, this tension was most visible in teacher-led decisions to skip or compress topics—decisions made not lightly, but in service of learner engagement.

Theme 10: Feedback Culture and Constructive Language Mediation

Feedback emerged as both a pedagogical technique and a relational practice—particularly in its ability to shape student confidence and language development. Interviews and field notes revealed that instructor feedback often served not only to correct but to coach, translate, and encourage. Par 2 noted, *“When my professor underlined my sentence and wrote ‘say it more boldly,’ I didn’t feel wrong—I felt challenged.”*

Such feedback moments embody Freire’s (1970) vision of dialogic teaching where critique is embedded in care. In observed sessions, instructors used multimodal strategies—color-coded rubrics, voice notes, collaborative editing—to make feedback accessible, not punitive.

Orange visualization mapped lexical fields around *rephrase*, *highlight*, *bold*, and *suggest*, showing how instructors used specific language tools to nudge students toward improvement (Heritage et al., 2020). These feedback practices also aligned with Doan et al. (2025), who documented evolving teacher usage of instructional materials to personalize feedback across hybrid formats.

Tarrayo and Salonga (2022) stress that ELT feedback must navigate both linguistic error and learner affect; a misstep in tone can easily become a barrier to participation. This nuance was evident in student reflections: Par 18 said, *“When the feedback feels like advice, not judgment, I try harder.”*

4.1 Integrative reflection

Together, these findings reaffirm the fluid, negotiated nature of ELT in graduate education. They suggest that instructional impact cannot be divorced from linguistic empathy, material intentionality, and classroom humanity. Instructors act as designers, facilitators, and co-learners; students bring stories, tensions, and aspirations that reshape pedagogy in real time. Orange visualizations did not substitute for interpretation—but they supported it, allowing abstract patterns to come into focus without flattening individual voice.

This pedagogical landscape, as Eslit (2023a,b) reminds us, is not static—it is shifting, hybrid, and co-created. In Philippine ELT, especially at the graduate level, the future may not lie in adopting new methods wholesale but in grounding every instructional choice within real-world learner experience and local educational purpose.

4.2 Cumulative reflection

With these ten interconnected themes, the study paints a rich portrait of ELT in Philippine graduate education—not as a standardized process but as a human, adaptive, and increasingly data-informed pedagogical ecosystem. From improvisation and identity negotiation to digital mediation and feedback culture, each insight affirms the need for flexible frameworks, contextual sensitivity, and relational teaching.

5 Discussion

The findings uncovered in this study reveal graduate ELT in the Philippine context as a space of improvisation, relational pedagogy, material negotiation, and identity work. Instructors are not simply applying established methods—they are reauthoring teaching in ways that respond to multilingual realities, institutional pacing, and learner affect. This pedagogical responsiveness mirrors what Dadvand and Behzadpoor (2020) conceptualize as a complex-system approach to teacher knowledge: one grounded in adaptability, lifelong learning, and reciprocal classroom dynamics.

Summarized answer to the five questions:

Based on the results of the study, graduate-level ELT in multilingual classrooms like in SMCII is not just simply a matter of delivering content—it is a responsive, relational process shaped by linguistic diversity, evolving pedagogy, and reflective insight. The following are summarized answers to the five research questions that guided this study, each grounded in thematic analysis, theory, and participant voice.

- **Instructors' conceptualization and delivery of ELT.** Teachers navigated ELT not through rigid methods but through strategic improvisation, translanguaging, and relational scaffolding. Their pedagogy was context-sensitive, shaped by linguistic diversity and learner emotion—aligning closely with Postmethod principles and sociocultural responsiveness.
- **Themes in instructional materials.** Materials simultaneously acted as scaffolds and filters. While some modules supported meaning-making through localized examples and multimodal

design, others created cognitive overload due to lexical density and abstraction. Multimodal Theory exposed the silent inequities embedded in layout, language, and design choices.

- **Graduate student narratives.** Learners voiced tensions around academic English—expressing identity anxieties, Affective hesitations, and pride in linguistic agency. These narratives illuminated Freirean insights into voice, empowerment, and epistemic justice, underscoring the need for inclusive, dialogic instruction.
- **Classroom behaviors and instructional effectiveness.** Observed practices prioritized interaction, feedback, and scaffolded peer exchanges. Teachers leveraged real-time cues to adjust pacing, reframe tasks, and encourage co-construction of meaning—reflecting Vygotsky's mediation and Engeström's activity systems in action.
- **Orange visualization as analytic support.** Orange offered visual affirmation of emerging themes—mapping lexical clusters, behavioral densities, and focus zones without diminishing narrative nuance. Though limited in capturing emotional tonality, it served as a meaningful interpretive actor within the research's analytic network.

Notably, the findings affirm the core tenets of the multi-theoretical framework anchoring the study. Kumaravadivelu's (2001) Postmethod Pedagogy comes alive in acts of real-time recalibration, where teachers shift linguistic register or reconstruct a lesson mid-flow—not as failure of planning, but as expression of professional intuition. Such pedagogical fluidity speaks to “particularity” and “practicality” as foundational principles for ELT in graduate spaces, especially where student profiles diverge sharply in linguistic confidence and prior exposure.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural emphasis also resonates strongly across the themes. Peer exchanges, scaffolded feedback, and low-stakes code-switching emerged not only as support strategies, but as meaningful tools for academic development. Observed classroom practices highlight how language becomes learnable through interpersonal engagement, and how the zone of proximal development is co-constructed through affective and cognitive interplay. As Murray and Christison (2020) emphasize, facilitative teaching in ELT is often most effective when it is socially mediated and dialogically layered.

The emotional contours of graduate ELT—especially around identity and anxiety—were pronounced in student narratives. These reflections surfaced Tupas' (2015) argument that ELT is always entangled in power, legitimacy, and access. Several students struggled with the performance of “academic English,” articulating tensions between linguistic self-expression and institutional expectation. These affective dimensions challenge programs to build more inclusive language spaces, as advocated by Lems et al. (2024), where multilingual literacy is not a deficit but a rich epistemic resource.

Instructional materials likewise played complex roles. Students and instructors alike viewed them as essential, but often unevenly accessible. Libo-on's (2020) analysis of syllabi in relation to CHED standards echoes this dynamic—policies may exist, but how they translate into usable, equitable instructional design depends on faculty discretion. Themes related to scaffolding, abstraction, and lexical load reveal that materials must evolve toward usability and

multimodality. Melo-Pfeifer (2023) argues for linguistic landscape awareness in teacher education, urging designers to consider not just what is taught, but how the visual and textual framing signals inclusion or exclusion.

Technology's role was similarly nuanced. The integration of Orange visualization, for instance, was largely supportive—enabling thematic clustering, lexical mapping, and cross-source triangulation. Orange did not replace interpretive labor, but extended it by offering visual affirmations of recurring patterns. As Alejandro and Zhao (2024) caution, however, tools must be read critically and situated within broader methodological reasoning. The limitations of Orange surfaced most clearly in emotional or tonal data, which resist quantification and require narrative proximity. In this sense, the tool became a lens—not a verdict—and functioned best when aligned with humanistic insight.

The implications for instructional design and policy extend across both local and global contexts. At the local level, faculty development initiatives in the Philippines—particularly in Mindanao—must prioritize adaptive pedagogy. This means moving beyond static “best practices” toward strategies that respond to linguistic diversity, emotional nuance, and the lived realities of multilingual learners. As Edmett et al. (2024) emphasize, the integration of AI and digital tools in ELT demands a shift from technocentric models to learner-centered applications. This insight is especially relevant as platforms like Orange become part of both qualitative research and classroom practice, offering new ways to visualize and interpret pedagogical data.

For curriculum designers and policymakers, the findings call for a departure from one-size-fits-all frameworks. In the Mindanaoan graduate ELT terrain, where sociolinguistic complexity is the norm, Renau Renau's (2023) advocacy for hybrid, responsive methodologies resonates strongly. These approaches must adapt not only the content but also the mode of delivery to suit diverse learner profiles—whether through multimodal materials, flexible pacing, or culturally grounded instruction.

Globally, this study contributes to ongoing conversations about multilingual ELT in postcolonial and resource-constrained settings. The use of narrative inquiry, material analysis, and classroom observation—combined with Orange-assisted visualization—offers a replicable model for exploring pedagogical improvisation and feedback culture in other multilingual contexts. These insights may inform teacher training programs, curriculum reform, and digital tool integration in regions facing similar challenges of linguistic plurality and educational inequity.

Finally, this study contributes to larger conversations around multilingualism, decolonial pedagogy, and inclusive literacy in graduate education. Eslit (2023a,b) suggests that meaningful language acquisition in post-pandemic, AI-influenced classrooms requires not just tools, but a deep reinvention of what counts as teaching. The emergent themes here support that reinvention—not as theoretical abstraction, but as practical reimagining grounded in voice, flexibility, and cultural affirmation.

6 Conclusion and recommendations

This study offers a textured and timely portrait of graduate English Language Teaching (ELT) in multilingual Philippine

classrooms—recasting it not as a fixed method, but as a living, adaptive practice shaped by pedagogical intuition, learner agency, and institutional realities. Guided by a multi-theoretical framework—Kumaravadivelu's Postmethod Pedagogy, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Freire's Critical Pedagogy, Multimodal Theory, Actor-Network Theory, and Activity Theory—the research unfolded through rich qualitative engagements with twenty purposively selected participants. SMCII participants' narratives, materials, and classroom moments, interpreted through narrative inquiry, instructional artifact analysis, structured observation, and Orange visualization, revealed ten emergent themes that illuminated not just how ELT is delivered, but how it is felt, revised, and reimagined. The paper's thesis—that graduate ELT must be rooted in context-sensitive, reflective, and relational pedagogies—was affirmed through layered data and thematic resonance, effectively responding to the gaps on material equity, anxiety discourse, and the underuse of digital analytic tools in humanities research.

In light of these findings, the study recommends several forward-facing strategies: redesigning instructional materials to be culturally anchored and multimodally scaffolded; cultivating feedback cultures that affirm learner voice and linguistic diversity; and deepening faculty development around adaptive design and emotional nuance in academic language instruction. At the institutional level, this calls for policy shifts that move beyond uniform pacing and instead honor dialogic learning across disciplines and identities. Future research could explore learner-authored modules as co-pedagogical tools, launch longitudinal studies tracing teacher and student growth across semesters, and further examine the role of visual coding platforms like Orange to ethically amplify pattern emergence in humanities inquiry. In the end, graduate ELT is not merely about mastering a language—it is about teaching with purpose, designing with care, and listening with curiosity to the diverse voices shaping our shared academic futures.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

EE: Funding acquisition, Resources, Conceptualization, Investigation, Visualization, Validation, Project administration, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Supervision, Data curation, Software.

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Conflict of interest

EE was employed by the company St. Michael's College of Iligan, Inc.

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The author declares that Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript. Generative AI tools were used in the editorial preparation of this manuscript, specifically to refine transitions, enhance linguistic clarity, and align formatting with journal requirements. All scholarly interpretations, theoretical framing, and data analysis were solely the author's own. The AI did not generate core content but served as a writing assistant under the

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