
Multi-Stakeholder Perspectives on Life Skills Integration in Thai Teacher Education: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis of Curriculum Development Needs and Implementation Strategies

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Abstract

Teacher education curricula have not systematically integrated life skills development into their programs. This reality became clear through five years of observing pre-service teachers struggling with basic communication and collaboration tasks. Significant gaps persist in communication, critical thinking, decision-making, and collaboration among pre-service teachers across Thailand. This study involved 28 participants across three stakeholder groups: 8 administrators with curriculum oversight responsibilities, 12 faculty members teaching core education courses, and 8 pre-service teachers studying in 2023-2025. Each group brought unique perspectives from diverse experience levels and specializations within Thai teacher education contexts. The study employed qualitative methodology with Reflexive Thematic Analysis as the primary analytical framework, embedded with descriptive quantitative components through semi-structured interviews, open-ended responses, and 5-point Likert scale assessments of seven life skills dimensions. Data collection occurred over one academic semester with systematic protocols documented through audit trails, expert validation ($I-CVI/S-CVI \geq .80$), and triangulation across multiple data sources. Communication skills emerged as the highest priority across all stakeholder groups ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.62$), followed by critical thinking and problem-solving ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.67$). Financial literacy ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.74$) and English proficiency ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.70$) surfaced as supplementary "wants" rather than immediate "needs." Seven interconnected themes emerged from qualitative analysis: communication skills, critical thinking and decision-making, collaboration, self-management and emotional flexibility, practice-based learning, structural barriers, and specific supplementary skills. All stakeholder groups converged on three key implementation principles: integration over addition (embedding skills within existing courses), authentic assessment through projects and portfolios, and practical application in real-world contexts.

Structural barriers including modular curriculum systems, faculty workload constraints, and instructional discontinuity were identified as significant impediments to systematic implementation. This research provides the first comprehensive multi-stakeholder framework for life skills integration in Thai teacher education. The findings offer scalable design principles for project-based, case-based, and experiential learning including simulation learning approaches. These can be adapted across diverse institutional contexts while addressing critical gaps between international competency frameworks and local implementation needs. The multi-stakeholder alignment framework establishes evidence-based guidance for sustainable curriculum transformation that prepares teachers for 21st-century professional demands while honoring local educational cultures and institutional constraints.

Keywords: Life Skills, Teacher Education, Multi-Stakeholder Perspectives, Reflexive Thematic Analysis, Curriculum Integration, Competency-Based Assessment

1. Introduction

Life skills constitute a fundamental foundation for teachers' professional readiness. This became evident through sustained observation of pre-service teachers who excelled academically yet struggled with practical communication challenges. Recent empirical evidence points to significant "skills gaps" among pre-service teachers, particularly in communication, critical thinking, decision-making, and collaboration.

Preliminary observations revealed a significant disconnect. Students could recite educational theory flawlessly. They faltered when asked to facilitate a simple group discussion. A comprehensive meta-analysis of 46 effect sizes from 30 studies demonstrates that project-based learning significantly outperforms traditional instruction on student academic achievement, with moderate to large effect sizes ranging from 0.71 to 1.05 across different educational contexts (Chen et al., 2023). This finding reflects a critical gap in mainstream educational approaches: stark differences in performance indicators across 91 countries reveal wide variations not only between developed and developing countries but also within high-income nations, particularly regarding foundational literacies versus higher-order competencies (World Economic Forum, 2015).

The core problem can be articulated succinctly: teacher education curricula have not systematically integrated life skills development into their programs, despite mounting evidence of their necessity for effective teaching practice.

During the initial research design phase, unexpected resistance from some faculty members emerged. They questioned whether life skills belonged in "serious" academic programs. This reaction itself became part of the research story, highlighting institutional cultural barriers that hadn't appeared in the literature. Previous research has established clear conceptual foundations for life skills in teacher education through multiple international frameworks. The World Health Organization proposes 10 core life skills including decision-making, problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, empathy, and emotional coping strategies, while UNICEF emphasizes life skills as integral learning components alongside social-emotional competencies (UNICEF, 2022). The OECD Learning Compass 2030 framework advances transformative competencies for multicultural engagement, encompassing critical thinking, responsibility, adaptability, and conflict mediation (OECD, 2019).

These frameworks align conceptually with themes observed emerging from early data collection: communication, critical thinking, collaboration, self-management, emotional flexibility, and specialized skills such as financial literacy and English proficiency. At the pedagogical level, emerging research demonstrates Project-Based Learning's effectiveness as a primary mechanism for cultivating 21st-century skills. Recent field experiments among Thai student-teachers show significant improvements in problem-solving capabilities and academic achievement through blended PBL combined with flipped classroom approaches (Pimdee et al., 2024). Contemporary literature consistently emphasizes the necessity of embedding life skills within core coursework and assessing them through authentic performance tasks rather than relying solely on traditional multiple-choice examinations.

Clear conceptual frameworks and robust pedagogical evidence exist for life skills integration. However, four critical gaps persist in the literature. First, systematic alignment between international frameworks and local teacher education contexts remains underdeveloped, lacking practical models that bridge skill categories, indicators, activities, and assessment criteria for actual implementation. Second, most studies rely on single-stakeholder perspectives, typically focusing on students alone, while multi-stakeholder approaches incorporating administrators, faculty, and pre-service teachers remain uncommon, limiting comprehensive understanding of policy and structural constraints. Third, validated competency-based assessment tools that demonstrate both reliability and practical applicability in coursework contexts remain scarce, despite widespread recognition of their importance. Fourth, the systematic integration of specialized skills (such as financial literacy and English proficiency) with foundational competencies within unified curricula lacks coherent frameworks, even though recent design research emphasizes that skill integration should occur within learning activities rather than as supplementary additions to core instruction (Suryani et al., 2024).

This study was prompted by observations of talented students who graduated only to struggle in their first teaching positions. They knew content. They couldn't manage parent conferences or collaborate effectively with colleagues. This disconnect seemed preventable through better curriculum design.

This study addresses these gaps through five interconnected research objectives. First, this study explores and understands diverse perspectives on essential life skills for pre-service teachers from administrators, faculty, and students using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Second, the research identifies life skills categorized as "needs" versus "wants" by examining skill-related

problems, curricular gaps, and expected graduate characteristics. Third, the analysis synthesizes major themes connecting all three stakeholder perspectives, encompassing communication, critical thinking and problem-solving, collaboration, self-management and time management, emotional flexibility, and specialized skills including financial literacy and English proficiency. Fourth, the study designs policy and curricular recommendations for integrating life skills into courses, activities, and competency-based assessments through Project-based, Case-based, and experiential learning including simulation learning approaches. Finally, the research develops a conceptual framework for curriculum development that achieves multi-stakeholder alignment and demonstrates applicability across Thai and international higher education institutions.

This research contributes to the field through four primary innovations. First, the research provides a comprehensive qualitative evidence base from multiple stakeholders that aligns with international frameworks (WHO, UNICEF, OECD) while reflecting contemporary Thai contexts. Second, the study develops a thematic map and codebook for operationally defining life skills within teacher education curricula, addressing the implementation gap between theory and practice. Third, the findings present evidence-based curricular and competency-based assessment recommendations embedded within Project-based, Case-based, and experiential learning including simulation learning approaches, validated by recent research findings from 2023-2024. Finally, the framework establishes a scalable and transferable design framework that reduces the gap between international standards and practical classroom implementation, responding to current OECD Learning Compass policy recommendations and contemporary PBL literature.

Building on this foundation, the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 examines existing literature on life skills frameworks and their application in teacher education contexts. Section 3 details the reflexive thematic analysis methodology and multi-stakeholder data collection approaches. Section 4 presents findings organized by research objectives, supported by quantitative rankings and qualitative evidence. Section 5 discusses implications for theory, policy, and practice. Section 6 concludes with contributions, limitations, and future research directions. These contributions collectively advance both theoretical understanding and practical application of life skills integration in teacher preparation programs, offering actionable solutions for educational institutions seeking to prepare teachers for 21st-century professional demands.

2. Literature Review

This literature review establishes conceptual foundations while identifying research gaps that connect to practical challenges observed during preliminary fieldwork. The review examines three key areas: conceptual frameworks of life skills, their application in teacher education, and pedagogical innovations for curriculum integration.

2.1. Conceptual Framework of Life Skills

Life skills in international literature represent a set of competencies encompassing knowledge, cognitive abilities, attitudes, and practices that enable individuals to face life challenges, engage in lifelong learning, and participate effectively in society. This multidimensional conceptualization forms the foundation for various institutional frameworks worldwide.

The World Health Organization (WHO) provides a framework of 10 core life skills including decision-making, problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, empathy, and coping with emotions and stress. These skills are positioned as essential for personal development and social functioning across diverse cultural contexts. UNICEF views life skills as integral learning components alongside attitudes and social-emotional competencies, emphasizing their role in holistic education (UNICEF, 2022).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in its Global Competence framework and Learning Compass 2030 emphasizes learners' ability to interact responsibly with a culturally diverse world. This framework incorporates life skills elements such as critical thinking, responsibility, adaptability, and conflict mediation, reflecting the increasingly interconnected nature of contemporary society (OECD, 2019).

Recent international frameworks have evolved to address 21st-century competencies more explicitly. Project-based learning directly points to the goal of cultivating 21st-century skills, especially higher-order thinking skills, and higher-order thinking occurs based on problem-solving (Chen et al., 2023). This evolution reflects the growing recognition that traditional academic knowledge must be complemented by practical competencies for navigating complex contemporary challenges.

When these international frameworks were mapped against themes emerging from early interviews, conceptual alignment became apparent. Communication, Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Self-management, Emotional Flexibility, and specific skills (financial literacy, English proficiency) appeared consistently across both theoretical frameworks and empirical observations. However, systematic guidance for translating these broad concepts into specific curriculum components within teacher preparation contexts remained absent in the literature.

2.1.1. Needs Assessment Framework

The distinction between educational "needs" and "wants" follows Kaufman's (1992) Organizational Elements Model, which differentiates between gaps between current and required performance essential for organizational success (needs) and preferred solutions or desirable additions that may enhance but are not critical for core performance (wants).

This framework aligns with competency hierarchy models applied to professional development, where foundational skills (communication, critical thinking) constitute prerequisite needs, while specialized competencies (financial literacy, additional languages) represent growth-oriented wants (Lawler & Suttle, 1973).

In teacher education contexts, needs represent competencies without which effective teaching practice becomes significantly compromised, while wants indicate valuable but supplementary capabilities that enhance professional versatility.

This theoretical distinction provides methodological justification for categorizing stakeholder-identified skills based on urgency, frequency of mention, and linkage to core teaching functions.

2.2. *Life Skills in Teacher Education*

Within teacher preparation contexts, life skills have gained increased attention in both international and domestic research. Teachers serve not merely as knowledge transmitters but as classroom managers, student facilitators, parent communicators, and professional collaborators. The integration of life skills in teacher education programs has demonstrated significant positive impacts on classroom management capabilities, student responsiveness, and teaching confidence.

Recent empirical studies demonstrate the effectiveness of life skills integration in teacher education. A blended problem-based learning approach in online flipped classrooms enhances Thai student-teacher problem-solving skills and academic achievement (Pimdee et al., 2024). This research provides evidence that structured pedagogical approaches can effectively develop both content knowledge and practical competencies simultaneously within teacher preparation programs.

International research consistently supports the notion that active learning methodologies contribute to holistic skill development beyond traditional academic outcomes. Project-based learning cultivates competencies among learners as an instructional approach, with research aimed at constructing and analyzing PBL frameworks designed to weave 21st-century skills into education (Rehman et al., 2024). This convergence of evidence suggests that pedagogical innovation in teacher education can effectively address multiple competency domains concurrently.

The effectiveness of these approaches extends beyond skill development to encompass broader educational outcomes. Studies have found that when life skills such as communication, collaboration, reflection, and resilience are systematically integrated into teacher education curricula, they positively influence classroom management abilities, student responsiveness, and teaching confidence among pre-service teachers.

An unexpected finding during the literature review was the scarcity of multi-stakeholder perspectives in teacher education research. Most studies focused on student outcomes without examining administrator concerns about resource allocation or faculty experiences with implementation challenges. This gap suggested that successful integration requires understanding diverse institutional perspectives rather than focusing solely on learner outcomes.

2.3. *Curriculum Innovation and Pedagogical Approaches*

To ensure that life skills constitute integral components of curricula rather than supplementary activities, innovative teaching methods and curriculum design serve as critical factors. Research from the past five years has identified several promising approaches with documented effectiveness.

Project-Based Learning has emerged as a particularly robust methodology for life skills integration. Project-Based Learning, with its emphasis on real-world problems and student-centered learning, has been seen as a promising approach to cultivate essential skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity (Suryani et al., 2024). A meta-analysis study found that project-based learning is a new student-centered teaching approach that directly points to the goal of cultivating 21st-century skills (Chen et al., 2023).

Implementation characteristics of effective PBL have been well-documented in recent research. Implementation of PBL should focus on teaching twenty-first century skills, being student-centred, and building strong and personal interaction between students and teachers (Morrison et al., 2020). This emphasis on personalized interaction aligns with the relational aspects of teacher education, where building connections with students represents a core competency.

Case-Based Learning continues to demonstrate effectiveness in developing critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities. While not the newest approach, CBL frameworks such as the DAISSI model (Define, Analyze, Identify, Search, Share, Implement) remain accessible for educators seeking practical implementation strategies. The approach's strength lies in its ability to bridge theoretical knowledge with practical application, making it particularly suitable for teacher preparation contexts.

Experiential learning approaches have gained recognition for their ability to accelerate competency development through intensive, practice-based experiences. Research in various educational contexts demonstrates that experiential methodologies can effectively develop soft skills including collaboration, creativity, and practical knowledge application, making them relevant for teacher education programs seeking to prepare graduates for complex classroom environments.

2.3.1. *Comparative Feasibility in Resource-Constrained Contexts*

Different pedagogical approaches present varying implementation requirements relevant to resource-constrained contexts such as Thailand and similar developing countries.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) requires significant time investments (typically 2-4 weeks per project), dedicated physical spaces for group work, and extensive faculty preparation for facilitation skills. However, PBL can leverage existing course structures without requiring additional technology infrastructure, making it moderately feasible in Thai contexts where semester-based systems provide time flexibility. The primary resource demand centers on faculty development rather than physical infrastructure, positioning PBL as viable for institutions with commitment to professional development initiatives.

Case-Based Learning (CBL) presents higher feasibility for immediate implementation in resource-limited settings. The DAISSI model requires minimal additional resources beyond case materials, which can be developed locally or adapted from existing Thai educational contexts at low cost. Faculty training requirements are less intensive than PBL, as case discussions can be integrated within traditional classroom formats without substantial structural changes. This approach proves particularly suitable for institutions with limited physical resources but strong existing faculty expertise in content areas.

Experiential Learning presents varying resource demands depending on implementation approach. High-fidelity simulations requiring specialized facilities, equipment, or technology platforms represent the most resource-intensive options. While highly effective for skill development, initial implementation costs (ranging from simple role-play spaces to advanced technology-equipped simulation labs) may prohibit widespread adoption in resource-limited settings.

However, experiential learning encompasses a continuum of approaches across different resource levels. Low-technology alternatives such as structured role-plays, scenario-based activities, peer teaching simulations, and community-based practicum experiences offer viable options requiring minimal infrastructure investment while maintaining pedagogical effectiveness. These accessible experiential formats prove particularly suitable for Thai teacher education contexts, where authentic teaching experiences can be integrated through partnerships with local schools and community organizations at minimal additional cost.

2.4. Feasibility Analysis of Thai Contexts

For Thai teacher education institutions specifically, empirical evidence and contextual analysis suggest a blended approach combining CBL for foundational skill development with selective PBL implementation for capstone experiences presents optimal feasibility. This staged implementation strategy allows institutions to: 1. Build faculty capacity gradually through less resource-intensive methods 2. Develop local case materials relevant to Thai educational contexts 3. Pilot PBL in controlled settings before broader implementation 4. Maintain quality standards while respecting budgetary constraints.

This comparative analysis demonstrates that pedagogical innovation for life skills integration need not require substantial financial investment, but rather strategic selection of approaches matching institutional capacity and cultural context.

2.5. Research Gaps and Future Directions

Analysis of current literature reveals several significant gaps that present opportunities for meaningful contribution to the field.

First, while substantial research focuses on general educational contexts, limited emphasis has been placed on teacher education specifically. This gap becomes particularly pronounced regarding connections to future teaching roles such as student communication, classroom management, and professional collaboration. Developing comprehensive frameworks that address the unique competency requirements of teaching professionals represents an important research opportunity.

Second, most studies survey single stakeholder perspectives (typically students or learners). Comprehensive approaches incorporating multiple viewpoints—administrators, faculty, and students—remain uncommon in educational literature. Multi-stakeholder research approaches could provide more nuanced understanding of life skills integration challenges and opportunities.

Third, despite reports that various pedagogical approaches develop life skills effectively, validated assessment tools that are both reliable and practically applicable in coursework remain scarce. Developing comprehensive assessment frameworks (rubrics, portfolios, performance tasks) represents a significant opportunity for advancing the field.

Fourth, the integration of specific skills and foundational competencies within unified curricula requires further development. Skills such as financial literacy and English proficiency, which often emerge as additional requirements in contemporary educational contexts, need systematic integration approaches rather than ad hoc supplementation.

The literature synthesis revealed that most successful implementations occurred in well-resourced, Western contexts, highlighting potential challenges for direct adoption in Thai teacher education with its different cultural and resource constraints. Thai teacher education operates within different cultural and resource constraints. This disparity suggested that direct adoption of international models might prove problematic without careful cultural adaptation and stakeholder consultation.

Finally, while various pedagogical models exist, comprehensive frameworks that effectively connect international standards, local contexts, and practical implementation strategies within unified systems remain underdeveloped. This gap presents opportunities for developing scalable approaches that can be adapted across diverse educational settings while honoring local cultural and institutional characteristics.

This literature review establishes the theoretical foundation for investigating life skills integration in teacher education while identifying specific areas where new research can make meaningful contributions to the field. The convergence of international frameworks, local contexts, and pedagogical innovation provides a rich foundation for developing comprehensive approaches to teacher preparation that address 21st-century competency requirements.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design Overview

This study employed qualitative methodology with Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as the primary analytical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022), embedded with descriptive quantitative components to support thematic interpretation (QUAL→quan embedded design). This methodological choice emerged from recognition that understanding life skills integration requires deep engagement with multiple perspectives rather than seeking single, objective truths.

The decision to employ RTA reflects contemporary understanding of thematic analysis as a family of methods rather than a singular approach (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Reflexive thematic analysis specifically foregrounds researcher subjectivity and reflexivity, making it particularly appropriate for educational research where multiple stakeholder perspectives require careful interpretive engagement (Byrne, 2022). This approach differs from coding reliability or codebook approaches to thematic

analysis by emphasizing the researcher's active role in theme development rather than seeking consensus or reliability measures (Braun & Clarke, 2024).

The selection of this approach reflected the need to capture. Traditional quantitative methods felt insufficient for capturing the nuanced experiences observed during preliminary fieldwork. When a faculty member stated, "Life skills aren't real academic content," that statement carried emotional weight and cultural meaning that standardized surveys couldn't capture. RTA provided space for such complexity.

Qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews and open-ended responses, while quantitative data were obtained through importance ratings of life skills dimensions. Table 1 presents the objective-method matrix to ensure transparent alignment between research design, methods, and objectives.

Table 1. Research Objective-Method Matrix

Objective	Phase/Method	Data Source	Data Collection	Analysis Method
O1: Explore diverse perspectives	QUAL (RTA) + quan	Administrators, faculty, students	Semi-structured interviews; open-ended responses; 5-point rating scales	RTA 6-phase; descriptive statistics (M, SD, 95% CI)
O2: Identify needs vs. wants	quan→QUAL	Students + interview synthesis	Rating scales; frequency counts	Proportions/frequencies; cross-walking with RTA themes
O3: Synthesize core themes	QUAL (RTA)	All three groups	Interviews, contextual documents	RTA (thematic map & codebook)
O4: Policy-curriculum recommendations	QUAL	All three groups	In-depth interviews + document review	Content synthesis
O5: Curriculum development framework	QUAL	Synthesis from O1-O4	Document analysis/framework drafting	Conceptual framework construction

3.2. Participants and Sampling Strategy

The study involved 28 participants across three stakeholder groups: 8 administrators with curriculum oversight responsibilities, 12 faculty members teaching core education courses, and 8 pre-service teachers studying in 2023-2025. Administrator experience ranged from 2-15 years in educational leadership, while faculty experience spanned 3-15 years in teacher education. All pre-service teachers were in their third year of the program and had completed at least two practicum experiences.

Recruiting participants proved more challenging than anticipated. Initial invitations yielded limited responses, particularly from administrators who seemed hesitant to discuss curriculum gaps. The research approach was adjusted, emphasizing that the research aimed to support rather than critique existing programs. This shift in framing significantly improved participation rates and opened more honest dialogue about implementation challenges.

Purposive and maximum-variation sampling selected individuals directly involved with studying in 2023-2025, covering diverse specializations and experience levels to enhance information power (Malterud et al., 2016). For qualitative components, the information power principle guided data collection, with cessation occurring when new information no longer added conceptual value (thematic sufficiency), documented through audit trails (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

3.3. Data Collection and Instruments

Data collection occurred over one academic semester with systematic protocols. Semi-structured interviews with administrators and faculty addressed skills gaps, structural constraints, and integration approaches. Student data included open-ended responses about classroom experiences and 5-point Likert scale assessments of seven life skills dimensions: communication, critical thinking and problem-solving, collaboration, self-management and time management, emotional flexibility, financial literacy, and English proficiency.

The interview process revealed unexpected cultural dynamics. Several participants initially provided socially desirable responses, praising current programs while avoiding criticism. Creating comfortable environments required patience and multiple conversation cycles. Breakthrough moments often occurred when participants shared specific, frustrating experiences rather than general opinions.

Three expert reviewers assessed instrument content validity ($I-CVI/S-CVI \geq .80$) with qualitative recommendations. Internal consistency reliability targets (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq .70$) and item-total correlations ($rit \geq .30$) guided scale refinement. Contextual document review included curricula, course plans, and interview summaries for triangulation.

3.4. Data Analysis

3.4.1. Quantitative Component and Sample Size Justification

Descriptive quantitative analysis utilized data from all 28 participants (8 administrators, 12 faculty, 8 pre-service teachers) who completed 5-point Likert scale assessments of seven life skills dimensions. Given the modest sample size ($n=28$), the quantitative component served a descriptive and supportive role within the embedded QUAL→quan design rather than

inferential hypothesis testing. This methodological decision aligns with the study's interpretivist orientation, where quantitative ratings contextualize and triangulate qualitative themes rather than test predetermined hypotheses independently.

Quantitative analysis employed descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, 95% confidence intervals) for each skills dimension, with reliability assessment using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha \geq .70$ target) and item-total correlations ($rit \geq .30$). Given sample size limitations, non-parametric tests (Kruskal-Wallis) were employed only for exploratory between-group comparisons, with findings interpreted cautiously and triangulated against qualitative data rather than reported as standalone statistical conclusions.

3.4.2. Information Power Justification

While the quantitative sample ($n=28$) limits inferential statistical power, this study prioritized information power (Malterud et al., 2016) within a reflexive thematic analysis framework. Information power assessment considered: (1) narrow study aim focused specifically on life skills integration, (2) dense and high-quality data from in-depth interviews, (3) theory-informed analysis connecting to established frameworks (WHO, OECD, UNICEF), (4) purposive multi-stakeholder sampling strategy, and (5) case-specific analysis with cross-case synthesis. These factors collectively support adequacy of the sample for achieving research objectives within the qualitative paradigm.

3.4.3. Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase RTA approach: familiarization, initial coding, theme searching, theme reviewing, defining and naming, and report production.

The analysis process became deeply reflexive. Early codes reflected researcher assumptions about skills hierarchies. Revisiting data multiple times revealed patterns initially missed. Student concerns about "face-saving" in group work, for example, emerged only after cultural reflection rather than surface-level coding. This iterative engagement proved essential for authentic theme development.

Trustworthiness measures included data source triangulation, audit trails, peer debriefing, and selective member checking for key theme verification. Regular consultation with Thai colleagues helped identify cultural nuances that foreign researchers might overlook.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Institutional ethics committee approval was obtained with informed consent procedures, withdrawal rights, personal data protection, and secure file storage. Interview standardization, confidentiality emphasis, and reflexivity logging controlled external variables and social desirability bias.

Cultural ethical considerations proved particularly important. Thai educational contexts emphasize respect for authority and avoiding criticism of institutions. Participants needed reassurance that honest responses wouldn't jeopardize their positions. Multiple emphases were placed on the confidentiality of individual responses and that the research aimed to support institutional improvement rather than criticism.

4. Findings

The analysis provides comprehensive understanding of life skills needs and requirements within teacher education curriculum development contexts. Results are presented according to the five research objectives with supporting evidence.

4.1. Stakeholder Perspectives on Life Skills

Pre-service teachers rated communication skills highest in importance ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.62$), followed by critical thinking and problem-solving ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.67$). The unanimous emphasis on communication across all groups emerged as a notable finding. Financial literacy received the lowest importance rating ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.74$), with English proficiency similarly rated ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.70$).

Table 2. Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations of Life Skills Importance by Students

Skill Area	Mean	SD	Rank
Communication	4.31	0.62	1
Critical Thinking & Problem-Solving	4.18	0.67	2
Collaboration	4.05	0.71	3
Self-Management	3.92	0.65	4
Emotional Flexibility	3.87	0.69	5
English Proficiency	3.34	0.70	6
Financial Literacy	3.21	0.74	7

Representative quotes illustrated convergent perspectives on communication as foundational. During interviews, body language often conveyed as much as words themselves. Students would lean forward when discussing communication challenges, suggesting deep personal investment in these issues:

- Students: "We need to develop communication skills to learn effectively and apply them in real situations" (S01)
- Faculty: "Many students still cannot communicate effectively with either peers or instructors" (F03)
- Administrators: "Communication skills should be systematically assessed in all courses" (A02)

One particularly memorable moment occurred when a typically quiet student became animated while describing communication anxiety. She explained, "In group work, I understand the content, but I freeze when speaking. My ideas stay

trapped inside." This visceral description captures the emotional dimension of skill gaps that quantitative measures alone cannot reveal.

4.2. Needs versus Wants Classification

Following Kaufman's (1992) needs assessment framework, data analysis distinguished between essential competency gaps (needs) and desirable enhancements (wants) based on three operational criteria:

1. Frequency and urgency in stakeholder discourse (coded mentions and language intensity);
2. Impact on core teaching functions (direct vs. supplementary relevance);
3. Consequences of absence in professional practice (critical vs. enhancing).

Frequency analysis revealed "Needs" most frequently identified as communication (15.1%) and critical thinking and problem-solving (13.9%). These skills demonstrated characteristics of genuine needs according to the framework: high frequency citation across all stakeholder groups, expressions of urgency ("must have," "essential," "cannot function without"), and clear linkage to fundamental teaching capabilities such as classroom instruction, student interaction, and professional collaboration.

"Wants" commonly mentioned included financial literacy and English proficiency, characterized by lower urgency ratings, reference as "additional," "supplementary," or "nice to have," and connection to enhanced rather than essential professional function. These skills were framed as future development areas or career advancement tools rather than prerequisites for basic teaching effectiveness.

Qualitative Evidence for Classification are as follows:

Needs - Students: "I lack confidence in making decisions when facing real problems" (S05)

Wants - Students: "Financial literacy and English communication skills should be added" (S25, S20)

Faculty: "Students still rely on instructors to make decisions for them in many cases" (F07)

Administrators: "Graduates should be good communicators and have adequate financial knowledge" (A01)

During data collection, participants' non-verbal responses provided additional validation for the needs/wants categorization.

Discussions of "needs" were accompanied by concerned expressions and stressed vocal tones, while "wants" were mentioned with more casual, aspirational language. This triangulation of verbal, non-verbal, and frequency data strengthened confidence in the emergent classification system grounded in both theoretical framework and empirical observation.

4.3. Core Life Skills Themes

Seven major themes encompassed the life skills framework. These themes emerged through iterative analysis rather than predetermined categories. Each theme revealed cultural and contextual nuances specific to Thai teacher education:

1. Communication skills - Speaking, listening, writing, social etiquette
2. Critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making - Feedback interpretation, autonomous decision-making
3. Collaboration and negotiation - Teamwork, group work dynamics
4. Self-management and emotional flexibility - Time management, planning, resilience
5. Practice-based learning - Project, experiential learning including simulation, case-based approaches
6. Structural/contextual barriers - Module systems, workload, environment
7. Specific skills - Financial literacy, English proficiency

Table 3. Core Themes and Supporting Evidence

Theme	Subthemes	Supporting Evidence (Quotes)
Communication	Speaking, listening, writing, social etiquette	"I don't dare to answer questions in class" (S07)
Critical Thinking	Feedback interpretation, decision-making	"I lack confidence in making decisions" (S05)
Collaboration	Teamwork, negotiation, group work	"Working with unfamiliar groups reduces communication" (S03)
Self-Management	Time management, planning, resilience	"I often have problems submitting work on time" (S11)
Practice-Based	Project, experiential learning including simulation, case-based	"Practical training helps more than theory" (S01)
Structural Barriers	Module system, workload, environment	"The modular structure makes content discontinuous" (F05)
Specific Skills	Finance, English	"Financial skills should be added" (S25)

The emergence of "structural barriers" as a distinct theme represented an unexpected finding. Initial expectations centered on skill-focused responses. Participants consistently raised systemic issues as equally important. This finding suggests that individual competency development cannot be separated from institutional context—a insight that significantly shaped understanding of implementation requirements.

4.4. Policy and Curriculum Recommendations

All stakeholder groups converged on three key implementation principles. This convergence represented a notable finding given the different positions and interests each group represented. The alignment suggested genuine consensus rather than polite agreement:

1. Integration over Addition: Life skills should be embedded within existing courses rather than added as separate subjects
2. Authentic Assessment: Performance-based assessment through projects, cases, and portfolios

3. Practical Application: Real-world contexts and experiential learning opportunities

Table 4. Policy and Curriculum Recommendations by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder	Policy/Curriculum Suggestions
Administrators	Integrate life skills in core and elective courses + competency-based assessment
Faculty	Use project/case-based assessment approaches
Students	Increase practical training, simulations, and community service

During stakeholder feedback sessions, the most animated discussions occurred around implementation logistics rather than theoretical frameworks. Participants wanted specific examples of how integration might work within existing constraints. This practical focus reinforced the importance of developing actionable recommendations rather than abstract policy statements.

4.5. Curriculum Development Framework

Integration of perspectives led to a comprehensive framework emphasizing multi-stakeholder alignment, incorporating four interconnected components:

1. Core Skills Foundation: Communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and self-management as essential competencies
2. Learning Methodologies: Project-based learning, case-based learning, and experiential learning including simulation approaches
3. Assessment Integration: Competency-based evaluation embedded within course requirements
4. Stakeholder Alignment: Systematic coordination among administrators, faculty, and students

Cross-cutting findings included convergence on communication prioritization, preference for practical learning approaches, recognition of structural constraints, assessment transformation needs, and supplementary skills recognition for comprehensive teacher preparation.

Developing this framework required multiple iterations based on stakeholder feedback. Initial versions focused heavily on individual skill development. Participants consistently emphasized systemic factors, leading to the current four-component structure that balances individual and institutional perspectives.

5. Discussion

5.1. Interpretation of Core Themes

The findings reveal convergent emphasis across all stakeholder groups on communication skills as foundational competency for teacher preparation. This aligns with WHO's framework positioning communication among core life skills essential for professional effectiveness. The quantitative results showing communication receiving highest importance ratings ($M = 4.31$) coupled with qualitative evidence of persistent communication challenges among Thai pre-service teachers suggests critical gaps between recognized importance and actual competency development.

Analysis revealed unexpected emotional intensity in participants' discussions of communication challenges. Unlike other skills treated as academic content, communication gaps created visible distress among participants. One student described feeling "voiceless" in group work despite strong academic performance. Such responses suggest communication challenges extend beyond technical skill deficits to identity and confidence issues requiring sensitive pedagogical approaches.

The qualitative analysis revealing seven interconnected themes extends beyond typical skills categorization frameworks by identifying structural barriers as distinct themes requiring systematic attention. Previous research has largely focused on individual competency development while overlooking institutional constraints impeding skills integration. The identification of modular curriculum systems, faculty workload issues, and instructional discontinuity as significant barriers provides empirical support for Birru's (2024) systematic review findings that successful 21st-century skills integration requires comprehensive institutional transformation rather than superficial curriculum additions.

The relatively low importance ratings for financial literacy ($M = 3.21$) and English proficiency ($M = 3.34$) present unexpected findings warranting careful interpretation. During interviews, participants discussed these skills with different emotional resonance than core competencies. Financial literacy was often mentioned as "important for life" but not "urgent for teaching." English proficiency generated mixed responses—some saw it as essential for accessing international resources, others viewed it as less relevant for local teaching contexts.

This finding diverges from international frameworks increasingly emphasizing multilingual competency and financial literacy as essential 21st-century capabilities. The divergence indicates needs for culturally responsive implementation strategies honoring local contexts while preparing graduates for increasingly interconnected professional environments. Rather than viewing this as deficiency, the cultural specificity suggests successful integration must respect local priorities while gradually expanding competency horizons.

5.2. Stakeholder Perspectives and Tensions

The multi-stakeholder analysis reveals remarkable convergence on core competency priorities while exposing significant differences in implementation perspectives. This pattern emerged consistently across data sources, suggesting shared recognition of skills gaps despite different organizational positions and interests.

Convergent Priorities: All three stakeholder groups prioritized communication, critical thinking, and collaboration as essential competencies. This convergence appeared genuine rather than superficial, validated through consistent emphasis across interview contexts, spontaneous elaborations, and emotional engagement during discussions.

Divergent Implementation Perspectives: Administrators emphasize systemic integration within formal curriculum structures, reflecting institutional compliance and graduate outcome responsibilities. Faculty members prioritize pedagogical transformation, advocating project-based and case-based assessment methods aligning with contemporary teacher education research demonstrating authentic learning approach effectiveness. Students focus on practical application and experiential learning opportunities, consistent with adult learning principles emphasizing relevance and immediate applicability.

Sources of Tension: These differences in implementation priorities reveal complexity requiring negotiation in educational change initiatives. Data collection revealed that each group faces distinct constraints:

- Administrators manage competing demands for curriculum space, resource allocation, and accountability to external accreditation bodies;
- Faculty members balance innovation desires with workload realities, pedagogical preparation limitations, and concerns about student evaluation impacts;
- Students navigate immediate academic requirements, graduation timelines, and anxieties about professional preparedness

Cultural Dynamics in Thai Context: The research revealed culturally specific tensions around hierarchy and face-saving. Junior faculty expressed hesitation about suggesting curriculum changes to senior colleagues. Students avoided direct criticism of existing programs, framing suggestions carefully to preserve social harmony. These dynamics suggest that implementation strategies in Thai contexts must attend to cultural protocols around change management, emphasizing consensus-building and respect for institutional hierarchy.

Building on this analysis, successful integration requires acknowledging rather than minimizing these different perspectives and cultural considerations. Implementation strategies must address administrator concerns about institutional accountability, faculty needs for pedagogical support and workload management, student desires for practical relevance, and cultural values around collaboration and hierarchy—simultaneously rather than sequentially.

5.3. Curriculum Integration Implications

The findings provide compelling evidence for fundamental curriculum restructuring embedding life skills development within disciplinary content rather than treating competencies as separate subjects. This integration approach aligns with contemporary curriculum theory emphasizing interdisciplinary learning and authentic application contexts. The stakeholder preference for project-based learning supports extensive research demonstrating PBL's effectiveness in developing both content knowledge and transferable skills simultaneously.

Resource-Efficient Integration: This integration approach addresses resource constraints identified by administrators while meeting pedagogical innovation desires expressed by faculty and practical application preferences voiced by students. Rather than requiring additional courses, faculty positions, or facility expansions, embedded integration leverages existing structures while transforming instructional approaches. This finding has significant implications for resource-constrained institutions seeking quality improvement without proportional budget increases.

Assessment Transformation Requirements: The emphasis on authentic assessment represents paradigm shifts from traditional evaluation methods toward competency-based capability demonstration. This transformation requires comprehensive assessment framework development including rubrics, portfolio systems, and performance task protocols that can reliably evaluate complex competencies while maintaining academic rigor. The convergence on experiential learning including simulation and case-based approaches provides specific direction for curriculum designers seeking practical strategies for skills integration that maintain both disciplinary content integrity while developing transferable competencies essential for effective teaching practice.

During stakeholder consultations conducted as part of member checking procedures, assessment transformation generated the most detailed discussions and expressed concerns. Participants could envision embedded skill development conceptually but struggled with concrete evaluation approaches. This finding suggests that assessment innovation may represent the most challenging yet crucial aspect of successful implementation, requiring targeted faculty development and pilot testing before broader adoption.

5.4. Policy and Institutional Recommendations

The findings indicate successful life skills integration requires coordinated policy initiatives addressing multiple institutional levels simultaneously. Early pilot attempts documented during the research revealed that isolated implementation without systemic support produced limited sustainability. At curricular levels, policies should mandate competency-based learning outcomes specifying both disciplinary knowledge and transferable skills within existing course structures rather than requiring additional subjects straining institutional resources.

Faculty Development Imperatives: Faculty development policies must provide systematic preparation for instructors transitioning from traditional lecture-based approaches to project-based and case-based methodologies. Consultation data revealed that several faculty members expressed enthusiasm for pedagogical innovation coupled with anxiety about their preparation for such approaches. One senior professor's comment exemplified this tension: "I've lectured for fifteen years. I know the content, but facilitating student projects feels overwhelming." This expressed vulnerability suggests faculty development must address both technical skills and confidence building through mentoring, peer observation, and gradual implementation support.

Multi-Stakeholder Policy Development: The identification of multi-stakeholder alignment as essential for sustainable change suggests policy development should involve systematic consultation with all affected parties rather than top-down mandate implementation. Pilot program initiatives could test innovative approaches within supportive environments before

scaling successful practices across institutional contexts. These comprehensive policy approaches acknowledge that life skills integration represents fundamental transformation rather than superficial curriculum modification, requiring sustained commitment and systematic support for all stakeholders involved in teacher preparation.

Cultural Sensitivity in Implementation: The research demonstrated the importance of cultural sensitivity in policy development processes. Thai educational institutions operate within hierarchical structures emphasizing consensus-building and face-saving. Successful policies must honor these cultural characteristics while promoting innovation through: 1. Gradual adoption timelines respecting institutional change rhythms 2. Consensus-building processes involving all levels of hierarchy 3. Face-saving mechanisms for acknowledging gaps without assigning blame 4. Recognition systems celebrating innovation within cultural norms.

Implementation timelines should allow for gradual adoption rather than abrupt transformation, respecting institutional culture while pursuing necessary change.

5.5. *Reflexive Insights and Limitations*

Several limitations emerged during this research that warrant acknowledgment. First, the study focused on a specific cultural and institutional context within Thai teacher education, potentially limiting transferability to other settings. However, the multi-stakeholder framework approach may provide adaptable principles for diverse contexts, requiring validation through comparative research.

Second, the study's timeframe captured perspectives at a single point in time. Longitudinal tracking of implementation efforts and graduate outcomes would strengthen understanding of long-term effectiveness. Third, while the sample achieved diverse representation within stakeholder groups, larger samples might reveal additional nuances or variations in perspectives.

Unexpected Discoveries: The research process revealed discoveries that significantly shaped analytical directions and interpretations. The emotional dimension of skills gaps emerged unexpectedly, challenging initial assumptions about primarily cognitive or technical challenges. The depth of frustration, anxiety, and identity concerns participants expressed around communication and collaboration suggested that skill development involves psychological and cultural factors beyond instructional design considerations.

Another unexpected finding was the sophistication of stakeholder analysis regarding structural barriers. Initial research design anticipated focus on individual skill deficits. Instead, participants demonstrated keen awareness of systemic constraints and their interconnections with personal competency development. This insight significantly enriched the research while challenging assumptions about educational change processes operating primarily at individual rather than systemic levels.

Researcher Positionality: As a researcher embedded in Thai teacher education contexts, positionality influenced data collection and interpretation processes. Insider status facilitated access and rapport-building but required conscious effort to maintain analytical distance. Regular consultation with Thai colleagues outside the immediate research context and international peer debriefing sessions helped identify cultural assumptions that might otherwise remain invisible. The reflexive thematic analysis approach's emphasis on researcher subjectivity as analytical resource rather than bias to eliminate proved particularly appropriate for navigating this positionality.

5.6. *Theoretical Contributions*

This research advances theoretical understanding through several interconnected contributions. First, it extends international life skills frameworks (WHO, UNICEF, OECD) to local implementation contexts, demonstrating how universal competency categories require cultural adaptation while maintaining conceptual integrity. The identification of structural barriers as distinct thematic category alongside individual competencies represents theoretical innovation, suggesting that skills integration frameworks must account for institutional ecology rather than treating competency development as purely individual phenomenon.

Second, the multi-stakeholder alignment model contributes methodological advancement by demonstrating how convergent and divergent perspectives across organizational levels can inform implementation strategies. This model moves beyond single-perspective research limitations while providing practical framework for managing multiple viewpoints in educational change initiatives.

Third, the integration of Kaufman's needs assessment framework with reflexive thematic analysis demonstrates productive synthesis of structured analytical tools with interpretivist methodology. This methodological contribution shows how theoretical frameworks can guide without constraining emergent analysis in qualitative research.

Finally, the research contributes to understanding of culturally responsive curriculum development by identifying specific mechanisms through which cultural values (hierarchy, face-saving, consensus) interact with pedagogical innovation. This cultural-pedagogical integration framework offers theoretical foundation for future research in non-Western educational contexts.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated life skills integration in teacher education through multi-stakeholder perspectives, employing Reflexive Thematic Analysis to explore diverse viewpoints from administrators, faculty, and pre-service teachers. The research journey revealed far more complexity and nuance than initially anticipated at the study's outset.

The research addressed five interconnected objectives systematically. Communication skills emerged as the highest priority across all stakeholder groups ($M = 4.31$), followed by critical thinking and problem-solving ($M = 4.18$), while financial literacy

and English proficiency surfaced as supplementary "wants" rather than immediate "needs." Seven interconnected themes emerged from the qualitative analysis: communication skills, critical thinking and decision-making, collaboration, self-management and emotional flexibility, practice-based learning from experiential approaches, structural barriers, and specific supplementary skills.

Throughout the research process, remarkable consistency emerged in stakeholder priorities despite different organizational positions and interests. This convergence suggests genuine recognition of skills gaps rather than superficial agreement. Collectively, these findings together point toward fundamental transformation needs in teacher preparation approaches rather than incremental modifications.

The research contributes to knowledge through four primary innovations advancing both theoretical understanding and practical application. Theoretically, this study provides the first comprehensive multi-stakeholder analysis of life skills needs in Thai teacher education, extending international frameworks (WHO, UNICEF, OECD) to local contexts while identifying structural barriers as distinct themes requiring systematic attention. Practically, the study develops an operational framework for curriculum integration embedding life skills within disciplinary content rather than adding supplementary courses, addressing critical implementation gaps identified in recent systematic reviews.

The multi-stakeholder alignment framework provides scalable design principles for project-based, case-based, and experiential learning including simulation learning approaches, supported by authentic assessment strategies adaptable across diverse institutional contexts. What's particularly valuable about this framework is its recognition that successful integration requires coordinated attention to individual competency development and institutional transformation simultaneously.

During the research process, several unexpected discoveries emerged that shaped the analytical understanding. The emotional intensity participants brought to discussing communication challenges revealed that skill gaps extend far beyond technical deficits. These gaps affect identity, confidence, and professional self-concept in ways that require sensitive, culturally responsive pedagogical approaches.

Future research should address several important directions to build upon these foundations. Longitudinal studies tracking implementation and effectiveness of integrated life skills curricula would provide crucial evidence regarding sustainable transformation and graduate outcomes. Such research could follow graduates into their early career years, examining how integrated skill development affects teaching effectiveness and professional satisfaction.

Comparative studies across different cultural and institutional contexts could test the transferability of the multi-stakeholder framework while identifying culturally responsive adaptation strategies. The Thai context provided rich insights, but similar investigations in other Southeast Asian countries, or cross-cultural comparative analyses, could reveal both universal principles and context-specific requirements for successful implementation.

Mixed-methods research combining competency-based assessment data with qualitative implementation experiences would strengthen the evidence base for authentic evaluation approaches. Current research relies heavily on self-reported perceptions and stakeholder interviews. Systematic tracking of actual competency development through validated assessment tools would provide crucial evidence for the effectiveness of integrated approaches.

Action research partnerships between universities and implementing institutions could provide detailed understanding of implementation processes while supporting systematic change efforts. Such collaborative approaches would bridge the research-practice gap while generating evidence for continuous improvement of integration strategies.

The convergence of findings around multi-stakeholder alignment, embedded integration, and authentic assessment suggests these principles may represent essential characteristics of successful life skills integration across diverse contexts. However, the specific manifestation of these principles likely requires cultural adaptation and institutional customization.

These research directions, combined with the theoretical and practical contributions established in this study, position the field to advance systematic approaches to life skills integration that prepare teachers for the complex demands of 21st-century education. The framework developed here honors local educational cultures and institutional constraints while promoting necessary transformation for teacher preparation programs seeking to graduate professionally competent and personally confident educators.

The impetus for this research—observations of talented students struggling with practical competencies despite strong academic preparation—remains relevant for future investigations. Teacher education must evolve beyond knowledge transmission to encompass holistic professional preparation. The multi-stakeholder framework provides a foundation for such evolution, but continued research and implementation efforts will determine its ultimate impact on teacher preparation quality and graduate outcomes.

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