From Classroom To Digital Work: Career Transitions Of Licensed Teachers In Pangasinan I

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Abstract – *This **qualitative, desk-based** study examines the career transitions of Licensed Professional Teachers (LPTs) in Pangasinan I from traditional classroom roles to digital and non-teaching positions within the growing digital economy. Drawing from **over 50 credible secondary sources**—including government labor reports, Scopus-indexed studies, freelance platform analytics, and documented digital narratives—the research investigates the types of work pursued, motivations for transition, challenges encountered, and implications for professional identity and career development.Findings reveal that approximately **85% of LPTs have transitioned to online roles** such as content writing (**34%**), online tutoring (**26%**), virtual assistance (**15%**), and digital marketing (**10%**), reflecting the strategic adaptation of teaching competencies to emerging labor markets. Key motivators include **financial necessity (45%)** and the pursuit of **flexibility and work-life balance (30%)**, while major challenges involve **income volatility (72%)**, **digital skill gaps (58%)**, and **professional identity concerns (38%)**.The study is **limited by its exclusive reliance on secondary sources**, which may not fully capture the nuanced, lived experiences of individual teachers and lacks the validation that primary qualitative or quantitative data could provide. Nonetheless, the findings underscore the urgent need for **structured digital upskilling programs**, **formal recognition of online work in CPD and career progression**, and **adaptive education labor policies** that integrate non-traditional career trajectories. This study reframes LPTs not as professionals exiting education, but as educators actively redefining their roles to meet the demands of a digitally interconnected world.*

Keywords – *Digital economy, Online Work, Licensed Professional Teachers, Career Transition, Freelancing, Professional Identity, Pangasinan I*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of the digital economy has redefined global labor markets, enabling professionals to pursue flexible, remote, and freelance work beyond conventional employment structures. In the Philippines, this transformation is particularly pronounced in provincial divisions such as Pangasinan I, where limited permanent teaching positions, contractual arrangements, and modest entry-level salaries constrain career stability. Licensed Professional Teachers (LPTs), traditionally regarded as central contributors to nation-building through classroom instruction, are increasingly exploring digital and non-teaching roles as alternative or supplementary livelihood strategies.

This shift is influenced by multiple factors, including financial necessity, work-life balance, and evolving conceptions of professional identity. Online platforms such as Upwork, 51Talk, and OnlineJobs.ph have emerged as gateways for teachers to engage in work ranging from virtual tutoring and content creation to administrative support and digital marketing. While these opportunities offer autonomy and, in some cases, higher earnings, they also introduce new challenges, such as income volatility, digital skill gaps, and the absence of social protection benefits.

Despite a growing body of literature on the Philippine gig economy, research focusing specifically on licensed teachers—particularly in rural or semi-urban contexts—remains scarce. This knowledge gap

limits policymakers' and educational institutions' capacity to design targeted interventions that address both the opportunities and vulnerabilities associated with this career shift. Guided by the **Career Construction Theory** (Savickas, 2005), which frames career transitions as adaptive responses to changing socio-economic environments, this study examines the lived realities of LPTs transitioning into digital work through a qualitative, desk-based analysis of over 50 credible secondary sources, including government labor statistics, academic publications, and platform-based employment data.

By identifying the types of digital and non-teaching roles pursued, the motivations behind these transitions, and the associated challenges and benefits, this research contributes to the broader discourse on teacher labor mobility, professional identity reconstruction, and the implications for educational workforce policy in the digital era. The findings aim to inform stakeholders—such as the Department of Education (DepEd), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), and labor agencies—on the systemic support needed to ensure that digital career pathways for teachers are sustainable, dignified, and integrated into professional development frameworks.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

General:

This study aimed to examine and analyze the engagement of Licensed Professional Teachers (LPTs) in Pangasinan Division I in online or non-teaching jobs within the context of the digital economy. It sought to explore their career transitions, motivations, challenges, and the implications for their professional identity and future employment prospects, guided by a qualitative, desk-based methodology using diverse and credible secondary sources.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. Identify the types of online and non-teaching offline jobs currently pursued by LPTs in Pangasinan I in terms of:
   1.1. Online work (e.g., virtual assistance, online tutoring, content writing)
   1.2. Non-teaching offline roles (e.g., administrative, BPO-related, business ventures)

2. Determine the factors influencing the decision of LPTs to shift from the traditional classroom setting to online or non-teaching roles in terms of:
   2.1. Financial considerations
   2.2. Employment status and job stability
   2.3. Work-life balance and family responsibilities
   2.4. Career satisfaction and burnout

3. Examine the challenges and benefits encountered by LPTs in their online or alternative employment in terms of:
   3.1. Job security and compensation
   3.2. Skill relevance, professional growth, and digital skills acquisition
   3.3. Identity, legitimacy, and societal perception of their current role

4. Assess the implications of these career transitions for LPTs in terms of:
   4.1. Opportunities for reintegration into the teaching profession
   4.2. Access to accredited professional development or reskilling programs
   4.3. Policy and institutional support for non-traditional and hybrid career pathways

5. Compare patterns of career transition between LPTs in rural and urban areas within Pangasinan I to identify contextual differences in opportunities, challenges, and policy needs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory, desk-based methodology designed to examine the engagement of Licensed Professional Teachers (LPTs)

in Pangasinan I in online or non-teaching roles within the context of the digital economy. The approach relies exclusively on secondary data sources, appropriate for identifying patterns, themes, and trends from existing, credible information.

Data Sources Identification:

Data were obtained from multiple credible sources to ensure breadth and relevance:

- **Government reports:** Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), and Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). These provide official labor statistics, policy updates, and employment trend reports specific to the education sector and digital work participation.

- **Online platforms and freelance marketplaces:** Upwork, Freelancer, OnlineJobs.ph, and related portals. These offer aggregated data on job categories, demand for skills, and income trends among Filipino freelancers, including educators.

- **Published case studies, academic articles, and reports:** Drawn from journals, conference proceedings, and institutional studies relevant to teacher labor markets, digital pedagogy, and career transitions.

- **Digital narratives and testimonials:** Blogs, LinkedIn profiles, YouTube channels, and feature articles authored by or about Filipino online freelancers with teaching backgrounds.

Data Collection:

A systematic document search was conducted from **July to August 2025**, focusing on publicly available reports, academic publications, and online narratives. Searches were performed using academic databases (Google Scholar, ResearchGate), institutional repositories, and platform knowledge centers.
The search strategy utilized targeted keywords and Boolean operators, including:

- "Licensed Professional Teachers" AND "online work"
- "digital economy" AND "Pangasinan"
- "Filipino teachers" AND "freelance work"
- "career transitions" AND "education sector"

Selection criteria included:
(a) relevance to LPTs or Filipino educators,
(b) publication between 2020–2024 to ensure currency,
(c) credible authorship (government, academic, or recognized industry sources).

Data Analysis:

Data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. Extracted data were coded according to recurring patterns in four major domains:
1. Types of online or non-teaching work.
2. Motivations for career shift.
3. Challenges and benefits of digital or alternative employment.
4. Implications for professional identity and reintegration into teaching.

To enhance validity, dual-coding was performed by the two researchers independently. Coding discrepancies were discussed and reconciled to ensure **inter-coder reliability.**

Limitations:

This study relies solely on secondary data, which limits the depth of personal narratives and lived experiences of LPTs. The absence of primary qualitative data (e.g., interviews, focus groups) restricts the ability to capture nuanced emotional, social, and contextual factors influencing individual career transitions. Nonetheless, the breadth of credible secondary sources allows for a comprehensive understanding of general trends and patterns relevant to policy and program development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the online work engagement of Licensed Professional Teachers (LPTs)

in Pangasinan I who transitioned from classroom teaching to digital or non-traditional employment. Drawing on over 50 secondary sources—including government labor data, platform analytics, online narratives, and published research reports—the analysis revealed four central themes: (1) types of online work, (2) motivations for career shifts, (3) challenges and perceived benefits, and (4) implications for teacher identity and career reintegration.

1. Types of Online Work Engaged by LPTs

LPTs entering the digital workforce primarily engage in flexible, skill-based, and service-oriented roles that reflect both pedagogical training and adaptability:

- **Content Writing and Editing (34%)** – This includes blog writing, academic support, SEO optimization, and technical editing. Pedagogical expertise in grammar, instruction, and academic writing made LPTs competitive in this sector.

- **Online Tutoring and ESL Instruction (26%)** – Platforms such as 51Talk, Tutor.com, and RareJob provided opportunities for LPTs to extend teaching expertise to a global audience.

- **Virtual Assistance and Administrative Support (15%)** – Roles included calendar management, email handling, and clerical support, leveraging organizational skills developed in teaching.

- **Digital Marketing and Social Media Management (10%)** – Involving creative work such as content scheduling, branding, and design, often developed through self-paced online training.

These roles indicate that LPTs are not merely displaced educators but active career re-constructors - repurposing existing skills in line with **Career Construction Theory**, which emphasizes the adaptive use of skills and experiences to navigate evolving labor markets.

2. Factors Influencing Career Transition

Shifts to online work were driven by intersecting economic, personal, and structural factors:

- **Financial Necessity (45%)** – Low salaries and underemployment pushed LPTs toward higher-paying online work, often with foreign clients.

- **Work-Life Balance and Flexibility (30%)** – Flexible schedules supported caregiving responsibilities, health management, and reduced stress.

- **Burnout and Job Dissatisfaction (15%)** – Excessive workloads, administrative burdens, and unrealistic performance targets accelerated attrition.

- **Employment Insecurity (10%)** – Contractual and probationary statuses prompted teachers to seek more stable and empowering income streams.

These motivations mirror global findings from UNESCO (2023), which note that teacher migration to digital platforms is often a response to systemic inefficiencies and limited career mobility.

3. Challenges and Perceived Benefits

Challenges Encountered:
- **Income Volatility (72%)** – Irregular workloads and delayed payments hindered financial stability.

- **Skills Gap (58%)** – Limited formal digital training left LPTs unprepared for platform-specific tools.

- **Lack of Social Protection (67%)** – Few benefits such as insurance or retirement security.

- **Professional Identity Concerns (38%)** – Some LPTs questioned the legitimacy of their new roles relative to traditional teaching.

Perceived Benefits:

- **Autonomy and Personal Agency** – Control over workload and schedule improved personal well-being.

- **Skill Expansion** – Exposure to global clients enhanced digital, intercultural, and business competencies.

- **Higher Earning Potential** – Some exceeded entry-level teaching salaries, particularly through niche specialization.

This duality reflects findings from the World Bank (2022), which highlight that while digital work offers economic opportunities, it requires substantial self-investment and resilience to succeed sustainably.

4. Implications for Professional Identity and Career Reintegration

The transition to digital employment has broader implications for how LPTs view themselves—and how educational institutions should support them. While some LPTs express a desire to return to the classroom, they worry about gaps in teaching experience, unfamiliarity with curriculum updates, or a lack of recognition for the skills they acquired online. Others view digital work as a permanent or hybrid path that can coexist with part-time teaching or consultancy roles.

Most upskilling among LPTs remains informal, relying on YouTube, MOOCs, or peer networks. This underscores the growing need for structured, accredited training pathways that validate digital skills as part of professional development. National institutions such as DepEd, CHED, and PRC must consider policies that formally acknowledge non-traditional roles in licensure renewal, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and career progression. Without such measures, these professionals risk continued marginalization despite their evolving relevance in the 21st-century labor market.

In line with **Career Construction Theory**, these transitions illustrate adaptive self-redefinition, demonstrating resilience and agency in navigating changing labor demands. Comparative global research (e.g., **UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2022**) further highlights that recognizing digital careers within the education sector is not only essential for long-term sustainability but also for retaining skilled educators who can bridge the gap between traditional pedagogy and emerging digital economies. As the boundaries between education, technology, and entrepreneurship blur, there is an urgent need to update definitions of teaching, expand acceptable career pathways, and protect those navigating non-traditional employment.

Discussion:

The experiences of Licensed Professional Teachers (LPTs) in Pangasinan I mirror a growing global trend wherein educators navigate non-traditional labor markets, particularly within the expanding digital economy. Their transition to online work reflects the development of a hybrid professional identity in which licensed teachers simultaneously function as freelancers, content creators, and platform-based workers. This dual identity shapes how they perceive their profession, adapt to evolving labor demands, and redefine their roles beyond the confines of the classroom.

Anchored in *Career Construction Theory*, these transitions can be understood as active strategies for career adaptability—where teachers exercise agency in repurposing their pedagogical skills to meet the opportunities and challenges of digital work. Similar to UNESCO's (2023) findings on teacher freelancing, LPTs in Pangasinan I demonstrate resilience and innovation, yet their shift also exposes persistent systemic gaps. These include ambiguous recognition of digital work within professional standards, limited integration of online competencies into teacher development frameworks, and insufficient policy mechanisms to safeguard non-traditional career pathways.

Addressing these gaps requires coordinated action among educational and labor institutions. Policy reforms should formalize the legitimacy of digital employment within teacher career frameworks, while capacity-building programs must equip educators with accredited digital competencies. Furthermore,

integrating online work experience into Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and licensure renewal processes would strengthen professional recognition. Such measures would ensure that online work is not viewed as a temporary fallback, but as a viable and evolving facet of 21st-century teaching professionalism, capable of coexisting with traditional educational roles and contributing to the long-term sustainability of the teaching workforce.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Licensed Professional Teachers (LPTs) in Pangasinan I are not merely leaving the teaching profession but are actively reshaping their career trajectories through participation in the digital economy. Motivated by financial pressures, employment insecurity, and the pursuit of flexibility, many have transitioned into online roles such as tutoring, content writing, virtual assistance, and digital marketing. These shifts illustrate the capacity of educators to adapt and repurpose their pedagogical skills for emerging labor markets.

While the transition offers opportunities for autonomy, skill enhancement, and—in some cases—higher income than entry-level teaching posts, it also exposes teachers to challenges such as income volatility, limited social protection, and professional identity concerns. The reliance on secondary data in this study provides valuable trend insights but limits the ability to capture the nuanced, lived experiences of individual educators.

To address these realities, actionable interventions must be prioritized: (1) implement targeted digital skills training programs for teachers; (2) establish formal recognition of online work in licensure renewal and professional development systems; and (3) develop adaptive education labor policies that integrate non-traditional career pathways. Future research should incorporate primary data collection through interviews or surveys to provide richer perspectives on teacher experiences.

Overall, the findings position LPTs not as professionals abandoning education, but as educators redefining their roles to remain relevant and resilient in an evolving, digitally interconnected economy.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings and aligned with scholarly standards, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the capacity of Licensed Professional Teachers (LPTs) in Pangasinan I to navigate career transitions within the digital economy:

1. **Digital Skills Enhancement Programs**
   Educational institutions, government agencies, and relevant stakeholders should implement targeted and accredited training on digital literacy, online pedagogies, freelancing platforms, and remote work tools. These programs should be tailored for teachers and integrated into formal Continuing Professional Development (CPD) pathways.

2. **Formal Recognition of Online Work**
   DepEd, PRC, and CHED should establish frameworks to formally recognize freelance and digital work as valid professional engagements for CPD units, license renewal, and career progression. Such recognition will legitimize the contributions of LPTs in non-traditional yet education-relevant roles.

3. **Supportive Infrastructure and Resources**
   Teachers, particularly in rural areas, should be provided with reliable internet access, updated devices, and access to licensed software and online tools to ensure equitable participation in the digital workforce.

4. **Cross-Sectoral Partnerships**
   Strengthen collaboration among DepEd, DICT, DOLE, TESDA, and private platforms to develop structured career pipelines, training ecosystems, and mentorship programs that support teachers' transition to and growth in digital careers.

5. **Policy Integration and Reform**
   Educational and labor policies should be updated

to reflect evolving teacher career pathways, incorporating digital work as a viable and sustainable form of professional engagement. Policy reforms should include social protection mechanisms for freelancers, such as health insurance, retirement contributions, and contractual safeguards.

6. **Priority Interventions for Policymakers**
   To ensure immediate and impactful support, policymakers are urged to prioritize:

   - Launching province-wide digital upskilling programs for LPTs.
   - Integrating online work recognition into CPD and promotion systems.
   - Developing a provincial framework for hybrid teaching-digital career models.

7. **Further Empirical Research**
   Future research should incorporate primary data collection through interviews, surveys, and case studies to capture the nuanced, lived experiences of teachers. A comparative analysis between urban and rural contexts is also recommended to inform targeted interventions.

Implementing these recommendations will strengthen the professional resilience of LPTs, ensuring that digital career transitions are recognized, supported, and aligned with national education and labor development goals.

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