Exploring the Development of Superstitions and Rituals Among Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) Reviewees

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ABSTRACT

The Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) in the Philippines is a high-stakes assessment that affects education graduates' employment opportunities and professional development. To cope with the pressure, LET reviewees often turn to superstitions and rituals rooted in cultural beliefs and peer interactions. This study aimed to investigate the development of these practices among LET reviewees, focusing on cultural, social, and psychological factors. A qualitative phenomenological study involving in-depth interviews with 12 reviewees from a northern Philippines review centre identified five themes: (a) from cultural inheritance to personalised rituals, (b) from social exposure to ritual ownership, (c) from experimentation to ritual consolidation, (d) from anxiety management to self-belief reinforcement and (e) from emotional triggers to regulatory rituals driving the adoption of these practices. The findings highlight the significant role of cultural and emotional factors in shaping these coping mechanisms, which provide psychological comfort and control, aiding in stress management and enhancing exam performance. Educational institutions should integrate traditional practices with modern stress management techniques to support LET reviewees effectively. This research contributes to educational psychology by offering insights into LET reviewees' cultural and psychological coping mechanisms, informing policies and practices to better support candidates in high-stakes exams.

1. Introduction

In the Philippines, the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) is a critical assessment for education graduates entering the teaching profession. The Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) evaluates candidates' competencies in general education, professional education, and specialized subjects (Cadosales et al., 2023; Figuerres, 2013). Passing the LET is a requirement for practicing as a teacher and a key indicator of teacher education programmes' quality (Cabahug, 2023). The examination's significance extends to employment opportunities and professional development within the Department of Education (DepEd) (Fiscal & Roman, 2022). As a result, candidates often develop coping mechanisms, including superstitions and rituals, to prepare for this high-stakes examination.

The intense pressure and anxiety surrounding the LET drive reviewees to adopt superstitions and rituals. Cultural beliefs and peer interactions fuel these practices, as candidates seek to boost their confidence and perceived chances of success (Acosta & Acosta, 2016). In high stakes testing environments, the fear of failure prompts examinees to grasp at any perceived advantage, regardless of its rationality (Cadosales et al., 2023). The competitive nature of the LET and the high-stakes outcomes further reinforce reliance on these psychological and cultural coping mechanisms (Balanquit et al., 2023). Understanding these phenomena is crucial for addressing underlying issues of stress management and cultural influences on behavior.

Exploring how these superstitions and rituals develop and their impact on examination preparation and performance provides valuable insights for educators and policymakers. Understanding their psychological and cultural roots can help

design better support systems for LET reviewees, improving their performance and well-being (Abdulmajid, 2024; Ayyub & Siraji, 2025). This highlights the need for a holistic approach that considers both academic and emotional needs (Fiscal & Roman, 2022). By addressing these aspects, educational institutions can create a more supportive environment, reduce examination-related stress and anxiety, and promoting more effective and humane education (Acosta & Acosta, 2016).

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Theories and Concepts Related to Superstitions and Rituals

Superstitions and rituals are distinct, despite often overlapping in practice. Superstitions involve beliefs that certain actions, objects, or events can influence outcomes illogically, often rooted in cultural traditions (Scheibe & Sarbin, 1965). Rituals are structured, repetitive actions with symbolic meaning, aiming to evoke a specific psychological or emotional state (Beit-Hallahmi, 2018). In the Philippines' LET, both superstitions and rituals serve as coping mechanisms for examinees to manage stress and uncertainty (Ogilvie et al., 2018).

Superstitions and rituals among LET enquirees can be explained through three theoretical frameworks. Behavioral theories attribute superstitions to operant conditioning, where a coincidental correlation between an action and a positive outcome reinforces the belief in its efficacy (Rudski & Edwards, 2007). Cognitive theories suggest superstitions result from cognitive biases, such as overestimating associations between actions and outcomes under uncertainty (Scheibe & Sarbin, 1965). Cultural theories highlight the role of societal norms and cultural transmission in perpetuating superstitions and rituals, which are passed down through generations and

reinforced by communal behaviors (Chau, 2006).

When exploring cultural aspects of superstitions and rituals, one must consider the social and environmental contexts in which they occur. Cognitive niche construction theory views these practices as adaptive strategies that enhance cognitive abilities through environmental manipulation (Bertolotti, 2016). For LET examinees, rituals like specific study routines or pre-examination ceremonies create a structured environment, reducing anxiety and enhancing focus, thereby serving as cognitive tools to manage examination stress (Maranise, 2013). A multidisciplinary approach provides a comprehensive understanding of their roles and effectiveness in high stakes testing environments.

1.1.2 Previous Studies on Examination-Related Superstitions and Rituals

Research has extensively examined superstitions and rituals among students, particularly during examinations. Rudski and Edwards (2007) found that students use these coping mechanisms to manage examination-related anxiety and uncertainty. The use of these practices increases with perceived task difficulty and high stakes, indicating a psychological need for control in stressful situations. Saenko (2005) similarly found that superstitious beliefs are common amongst college students, especially during finals, serving as an emotional safeguard against negative outcomes.

Cultural and contextual factors significantly shape superstitious practices. Alexander and Costandius (2020) found that cultural beliefs influence students' superstitions and religious rituals in South African higher education, reflecting deeper cultural narratives and post-colonial perspectives. This highlights the need for culturally sensitive education. Similarly, Howlett (2022) showed how local traditions and beliefs persist in China's National College Entrance Examination, the Gaokao, despite official secularism. These findings stress the importance of considering cultural contexts when analyzing superstition and ritual development amongst examinees. Research has explored the link between superstitions, rituals, and examination performance across various educational and cultural contexts. Olatoye (2008) found that superstitious beliefs significantly contribute to cheating amongst Nigerian secondary school students, undermining efforts to promote academic integrity. Similarly, Albas and Albas (1989) observed that university students often engage in "magical practices" before examinations, revealing the idiosyncratic nature of these behaviors in modern education. These studies demonstrate the complex interplay between cultural, psychological, and situational factors driving superstitions and rituals amongst students facing high-stakes examinations.

1.1.3 Superstitions and Rituals in Various Educational Contexts

Superstitions and rituals in education vary significantly across cultures and systems. In South Africa, Alexander and Costandius (2020) found that students' beliefs are deeply intertwined with their educational experiences, reflecting broader societal and post-colonial influences. These beliefs provide psychological comfort and a sense of control amidst academic pressures, playing a crucial role in students' educational journeys. Similarly, in China, Howlett (2022) observed that despite the official secular stance, students preparing for the Gaokao engage in religious and superstitious practices, such as pilgrimages, to mitigate examination stress.

Superstitions and rituals are pervasive in education globally, as shown by comparative studies. For example, Mukherjee and Shaikh (2022) found that university athletes in India commonly engage in superstitious behaviors, believing they enhance performance.

Similarly, superstitions serve as coping mechanisms for stress and uncertainty in high-stakes environments. Lu (2023) compared superstitions in Russian and Chinese educational contexts, revealing similar practices despite cultural differences. These studies indicate that superstitions and rituals are universal, influenced by cultural, psychological, and situational factors.

Case studies in different educational settings demonstrate how rituals shape student behavior and outcomes. Henry (1992) compared an elite preparatory school and a Waldorf school in the US, showing how distinct philosophies influence ritual nature and function. At the preparatory school, rituals reinforced an instrumental-rational worldview, while at the Waldorf school, they promoted a holistic and aesthetic perspective. Similarly, Vain (2002) explored Argentine school rituals, highlighting their role in inculcating social values and cultural norms. These examples illustrate the diverse manifestations of superstitions and rituals across educational systems, emphasizing the need for cultural and institutional contextualization.

1.1.4 Psychological Mechanisms Underlying Superstitions and Rituals

Superstitions and rituals are closely tied to the stress and anxiety of examination preparation. In high-stress situations, individuals often turn to superstitious behaviors to cope with anxiety and regain control (Keinan, 2002). This is especially true for students facing uncertainty and pressure to perform. Superstitious rituals provide a structured way to manage emotions, offering comfort and a sense of predictability in unpredictable situations (Brevers et al., 2011). Superstitions and rituals persist due to reinforcement and habit formation. When a superstitious action coincides with success, it's positively reinforced, increasing the likelihood of repetition in future stressful situations (Schippers & Lange, 2006). Over

time, these actions become ingrained habits, performed to maintain the illusion of control and reduce anxiety. Cognitive biases, such as pattern perception or assumed causality, further entrench these behaviors (Rudski & Edwards, 2007). This cycle of reinforcement and bias sustains superstitions and rituals among individuals.

Furthermore, the social and cultural contexts of learned behaviors cannot be ignored. Superstitions and rituals are often passed down through generations, woven into community practices and social identity. This cultural transmission reinforces their importance and persistence (El-Islam, 1967). The interplay of psychological mechanisms, reinforced behaviors, and cultural influences sustains superstitions and rituals in educational contexts, particularly during high-stakes examinations.

1.1.5 Cultural and Social Influences

Cultural beliefs and traditions significantly shape superstitions and rituals among LET reviewees. In many cultures, these practices are deeply embedded in social norms and transmitted through generations as cultural heritage (Chau, 2006). For instance, Chinese businesses use Feng Shui to manage uncertainty, illustrating how traditional beliefs are integrated into modern contexts (Ogilvie et al., 2018). Similarly, Filipino LET reviewees adopt local rituals to cope with the high-stakes examination, finding psychological comfort and communal identity in these practices.

Social dynamics among LET reviewees perpetuate shared superstitions and rituals. Peer influence is key, as individuals conform to group behaviors to gain acceptance (Swidler, 1986). This is evident in advice networks, where examinees share strategies and rituals believed to boost success (Baker-Doyle & Petchauer, 2015). These networks create a collective belief system, where peers' success stories reinforce the perceived

efficacy of these practices. As a result, social reinforcement within these networks not only sustains these behaviors but also integrates them into the broader preparation culture.

Superstitions and rituals in educational contexts are shaped by a complex interplay of cultural and social factors. Research shows that these practices are not just irrational behaviors but are deeply rooted in community culture and social fabric (Atkinson & Whitehouse, 2011). They help individuals cope with psychological pressures, such as licensure examinations. Recognizing these cultural and social influences can inform educational institutions and policymakers on how to better support students. By integrating cultural sensitivities and social dynamics, support systems can reduce anxiety and enhance reviewees' overall well-being.

1.1.6 Existing Gap in the Literature

Despite foundational research into examination-related superstitions in academic settings (Rudski & Edwards, 2007) and the cultural transmission of beliefs (Chau, 2006), empirical studies investigating how superstitions and rituals emerge and spread among candidates preparing for the Licensure Examination for Teachers in the Philippines remain scarce. Research on the LET in the Philippines has examined the perceived value of licensure for teacher quality (Acosta & Acosta, 2016), the relationship between licensure outcomes and teaching performance (Cadosales et al., 2023), and the influence of academic staff qualifications on pass rates (Balanquit et al., 2023), yet none of these studies explores how candidates develop, share, and adapt superstitions and rituals within their cultural and social networks. Thus, this study seeks to investigate the development of superstitions and rituals among individuals preparing for the LET. The primary research question driving this inquiry is: How do superstitions

and rituals develop among Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) reviewees?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design

The researchers employed qualitative research, which explores how people perceive reality differently and examines non-numerical data, such as personal experiences (Stiles, 1993). Specifically, this study used phenomenology to uncover how individuals assign meaning to social phenomena in their daily lives. Phenomenology's role is to investigate the essence of consciousness from a first-person perspective (Thomasson, 2005). Interviews were conducted to gather firsthand accounts from LET reviewees about how superstitions and rituals develop among them.

The use of tables in this phenomenological study is a deliberate methodological choice to improve clarity and analytic transparency. Established scholars, including Creswell and Poth (2018), Patton (2015), and Tracy (2019), have emphasized that summarizing qualitative data visually can assist readers in grasping complex patterns without undermining narrative depth. In this research, tables serve to organize information about participants and themes, allowing for more accessible presentation of findings. By supplementing, rather than replacing, the detailed first-person accounts, tables support methodological rigor and facilitate the reader's understanding, consistent with best practices in qualitative inquiry.

2.2 Setting and Participants

The study involved LET reviewees enrolled in a single review center in the northern Philippines. This review center was intentionally chosen as the research setting because it creates a concentrated, communal environment where high-stakes exam preparation can intensify and transmit

superstitious beliefs and ritualistic behaviors. Focusing on one review center enabled a close examination of how shared anxieties and institutional practices may reinforce such phenomena among future teachers. Although other groups, such as independent reviewees or teacher graduates outside review centers, could yield additional perspectives, this context was prioritized to foreground the collective aspects of superstition and ritual.

Twelve participants were purposively selected in line with established phenomenological methodology. Recommendations by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2012) as well as Creswell and Poth (2017) support small, information-rich samples, usually between three and ten participants, to enable in-depth analysis. The sample size was determined prior to data collection, with the research team continuously monitoring for data saturation. By the twelfth interview, no new themes or significant insights were emerging, which indicated that the phenomenon had been thoroughly explored within this group.

Inclusion criteria required participants to self-identify as practitioners and believers of superstitions and rituals, to be actively enrolled in the selected LET review center, and to have completed a teacher education program. Purposive sampling also considered demographic and educational diversity, along with participants' willingness and ability to articulate their experiences in depth. These criteria were established to ensure relevance and the potential for rich accounts. While broader or alternative criteria, such as including participants from other regions or educational pathways, could offer complementary perspectives, the current approach was selected to maintain coherence within the phenomenological framework.

The choice of the northern Philippines was informed by practical accessibility for the researchers and by the region's dense concentration of LET review centers, which reflects a distinct local context for exam preparation. The study recognizes that cultural and institutional factors in this region may shape the forms and meanings of superstitions and rituals. Consequently, findings are not intended to be statistically generalized. Using detailed description, the study supports transferability to similar settings. Readers are encouraged to consider the contextual boundaries when applying insights beyond this study's geographic and institutional scope.

2.3 Instrumentation

A semi-structured, in-depth interview protocol was developed to collect qualitative data on how superstitions and rituals emerge among Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) reviewees. The questions were constructed based on existing theory and prior research in educational psychology and ritual behavior, with conceptual grounding from works such as Bandura (1986), Vyse (2014), and Damisch et al. (2010). Three experts in the field reviewed the draft protocol, and their feedback was used to refine the clarity and relevance of each question. The protocol primarily featured open-ended questions, allowing participants to describe their beliefs and experiences in their own words, with probing questions included to clarify or deepen responses as needed.

Interviews were scheduled at times convenient for participants, with confidentiality maintained throughout the process. Each interview lasted at least 45 minutes and included a follow-up session for clarification and validation of the collected information. With participant consent, audio recording and note-taking were used to ensure accurate data capture. If participants preferred not to be recorded, detailed notes were taken instead, prioritizing their comfort and autonomy. This combination of methodological rigor and ethical care

ensured the collection of rich, trustworthy qualitative data.

2.4 Data Explication and Analysis

The interview data were transcribed and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2013) thematic analysis, following their six-phase process. The research team adopted an entirely inductive approach, ensuring that all coding categories and themes were derived directly from the data. Coding was conducted collaboratively, with team members holding regular discussions and maintaining analytic memos. Themes were developed and refined through iterative discussions and were cross-checked against the dataset for coherence. To support rigour, the team used thick description and reflexive journalling throughout the process, documenting analytic decisions and maintaining transparency.

Aligned with established qualitative research conventions, tables were incorporated to increase analytic clarity and transparency (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2019). The tables offer concise overviews of participant characteristics and summarize emergent themes, allowing readers to follow the analytic progression of the study. Rather than replacing the narrative depth central to phenomenological research, these visual representations are intended to support transparency, auditability, and accessibility while retaining the richness and context of first-person accounts. This approach is consistent with contemporary qualitative standards and enhances the overall methodological rigor of the study.

3. Results and Discussion

This study explores how superstitions and rituals emerge among Filipino LET reviewees, addressing a significant knowledge gap in the cultural and psychological factors influencing high-stakes exam preparation. While previous research has examined superstitions and rituals in various student groups, it has neglected LET reviewees in the Philippines. The study found that LET reviewees' superstitions and rituals develop through five main themes: from cultural inheritance to personalized rituals, from social exposure to ritual ownership, from experimentation to ritual consolidation, from anxiety management to self-belief reinforcement and from emotional triggers to regulatory rituals. These themes reveal how cultural heritage, social dynamics, and personal actions shape these practices, providing comfort, stress relief, and control. Driven by feelings of doubt and anxiety, these rituals serve as coping mechanisms for managing exam-related stress and anxiety.

3.1 From Cultural Inheritance to Personalized Rituals

This theme delves into the cultural and familial origins of superstitions and rituals among LET reviewees. Participants shared generational practices, such as butchering a chicken to inspect its gallbladder and lighting candles and incense for guidance and blessing. These beliefs are shaped by family traditions and passed down from elders. Rooted in cultural heritage, these practices play a significant role in shaping LET reviewees' superstitions and rituals, offering a sense of connection to their cultural roots and a framework for navigating exam-related anxieties.

The development of these traditional superstitions and rituals results from ongoing cultural transmission, observation, and personal adaptation. LET reviewees are typically introduced to these rituals during their formative years as they observe elders engaging in practices that carry both symbolic and practical significance. Repeated exposure establishes these rituals as familiar responses to significant life events, including licensure examinations. As reviewees face examination-related pressures, they often move from passive observers to active participants, modifying and personalizing rituals according to their own beliefs and

emotional needs. The influence of family and community not only encourages the adoption of these behaviors but also reinforces their value, ensuring their continued relevance. In this way, traditional practices evolve over time and are reinterpreted to fit the contemporary experiences of LET reviewees, providing psychological comfort and a sense of agency when confronting uncertainty.

Table 1. From Cultural Inheritance to Personalised Rituals: Codes, Codes Descriptions and Excerpts

Codes	Codes Descriptions	Excerpts
Butchering chicken	Ritual involving the slaughter of a chicken to check the condition of the gall bladder for omens.	"In my family, a superstition and ritual before taking the LET exam involves butchering a chicken and checking the condition and positioning of its gall bladder." [Participant 5]
Gall bladder condition	Assessing the gall bladder's size and position to interpret good or bad signs.	"In the Kanyaw ritual (a cultural practice practiced by the indigenous communities in the Cordilleran region of the Philippines), a successful outcome is indicated by a large gall bladder firmly attached to the liver of the butchered pig or chicken." [Participant 8]
Candle lighting	Lighting candles as a symbolic act for guidance and blessing before the exam.	"Lighting three candles, symbolizing 'God Bless Me,' is a family tradition before important events like exams. We believe a steadily burning flame signifies success." [Participant 1]
Incense lighting	A family ritual held before or after board exams to foster calm, focus, and mark success.	"Lighting incense is a ritual tradition in our family, especially during times like this, both leading up to and after a board exam." [Participant 7]

Table 2. From Social Exposure to Ritual Ownership: Codes, Codes Descriptions and Excerpts

Codes	Codes Descriptions	Excerpts
Friend's influence	Adopting superstitions and rituals based on friends' practices and beliefs.	"My friend has many unexplainable stories and intriguing beliefs. While some may be true, others are questionable. She's managed

		to convince me to believe in some of these unconventional ideas, which has been an interesting experience." [Participant 4]
Elder brother's success	Being persuaded by a sibling's success story linked to specific rituals.	"A classmate shared that his brother performed a ritual and believed superstitions before an exam, and surprisingly, his brother passed. My classmate convinced me to try it too, and I figured, why not? It couldn't hurt." [Participant 12]
Review center's rituals	Following rituals suggested by the review center, such as specific preparatory acts.	"According to the review center, turning your chair around before sitting down can help you pass the LET exam. It's a harmless habit that might just prevent you from failing and having to retake the test." [Participant 6]
Following rumours	Believing and adopting practices based on widespread rumours among peers.	"I heard rumours that certain beliefs can help with passing the LET exam. When I saw that it worked for others, including siblings of friends, I decided to give it a try. I figured, why not believe and see if it helps me pass the exam too?" [Participant 10]

The role of traditional practices as coping mechanisms is well supported by theories of cultural continuity, which suggest that such practices offer psychological stability and reassurance (Barnes, 1998). Ritualistic behaviors, such as butchering a chicken to inspect its gall bladder, are rooted in cultural belief systems that connect physical and spiritual realities, thereby providing a sense of control in unpredictable circumstances (Schippers & Lange, 2006). Lighting candles and incense for protection and guidance accords with studies demonstrating the psychological benefits of rituals for managing stress and anxiety (Xygalatas et al., 2019). These findings highlight how cultural heritage shapes contemporary beliefs and behaviors, supporting stress reduction and improved concentration for LET reviewees.

Although traditional practices can serve as effective coping mechanisms for examination anxiety, overreliance on them may limit the use of evidence-based study techniques and potentially affect academic performance. Educational institutions can respond by offering workshops that integrate cultural practices with modern stress management strategies. Mentorship programs can assist reviewees in balancing traditional beliefs with effective study methods. By promoting open dialogue about these rituals, institutions can support students in navigating examination-related anxieties in a holistic and informed manner.

3.2 From Social Exposure to Ritual Ownership

This theme explores how external influences shape superstitions and rituals among LET reviewees. Peers, family, and institutional figures significantly impact the adoption of these rituals, with friends' experiences, family success stories, and review center-promoted rituals contributing to their behaviors. Community rumors and shared stories reinforce these practices, highlighting the role of social learning and conformity in shaping beliefs.

The development of superstitions and rituals among LET reviewees is shaped by active engagement with their social environment. Reviewees are often introduced to these beliefs through repeated exposure to the behaviors, advice, and narratives of peers, siblings, or mentors from review centers. As these stories accumulate, particularly those associated with successful examination outcomes, they acquire legitimacy and emotional resonance. Individuals who feel uncertain or anxious about the licensure examination may be more receptive to these practices, viewing them as low-risk strategies that could provide a sense of control in the face of unpredictable outcomes. Over time, the repetition of these practices, together with reinforcement from others who share similar experiences, leads to the internalization of rituals as a natural aspect of examination preparation. This process is iterative, involving observation, imitation, experimentation, and adaptation, so that each reviewee personalizes rituals in accordance with both group norms and individual needs.

Superstitions and rituals among LET reviewees are frequently influenced by social factors, whereby individuals adopt behaviors observed in peers or family members to gain a sense of control and reduce anxiety in uncertain situations (Rudski & Edwards, 2007). The influence of significant others, such as siblings and friends, plays a crucial role in reinforcing these behaviors through

shared beliefs and perceived successes (Scheibe & Sarbin, 1965). Additionally, review centers that promote particular rituals further institutionalize these practices, embedding them within the culture of review and enhancing their perceived legitimacy (Maranise, 2013).

While social influences can provide comfort and a sense of preparedness, excessive reliance on non-scientific rituals may undermine the use of evidence-based study strategies. Educators and review centers should endeavor to understand these social dynamics and address them through targeted interventions.

Effective programs can facilitate open discussion about superstitions and their psychological effects, while also promoting critical thinking so that reviewees can more easily distinguish between practices that support academic performance and those that may be less effective.

3.3 From Experimentation to Ritual Consolidation

This theme explores the unique rituals LET reviewees adopt to boost their exam success. Participants engage in personalized practices, such as having pencils sharpened by a previous passer, avoiding certain actions, and wearing specific underwear for luck. These idiosyncratic rituals reflect a desire for control and agency amidst the uncertainty of the high-stakes exam.

Rooted in cultural traditions and shared amongst peers, these rituals symbolically transfer luck and help reviewees avoid jeopardizing success.

Despite appearing illogical to outsiders, these actions hold significant meaning and provide comfort, highlighting the strong cultural influence and the need for emotional comfort in managing exam-related anxiety.

Table 3. From Experimentation to Ritual Consolidation: Codes, Descriptions and Excerpts

Codes	Codes Descriptions	Excerpts
Sharpening pencils	"Having pencils sharpened by someone who has achieved success in the exam to transfer."	"The review center shared a pre-exam ritual: have a LET passer sharpen your pencils, preferably someone who is intelligent and successful. This could bring you good luck on exam day." [Participant 2]
Avoiding looking back	"Not looking back at the examination venue to avoid failure or retaking the examination."	"The review center advised us to avoid looking back at the examination room as we left. According to them, doing so might cause us to fail the examination. It may seem unusual, but it's a harmless precaution to take." [Participant 9]
Avoiding washing hair	"The belief that washing one's hair will cause reviewed knowledge to be forgotten."	"I read in a magazine about a LET passer who believes that taking a bath or washing her hair before the exam could erase all her revised material from her mind. Instead, she advises eating sticky foods to attract good luck. I researched online and found that many other examinees share this belief and have tried it." [Participant 3]
Wearing red or white underwear	Wearing specific colored underwear is believed to bring luck.	"A reviewer at the center claimed that wearing red or white underwear brings good luck. I researched online and found that several passers, including a high-achiever, credited their success to wearing red underwear during the exam." [Participant 11]

These specific rituals emerge through a combination of personal experimentation, peer influence, and cultural adaptation. LET reviewees often learn about such practices from stories shared by previous examinees, advice from peers and mentors, or media sources. By engaging in actions such as having their pencils sharpened by a successful passer or selecting particular colors of clothing, examinees transform

anxiety into a set of manageable routines. Through repeated performance, these rituals become internalized and integrated into individual preparation, reinforced by both personal belief and accounts of others' success. The process is not static; reviewees may adapt or refine their rituals over time, discarding those that do not resonate or adopting new ones as their experiences evolve. The ongoing negotiation between individual agency and broader cultural narratives demonstrates how ritual behaviors develop as responses to both personal and social needs during high-pressure academic situations.

Table 4. From Anxiety Management to Self-Belief Reinforcement: Codes, Codes Descriptions and Excerpts

Codes	Codes Descriptions	Excerpts
Boosting confidence	Feeling more confident and assured of success through rituals.	"Doing my rituals gives me confidence in passing my exams. I believe in my ability to pass, and there's no harm in having faith in myself. It's all about trusting myself." [Participant 6]
Motivation to achieve goals	Increased drive to study and succeed due to superstitions.	"My superstitions and rituals have boosted my motivation to pass the exams, and I feel more confident than ever." [Participant 1]
High confidence	Experiencing elevated confidence levels while performing rituals.	"My self-confidence just boosts while I'm doing my rituals. I can't explain why, either. But I already feel that I'm going to pass this exam." [Participant 3]
Positive thinking	Maintaining a positive mindset influenced by superstitions.	"I ditched worrying, which only fuels negativity, and focused on studying and believing in myself. With no harm in sight, I figured it could only help me pass my exams." [Participant 11]

The use of specific rituals, such as sharpening pencils or avoiding looking back, accords with research indicating that rituals provide a sense of control and reduce anxiety, which can enhance performance in stressful contexts (Hobson et al., 2017). Practices such as avoiding washing hair or wearing lucky colors further illustrate how personalized and culturally embedded rituals serve as psychological tools to manage stress and bolster self-confidence before important tasks (Tian et al., 2018). These behaviors foster emotional energy and a sense of belonging, supporting a focused and determined approach to achieving examination success (Olitsky, 2007).

Recognition of the strong adherence to these rituals underscores the importance of

supportive interventions to address examination-related anxiety and pressure among LET reviewees. By understanding the meanings behind such practices, educators and review centers can design stress management programs and coping strategies that complement, rather than dismiss, the cultural context of examinees. Future research should further investigate the effectiveness of these rituals in reducing anxiety and improving outcomes, thereby enabling the development of more nuanced and culturally responsive support systems.

3.4 From Anxiety Management to Self-Belief Reinforcement

This theme examines the psychological impact of superstitions and rituals on LET reviewees. These practices boost confidence and motivation, fostering a sense of preparedness and assurance. By managing stress and anxiety, they promote positive thinking and an optimistic outlook. The findings highlight the significant role of psychological factors in the development and reinforcement of these superstitions and rituals. In essence, superstitions and rituals play a crucial role in bolstering the mental well-being of LET reviewees. They provide a sense of control and agency, empowering reviewees to approach the exam with confidence and self-efficacy.

The psychological effects described above develop gradually as LET reviewees repeatedly engage with their rituals and observe positive changes in their emotional states. Examinees typically begin by seeking strategies to manage anxiety and uncertainty, experimenting with various superstitions and rituals that offer comfort or confidence. Through practice and experience, they identify which behaviors are most effective in enhancing their motivation and outlook. These ritualized acts then become reliable tools for self-regulation, providing predictable relief from stress and reinforcing feelings of agency and competence. Success

or affirmation from peers further strengthens these behaviors, making them an integral part of the examinees' preparation and psychological well-being. This ongoing adaptation illustrates how rituals are internalized not merely as traditions, but as personalized mechanisms for sustaining resilience and emotional balance in challenging academic contexts.

Emotional experiences such as doubt and nervousness frequently drive LET reviewees to adopt superstitions and rituals, providing a sense of control and predictability (Rudski & Edwards, 2007). Research confirms that ritual behaviors increase in high-stress situations, offering psychological comfort and structure (Alexander & Costandius, 2020). Belief in superstitions, even when accompanied by underlying fear, reflects their value as coping mechanisms for managing anxiety and enhancing self-confidence. Evidence shows that these rituals can reduce stress by structuring how individuals manage uncertainty, thereby maintaining emotional stability and improving performance under pressure (Brevers et al., 2011). Understanding these psychological mechanisms is essential for educators and support providers. While superstitions and rituals often enhance resilience and optimism, over-reliance on them without the balance of effective study strategies may affect long-term academic outcomes. Educational institutions should consider integrating stress management workshops that combine traditional practices with contemporary psychological techniques. Additionally, mentorship programs can be used to promote both adaptive rituals and evidence-based study habits, encouraging critical thinking and sound decision-making among LET reviewees.

3.5 From Emotional Triggers to Regulatory Rituals

This theme explores the emotional states that drive LET reviewees to adopt superstitions

and rituals. Feelings of doubt, nervousness, and stress lead to these practices, which provide comfort and control amidst exam anxiety. Participants shared how uncertainty about exams pushes them towards these rituals, which offer reassurance and a sense of agency. Despite underlying fears and anxieties, the rituals help reviewees navigate the emotional challenges of the exam preparation process.

The process through which these rituals develop is rooted in ongoing emotional challenges. LET reviewees begin by encountering heightened uncertainty and persistent pressure associated with licensure examinations. These stressors prompt the search for strategies that can restore a sense of stability or predictability. Rituals, often inspired by peer accounts or cultural narratives, become attractive options because they offer tangible actions that alleviate anxiety and structure experience. Through repetition, these practices are gradually integrated into daily routines, becoming personalized methods of emotional regulation. Success stories, whether experienced firsthand or vicariously, reinforce the value of these rituals, leading reviewees to rely on them as trusted supports during periods of self-doubt or distress. Over time, the internalization of ritual behaviors reflects both an individual adaptation to emotional strain and a collective response to the demands of high-stakes testing.

Empirical evidence supports the finding that emotional experiences such as doubt and nervousness frequently motivate LET reviewees to adopt superstitions and rituals, as these practices create a perception of control and predictability (Rudski & Edwards, 2007). This is consistent with broader research demonstrating that ritual behaviors increase under conditions of uncertainty and stress, providing psychological comfort (Alexander & Costandius, 2020). The persistence of ritual practices, even in the presence of lingering fears, highlights their role as adaptive coping mechanisms for managing anxiety and enhancing confidence. Studies have shown that rituals can significantly reduce stress by providing a structured approach to uncertainty, which helps to maintain emotional stability and improve performance under pressure (Berthomé & Houseman, 2010).

Recognizing the emotional vulnerability of LET reviewees underscores the need for comprehensive mental health support systems during examination preparation. Educational institutions and review centers should prioritize access to mental health resources and integrate evidence-based stress-reduction techniques into their programs. By normalizing open discussion about anxiety and coping, these institutions can help to reduce stigma and encourage proactive help-seeking behaviors. Supporting the development of healthy coping mechanisms, alongside fostering rigorous academic preparation, is essential to the well-being and sustained success of future educators.

Table 5. From Emotional Triggers to Regulatory Rituals: Codes, Codes Descriptions and Excerpts

Codes	Codes Descriptions	Excerpts
Doubts and nervousness	Feelings of uncertainty and anxiety about the exam.	"Despite practice, nervousness and fear remain. There's no guarantee, but I've nothing to lose, so I choose to believe." [Participant 9]

Believing despite fear	Continuing to follow rituals despite underlying fears.	"I'm adrift and worried. What am I doing? I'm stressed out, reviewing." [Participant 4]
Stress from reviewing	Experiencing stress and pressure from the preparation process.	"Instead of worrying, I studied and believed more. Believing won't harm me, and it might even help me to pass." [Participant 10]

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has provided a rigorous exploration of how superstitions and rituals develop among Filipino Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) reviewees. By drawing on a phenomenological approach, the research traced the ways in which cultural inheritance, social exposure and personal experimentation converge to shape the coping strategies of examinees navigating high-stakes assessment environments. The findings illustrate that these practices are not merely residues of irrationality but represent complex, adaptive responses rooted in family tradition, community influence and the psychological need for stability.

Across the five key themes identified, the research details a cyclical process of adoption and adaptation. LET reviewees first encounter ritual practices within their families and communities, gradually internalizing and refining them as part of their own preparatory routines. Peer influence and institutional narratives further reinforce these behaviors, leading to a spectrum of rituals ranging from communal ceremonies to highly personalized habits. These coping mechanisms consistently offer emotional comfort, strengthen self-belief, and provide a sense of agency, especially in times of heightened stress and uncertainty.

The study advances the theoretical discourse by situating the development of rituals and superstitions within wider frameworks of cultural transmission, social learning and psychological adaptation. It demonstrates

that these practices serve not only as tools for managing anxiety, but also as bridges between tradition and the contemporary demands of teacher licensure. This reconceptualization invites a more critical understanding of the ways in which cultural and psychological resources interact to support resilience among aspiring educators.

The practical implications of these findings are considerable. The research calls for a shift from deficit-based interpretations, encouraging educational institutions to recognize and engage with the positive functions of ritual and superstition. Rather than pathologising such practices, support programs should integrate them into broader strategies for academic preparation and well-being. This integration requires careful attention to cultural context, psychological need, and the evidence base for effective exam preparation.

At the same time, the study acknowledges its limitations with due transparency. The focus on reviewees from the northern Philippines, who are enrolled in formal review centers, necessarily shapes the scope and transferability of the findings. While the phenomenological method yields deep and contextually rich insights, the experiences of independent reviewees and those from other regions remain underexplored. The reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of selective recall and social desirability effects, though methodological safeguards have been used to mitigate these risks.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are offered. Educational providers should design support systems that respect and incorporate traditional rituals alongside the promotion of evidence-based study techniques. This could be achieved through workshops, mentoring, and open forums where reviewees can critically discuss both the value and limitations of their ritual practices. Teacher education programs should also embed mental health literacy and mindfulness training, recognizing that psychological support is integral to effective exam preparation. Additionally, staff and mentors must be trained in cultural competence, so they can engage with reviewees' beliefs with empathy and without prejudice.

Future research should pursue longitudinal studies that follow reviewees beyond the licensure process, examining the persistence and evolution of ritual and superstitious practices in their subsequent teaching careers. Comparative studies across other Philippine regions and international contexts are warranted, as such work will shed light on the diverse cultural logics that underpin coping strategies in education. Intervention research should also assess the impact of integrated support programs, examining their effect on candidate well-being, exam performance, and long-term resilience.

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