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Research Article

Standardizing Qualifications and Criteria for the Selection, Certification, and Evaluation of Philippine Coast Guard K9 Handlers' Instructors

Rene Leandro B. Narvasa*

Philippine Coast Guard K9 Force, Philippine Coast Guard, 1632, ML Quezon St. New Lower Bicutan Taguig City, Philippines

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*Corresponding author:

E-mail:

Narvasa.leandro@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the current qualifications of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) K9 Instructors in terms of eligibility, educational background, professional experience, rank, and training, and explores perspectives from select K9 instructors and officers of the PCG K9 Training Center on the required competencies specific to K9 instructors and the existing evaluation practices. Findings reveal that current tools for evaluation rely on generic measures and fall short in assessing behavioral competencies such as technical skills, kennel management, scenario-based training, and ethical handling of dogs. Similarly, feedback in the tool is a one-way process and is incapable of utilizing the results for the development of practice. These gaps risk mismatched qualifications, reduced instructional effectiveness, and negative impacts on student learning and ultimately on operational goals such as public safety, order, and trust. Moreover, this study highlights the best practices of the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), the Philippine Army (PA), and two private K9 providers in their K9 Instructors, handler training, selection, and evaluation. Based on these insights, the study proposes a standardized and systematized framework for selection, certification, and evaluation of PCG K9 Instructors, along with an enhanced performance tool. The findings aim to inform future improvements in PCG K9 curriculum and training standards.

Keywords: *Standardizing, Qualifications, Criteria, Certification, Evaluation, K9, Instructors*

Background

The PCG, as the nation's third armed uniformed service, includes in its duties to deploy K9 units in key operations like search and

rescue, narcotics and explosives detection, and maritime patrols. These tasks require not only well-trained K9 handlers and dogs but also a skilled team of instructors who can provide

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specialized training that meets operational needs.

Currently, the process of selecting PCG K9 Instructors greatly relies on technical skills, proven dog handling capabilities, backed up by their passion and obedience for working with animals, neglecting criteria such as eligibility or academic background, or animal science or formal education, and continuous relevant training. This selection contradicts the standards required by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), where member countries must establish education, training and learning objectives that align with content and performance skills required for assessments and applying quality standards in certification systems, training courses, and conducting assessments. In PCG, instructor roles are distinguished by tenure and experience rather than using formal criteria. This opposes what the National Police Canine Association (NCPA) considers in professionalism, where they focus on realistic and attainable certification goals for canine teams in law enforcement.

This situation reveals gaps in the PCG K9 curriculum and training and the expected qualifications of its instructors. Without the standard for selection, certification, and evaluation of PCG K9 Instructors, it challenges the accountability, transparency, and trust in the competence of the entire organization.

Hence, the study aims to propose a standardized qualification, criteria for selection, certification, and evaluation, as well as an evaluation tool for PCG K9 Instructors.

Specifically, it will answer the following questions:

1. What are the qualifications of the current PCG K9 Instructors in terms of:
 - a. Eligibility,
 - b. Educational background,
 - c. Professional experience,
 - d. Rank, and
 - e. Training
2. What are the required instructors' qualifications and essential competencies specific to K9 Instructors?
3. How does the current performance evaluation tool align with the required competencies of PCG K9 Instructors?

4. What best practices can be adapted from other K9 institutions in terms of:
 - a. Criteria for the Selection, Certification, and Evaluation of Instructors; and
 - b. Policies related to Instructors
5. Based on the findings, what standard qualifications and criteria for the selection, certification, and evaluation, and enhanced performance evaluation tool of PCG K9 Instructors can be proposed?

Methods

The study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the qualifications and criteria for selecting, certifying, and evaluating K9 instructors in the Philippine Coast Guard. Interview participants from the PCG K9 were selected from the 36 personnel who underwent document review using purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria required that participants (a) be officers or instructors actively involved in K9 handling training, and (b) have at least three years of experience for officers and five years for instructors at the PCG K9 Training Center.

Through the same sampling method, additional participants were selected as key informants, with one representative each from PDEA, PNP, PA, and two private K9 providers to offer a broader perspective.

Before instigating any research activity, explicit and informed consent was obtained from all participants, including instructors and assistants from the PCG K9 Training Center. All data collected through interviews and data analysis were treated with strict confidentiality. Participant responses were anonymized to protect their identities, and all information was securely stored. Access to identifiable data was limited solely to the researcher, ensuring that privacy and confidentiality were maintained consistently.

This study utilized interviews and document review as primary methods of data collection. The data collected from interviews underwent a systematic transcription, evaluation, and interpretation process to identify and evaluate underlying meanings, relationships, and themes within the responses. To uphold academic integrity, Turnitin was used to detect and prevent plagiarism, duplication, or unau-

thorized use of intellectual property. The results showed a 3% Similarity Index and 0% AI, further ensuring the authenticity and originality of the study. Results of the analysis were primarily presented in narrative format.

Results and Discussion

The results and discussion derived from the analysis and interpretation of the data collected in the study, based on the stated questions.

Qualifications of the current PCG K9 Instructors

The data on the qualifications of the current PCG K9 Instructors were gathered from their summary of information. This is the document review from the current K9 instructors. This provides a discussion of the qualifications they possess, such as eligibility, educational background, professional experience, rank, and training.

Table 1. Eligibility of PCG K9 Instructors

Eligibility	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Board/Bar Eligibility	5	13.89
Career Service Professional Eligibility	2	5.56
Honor Graduate Eligibility	1	2.78
No eligibility	28	77.77
Total	36	100

Some participants from PCG K9 Training Center interchange the perception of eligibility with educational background and it should be noted that academic eligibility is not a current requirement for K9 instructors with the belief of some personnel that K9 training is more on skills rather than acquisition of knowledge from traditional education. They consider one is eligible to teach after undergoing and passing certifications and specialized courses for instructors. Courses will be mentioned in the educational background qualification.

Lack of formal eligibility as a qualification for selecting PCG K9 Instructors may lower the professional standards and questions the credibility and accountability of the PCG K9 program which may affect its effectiveness in carrying out its roles and responsibilities.

Eligibility

Table 1 presents the qualifications of the 36 PCG K9 Instructors based on their eligibility. Among the 36 K9 instructors, the majority lack formal eligibility, with 28 or 77.77%, thereby creating a critical gap in the Competency-Based Recruitment and Qualification Standards (CBRQS) framework. This was followed by those who have Board/Bar Eligibility with 5 or 13.89% of the total instructors, comprising 3 criminologists, 1 midwife, and 1 teacher. The board and bar eligibility are mandatory qualification requirements for certain government positions under the Republic Act 1080, also known as An Act Declaring the Bar and Board Examinations as Civil Service Examinations. Furthermore, 2 or 5.56% have Career Service Professional Eligibility, and 1 or 2.78% have Honor Graduate Eligibility.

In contrast, a formal baccalaureate degree—a four-year college degree, is required to be eligible to join the PNP. Earning units in a master's program is considered an advantage but is not mandatory for K9 instructors. To become a K9 instructor, civil service eligibility nor licensed professional eligibility is not required but preferred. Meanwhile a participant from PDEA, noted that their agents who are currently undergoing training all have CSC professional eligibility and two of their K9 instructors are veterinarians with board eligibility.

Educational background

The diverse range of academic credentials held by current PCG K9 Instructors significantly impacts their proficiency in managing and training K9 handlers and units. Table 2 shows that the predominant degree among the

36 instructors was Engineering and Technology, held by 9 individuals or 25.00% of the total PCG K9 Instructors. Degrees in Marine Science are also prevalent, with 8 or 22.22% possessing these qualifications, while 7 or 19.44% have degrees in Criminology. Additionally, 5 or

13.89% hold degrees in the field of Teacher Education. While the remaining percentages hold degrees in the field of Education, Political Science, Mathematics, Entrepreneurship, Nursing, and Business Administration, and Psychology.

Table 2. Educational background of PCG K9 Instructors

Educational background	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Engineering and Technology	9	25.00
Marine Science	8	22.22
Criminology	7	19.44
Teacher Education	5	13.89
Political Science	2	5.56
Mathematics	1	2.78
Entrepreneurship	1	2.78
Nursing	1	2.78
Business Administration	1	2.78
Psychology	1	2.87
Total	36	100

This diversity in educational backgrounds suggests that K9 instructors bring a wide range of skills and perspectives to their roles, potentially enhancing the operational efficacy and training of K9 handlers.

Contrarily, this diversity in field of expertise may lead to inconsistency and varying set of skills and knowledge which may misalign to the competencies expected of a PCG K9 instructors.

Some participants say that educational background is of little importance, but they focus on assessing the potential to teach. Additionally, others prefer candidates with degree in education and teaching experience or a degree in veterinary science. Aside from that, they are required to complete Basic K9 Handler's Course and graduate as certified K9 Handler. Other participants say one must complete the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Model Course 6.09 and the Instructor Development Course (IDC) to become a PCG K9 Instructors.

Professional experience

The analysis of the K9 instructors' professional experience reveals a diverse range of

positions, categorized into various functions as presented in Table 3 in multiple responses. Various distinct roles were identified, with the most common being K9 Handler and K9-related roles with 40 or 31.75%, indicating that K9 operations and training are highly valued within the institution. 36 or 28.57% are those who have instructor roles that also played a significant role, demonstrating the center's dedication to providing high-quality training and knowledge sharing. The remaining percentages are accounted for administrative roles, underscoring the significance of support functions in enabling operational effectiveness and director and acting director positions, highlighting the importance of supervision and leadership in operational and training tasks.

Overall, the professional experiences of PCG K9 Instructors were found to be positively diverse, demonstrating a balanced organizational structure that prioritizes operational readiness, training, and the effective management of K9 units, all of which are essential to the Coast Guard's mission.

Table 3. Professional experience of PCG K9 Instructors

Professional experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
K9 Handler and K9-related roles	40	31.75
Instructor roles	36	28.57
Administrative roles	30	23.81
Director and acting director positions	20	15.87
Total	126	100

Rank

Table 4 presents the ranks held by PCG K9 Instructors. Out of 36 K9 instructors, most come from the non-commissioned officer (NCO) level, specifically, Petty Officer First Class, Petty Officer Second Class, and Petty Officer Third Class represented 16 or 44.44%. There is also a strong presence of junior enlisted members, such as Seaman First Class, Seaman Second Class, and Apprentice Seaman represented 13 or 36.12%.

Interestingly, only 1 or 2.78% was listed as a Seawoman First Class and Seawoman Second Class, respectively, which may suggest that women may be underrepresented in K9 training roles. On the other hand, higher ranks such

as Coast Guard Lieutenant, Lieutenant Commander, and Lieutenant Junior, each of which were held by 1 or 2.78% while Ensign ranks were held by 2 or 5.56% of the PCG K9 Instructors.

The strong representation of NCOs and junior ranks aligns with the operational and hands-on nature of K9 duties, as these personnel are suitable for the practical engagement for instance in direct training and handling of dogs but looking into the roles of commissioned officers which are of higher ranks, there is a shortfall in their involvement to field operations and leadership which can be employed in K9 program development.

Table 4. Rank of PCG K9 Instructors

Rank	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lieutenant Commander	1	2.78
Lieutenant	1	2.78
Lieutenant Junior Grade	1	2.78
Ensign	2	5.56
Petty Officer First Class	7	19.44
Petty Officer Second Class	7	19.44
Petty Officer Third Class	2	5.56
Seawoman First Class	1	2.78
Seaman First Class	10	27.78
Seawoman Second Class	1	2.78
Seaman Second Class	1	2.78
Apprentice Seaman	2	5.56
Total	36	100

Most participants from PCG K9 unit detailed that instructors must have a minimum rank of Seaman First. This rank is acceptable as they already acquire prior field experience, making them credible instructors.

Training

Table 5 presents the distribution of eligibility across various training categories in multiple responses. Military/Basic and Advanced Training recorded the highest participation, with a frequency of 36, representing 100% of

the sample, indicating universal eligibility in this domain. This is closely followed by K9 and Explosives Handling, with a frequency of 35 or 97.2%, suggesting that nearly all participants are also qualified in this specialized area.

In contrast, eligibility in Leadership and Management accounted for 16 participants, comprising 44.44% of the total sample. This figure indicates that less than half of the population possesses qualifications in leadership, suggesting potential areas for further development in management training. Eligibility percentages for Rescue, Survival, and Water Operations, as well as Tactical and Protection Skills, were moderate, at 20 or 55.55% and 24 or 66.67% respectively. These figures imply a considerable portion of participants possess operational skills relevant to field survival and protection.

Training in Maritime and Environmental Operations was noted in 50% of participants or 18 individuals, reflecting a balanced level of expertise in this specialized area. Significantly lower participation rates were observed in Strategic/Staff Training and Law Enforcement & Incident Management, each with a frequency of 1 participant or 27.78%. This suggests that a minority of the sample is qualified in these strategic or administrative areas, highlighting potential gaps in advanced or specialized training.

Overall, the data indicate a strong emphasis on core military, operational, and tactical training, with comparatively lower representation in leadership and strategic domains. These findings could inform targeted training programs to enhance competencies in underrepresented areas.

Table 5. Training of PCG K9 Instructors

Trainings	Frequency	Percentage (%)
K9 and Explosives Handling	35	23.18
Military / Basic and Advanced Training	36	23.84
Leadership and Management	16	10.6
Rescue, Survival, and Water Operations	20	13.25
Tactical and Protection Skills	24	15.9
Maritime and Environmental Training	18	11.92
Strategic/ Staff training	1	0.66
Law enforcement & incident management	1	0.66
Total	151	100

Overall, the analysis of the qualifications of the current PCG K9 Instructors shows a mixed view of operational strengths and gaps. While instructors have strong proficiency in core training and professional experience, deficiencies are seen in standard eligibility and educational background.

Required instructors' qualifications and essential competencies specific to K9 Instructors

Required Qualifications

Eligibility. The respondents were presented with the first question, "What specific eligibility criteria are required for K9 instructors?". Based on their responses, currently, there is no specific eligibility requirement for K9 instructors. However, the respondents believed that the specialization courses and

training related to K9 instruction are essential before becoming an instructor. Participant 2 stated that:

At present, sir, ang qualifications para maging K9 instructor is unang-unang una dapat nakapag undergo ka na nga K9 Specialization Course which yung Narcotics or Explosive Detection Dog and other Specialization Course and then K9 Instructors Course, and then pangatlo is yung willingness na ma assign dito sa PCG K9 Academy. (At present, sir, the qualifications to become a K9 instructor are, first and foremost, having completed a K9 Specialization Course such as Narcotics or Explosive Detection Dog training, along with other specialization courses. This must be followed by a K9 Instructors' Course. Thirdly, there must be a

willingness to be assigned to the PCG K9 Academy.)

The respondents also specifically stated that the Coast Guard Basic and Specialization Canine Handler Course and the IMO 6.09 should be completed before becoming a K9 instructor. Participant 10 said that to become an instructor:

As far as I know, sir, the initial requirement to become a canine instructor is first, you must graduate with a CGK9 handlers course. And then, at least, you must serve a minimum of three years in the field operating unit. And also if you have a course like the IMO 6.09 instructor's course, and also the IDC instructor's development course.

Participant 9 also emphasized that:

Para maging i-standard talaga tayo sir sa buong Coast Guard K9 Training, yung 6.09 na dapat makuha ng bawat instructors course sa level pa lang sana ng staff makuha na. Kasi nandun na lahat kung paano ka magtuturo, nandoon na lahat ng guide. Sasusunod na yung mga intensive experience as a handler sa area. *(For true standardization across the Coast Guard K9 Training program, the IMO 6.09 should be mandatory for all instructors at the staff level. This course covers comprehensive teaching methodologies and guidelines. Only after mastering this should handlers pursue intensive field experience in operational areas.)*

Educational background. The answers to the questions "What specific educational qualifications are required for K9 instructors?" and "Are there particular degrees or certifications that are mandatory?" reveal differing opinions on the importance of formal education versus practical experience in the recruitment process. Most of the participants who answered said that the main requirement for becoming a K9 instructor is to finish either a Basic K9 Handler's Course or a Coast Guard K9 specialization course, suggesting that getting certified and trained in how to handle K9s is more

important than getting a degree. This perspective aligns with the notion that teachers' skills and knowledge are crucial for effective training programs (Sevilla, 2024). Participant 1 stated that:

Initially sir, hindi natin tinitingnan ang educational background niya. As long meron siyang Handler's Course, gumradwate siya certified K9 Handler siya. Ang tinitingnan natin dito is may potential siya magturo. Sa recruitment initially, yung ngayon sir ang ginagawa natin is in-assess natin. Yung mga present, from training sila, may potential sila, maganda ang handling nila. *(Initially, we do not prioritize an applicant's educational background. If they have completed the Basic K9 Handler's Course and are certified as a K9 Handler, our focus shifts to their potential to teach. During recruitment, we assess current trainees based on their skills demonstrated during training.)*

Although some respondents believed that a high school degree might be enough for trainers, they also agreed that a college degree is ideal in fields like education or veterinary science. Participant 5 responded that "Preferably an education and a degree holder in veterinary science; certification of basic and specialized K9 courses." Similarly, Participant 7 shared that a "Background in the field of education may be necessary in the future."

Professional experience. When asked about "What prior experience should K9 instructors possess before taking on this role?" and "How important is hands-on experience with K9 units?", participants expressed that a solid foundation of at least three years of experience as K9 handlers in various operational environments is vital for aspiring K9 instructors. This aligns with the study by Boudersa (2016), which suggests that ongoing professional development and training are necessary to enhance specialization and have a positive impact on teaching practices. Furthermore, this requirement highlights the importance of real-world experience in developing effective educators. Participant 2 stated that:

Sa opinion ko sir, para sa mga aspiring K9 instructors, dapat at least magkaroon sila ng 3 years experience sa FOU. Ideally, ma-assign sana sila sa Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao para magkaroon sila ng exposure. And then, maintindihan nila yung ano talaga yung trabaho doon sa area para yun maging tool nila pag sila ay naging instructors na. So mas madali nilang ma-relay o maituro sa students nila kung ano ang real scenario pagdating doon sa field. *(In my opinion, aspiring K9 instructors should have at least three years of experience in FOU. Ideally, they should be assigned to Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao to gain diverse regional exposure. This hands-on experience allows them to deeply understand the operational realities of each area, which becomes a critical tool when they transition to teaching. By grasping the nuances of fieldwork, they can more effectively convey real-world scenarios to their students, ensuring training aligns with the challenges faced in actual deployments.)*

Furthermore, Participant 6 mentioned that:

As K9 instructor they have experience in K9 handling for at least tatlong taon sila sa FOU. Dito kasi sir makikita natin, yung three years nila ay importante yun para makapag impart sila kung ano ang natutunan nila doon sa area na meron sila in terms sa law enforcement at maging ma-master nila ang handling ng isang K9. *(A K9 instructor must have at least three years of K9 handling experience in a FOU. This duration is critical because it allows them to impart the knowledge and skills they've gained in law enforcement operations within that area. Over these three years, they refine their mastery of K9 handling, ensuring they can effectively train others in both tactical and operational aspects of working with canines.)*

Rank. The respondents were asked the question, "What should be the minimum rank or level of operational experience required for a service member to serve as a K9 instructor?" and "Why do you believe that level of leader-

ship and responsibility is essential for the effectiveness and integrity of the training program?". This was the response from Participant 1, who mentioned that: "Pag direct, minsan kasi yung mga trainees natin apprentice pa lang. Pagkagraduate nila seaman second." *(When direct hiring, sometimes our trainees are still apprentices. After graduation, they become Seaman Second).*

Moreover, Participant 2 had the following statements:

"So sa rank, sir, at least seaman first. So, hindi naman sa dina-down or dini-disregard yung capability ng apprentice. Pero mas maganda kung yung maging instructor ay at least magkaroon ng rank ng seaman first." *(Regarding rank, sir, instructors should at least hold Seaman First. This isn't to undermine apprentices' capabilities, but instructors should have a higher rank)*, shows that a minimum rank of Seaman First Class is considered necessary for K9 instructors. While some trainees may still hold apprentice positions, those who achieve the rank of Seaman First Class are viewed as more qualified due to their extensive knowledge and operational experience.

Training. In response to the question, "What specific training or professional development do you think should be required for K9 instructors?", most of the participants stated that the instructor's course (6.09) and specialization courses are key to maintaining the high standards in K9 instruction, which includes both basic and specialized courses. This point of view aligns with the requirements set by the International Maritime Organization (2017), which stipulates that member countries must establish education and training goals and competence standards that demonstrate the knowledge, understanding, and skills necessary for effective teaching. Participant 2 mentioned:

Aside sa tactical trainings or courses na kinoconduct ng Coast Guard or other branch of service, sa tingin ko ang magandang pag focus-an ay yung sa pagdating sa academics, kung paano nila turuan yung estudyante. So, isa dito ay

yung 6.09 and yung 3.12 or yung kinconduct ng Coast Guard, yung CMTTS (Course Management Training for Training Staff) and then isang kailangan din natin is yung mga licensed teacher sana. Mas magandang makuha natin o eligibility na meron ng isang canine instructors. *(Aside from the tactical trainings or courses conducted by the Coast Guard or other branches of service, I believe it would be better to focus on academics—how they teach students. One example is the 6.09 and 3.12 programs, or the Coast Guard's CMTTS (Course Management Training for Training Staff). Additionally, we need licensed teachers. It would also be ideal to acquire certified canine instructors with proper eligibility.)*

Participant 9 added that “Number 1 talaga is 6.09, then yung mga IDC sir na yung mga instructors development course. Kailangan continuous kasi yung learning para ma-refresh pa rin ulit ang mga instructor.” (The priority is Course 6.09, followed by IDC or the Instructors Development Course. Continuous learning is critical to keep instructors updated.)

Relatively, when asked regarding the role of standardization in K9 instructor training protocols, specifically “What is your opinion on the importance of standardization for consistency in K9 instructor training protocol?”, the participants expressed that a standardized protocol would lead to a better quality of training and ensure consistency and reliability in the outcomes of K9 units. Participant 3 said that:

Standardization is critical to resolving issues in K-9 instructor training. A mandatory 3-year instructor duty should be added to the career path of K-9 handler graduates. This experience will deepen their expertise and improve their ability to train subordinates effectively.

Participant 6 also responded that “Mahalaga ito sir, sa consistency. Bakit? By setting it, magkakaroon tayo ng isang guidelines, pag-follow, pagsunod sa isang guidelines lang at isang method.” *(This is vital for consistency. By establishing guidelines, we ensure everyone follows the same methods and protocols.)* This relates to

the study by Viernes (2022), which emphasizes the absence of a comprehensive set of standardized training procedures for PCG K9 Instructors.

Essential Competencies of K9 Instructors

In response to the question, “What key competencies are essential for K9 instructors?”, participants identified a broad set of essential skills. The reactions suggested a strong consensus on the importance of behavioral literacy, communication skills, emotional intelligence, and practical training expertise, all of which are supported by a solid foundational knowledge of canine behavior.

Under the thematic category of deep understanding of canine behavior, several participants emphasized the importance of instructors possessing a solid foundation in canine psychology and communication. Participant 4 highlighted the significance of instructors having both strong communication skills and the ability to accurately interpret a dog's behavior. He stated:

Yung educational approach pagdating sa K9 behavior and psychology, dapat sir yung sa communication skills at saka marunong siya magbasa ng behavior ng dogs. Para kahit papaano hindi na tayo mangangamba especially sa action and reaction ng aso natin minsan nahihirapan tayo. Very important kasi na yung mag instructor natin kailangan bumasa ng behavior ng aso at tsaka yung trainee. *(When it comes to the educational approach on K9 behavior and psychology, the instructor should have strong communication skills and the ability to read and understand a dog's behavior. This is important because it helps us avoid constantly worrying about how our dogs behave or react in certain situations, which can sometimes be challenging to manage. The instructor must be able to assess not only the dog's behavior but also the trainee's actions as well.)*

This perspective highlights the broader understanding that a deep knowledge of canine behavior is crucial for creating a safe and effective training environment. Participant 10

emphasized this point, stressing that K9 instructors need to be able to accurately read and interpret a dog's body language to respond appropriately during training sessions.

Participant 14 further expanded on the essential competencies required of K9 instructors. They pointed out that a well-rounded instructor must be knowledgeable in canine communication and behavior, as well as in applying positive reinforcement techniques. As he stated:

Key competencies for K9 instructors include understanding canine communication, behavior, and positive reinforcement training methods, along with the ability to teach and communicate effectively with both dogs and their handlers. Patience, empathy, and physical fitness are also essential for success.

Similarly, Participant 5 emphasized this:

Number one is training skills and knowledge. The consistency, empathy and compassion with regards to our dog, sir. He has problem-solving skills. For example, when you have a K-9 dog, he knows how to handle it. And then, he must have patience and persistence. So, apart from training the dog, do you have any other competencies for the dogs. For the students too. The communication skills. One of the important ones, sir, is to be able to deliver. We can deliver, we can teach well, we can deliver well, and then our students understand what we are teaching.

In response to the question, "How do you assess whether these competencies are met during actual training?", participants consistently emphasized the use of practical demonstrations and performance-based tasks as the primary methods for evaluating instructors' skills.

Under the thematic category of providing performance feedback, Participant 5 emphasized that instructor assessment is primarily grounded in actual performance during training sessions. As she explained "The performance-based and then feedback, evaluation of the instructor based on performance, we can take it from the students, there is feedback."

This was supported by Participant 7 who similarly noted the two-step process of evaluation, "Performance-based evaluations are followed by feedback, which is obtained from the students and is used to evaluate the instructor."

Also, several participants emphasized that collecting input from those directly involved in or observing the training sessions contributes to a more comprehensive assessment. Participant 2 stated "Isang way para ma-assess natin na na meet ba yung competencies is through, feedbacks from sa mga trainees natin and then sa mga senior instructors." (*One way to assess if competencies are met is through feedback from our trainees and also from senior instructors.*) Participant 12 noted that "Yun ang primary namin ng feedback mechanism namin, evaluation talaga." (*That is our primary feedback mechanism, evaluation itself.*)

Similarly, Participant 9 highlighted the combined role of observation and feedback:

"Sa pag observations, performance evaluation ng instructor natin, tsaka feedbacks. Minsan kailangan rin natin mag-feedbacks galing sa mga trainees, kung paano yung performance ng ating mga instructors." (*Through observation, performance evaluation of the instructor, and feedback. Sometimes we also need to collect feedback from trainees regarding the performance of our instructors.*)

In addition to qualitative feedback, participants cited the use of structured assessment tools including written exams and practical evaluations to objectively measure instructional competencies. Participant 11 shared that "Through written and practical examination, or evaluation. And also tinitingnan din yung improvement or capability na tine-train." (*Through written and practical examinations or evaluations and also assessing the improvement or capability being trained.*). Participant 15 added "You have field exercises and written exam if you pass it, we will check your qualification competencies by developing of group of handlers."

Several responses highlighted the importance of direct observation and ongoing validation as integral components of the compe-

tency assessment process. Participant 9 mentioned: "Sa pag observations, performance evaluation ng instructor natin, tsaka feedbacks. Minsan kailangan rin natin mag-feedbacks gal-ing sa mga trainees, kung paano yung performance ng ating mga instructors." *(Through observation, performance evaluation of the instructor, and feedback. Sometimes we need feedback from trainees regarding how our instructors are performing.)*

In addressing the question, "How important is knowledge of canine behavior and psychology for K9 instructors?", participants highlighted its critical role. Bray, et al. (2021) proved that understanding canine cognitive and behavioral traits is essential for instructors to accurately assess and enhance a dog's performance in working roles.

Under the theme significant in reading behaviors, participants stressed that instructors must not only teach behavioral principles but also embody them through practice. Participant 1 explained:

Napakahalaga nun sir kasi nga yun yung tinuturo natin. Kailangan pag nag-tuturo tayo alam din natin kung ano yung tinuturo natin, and na peperform din natin yung tinuturo natin. Like for K9 psychology dapat alam natin paano basahin yung aso, yung galaw niya, para maturuan din natin yung mga estudyante paano niya basahin yung behavior nung aso niya para for corrections pagdating ng training. *(It's very important, sir, because that's what we're teaching. We need to know exactly what we're teaching, and we should also be able to perform what we teach. When it comes to K9 psychology, we must know how to read a dog's movements so we can teach students how to understand their own dogs' behavior especially when it comes to making corrections during training.)*

Participant 12 supported this as he stated:

Pinaka basic talaga dapat alam ng instructor kung paano ang aso natututo, how he think, how he learn. So, the basic psychology ng dog psychology. Part ng POI natin na para effective ka na magiging instructor. So alam mo rin yung

hindi man ikaw magiging animal behaviorist, at least may mga basic knowledge ka kung paano nag-isip at paano natututo ang aso. Basic know-how sa K9 psychology dapat ang isang instructor ay alam niya. May mga kasamahan kami sir na nag-enroll online pero sa ibang bansa. Dito sa Pilipinas sir, wala po siya. On thier own na lang, pero sa PNP, wala po. *(Instructors must understand how dogs learn and think the basic psychology of dogs. It's part of our POI. Even if you're not an animal behaviorist, you should still have basic knowledge of how dogs think and learn. Some of our colleagues have taken online courses abroad, but here in the Philippines, we don't have much. Within the PNP, it's mostly self-directed learning.)*

Participants 2, 8, and 15 emphasized the instructor's ability to interpret canine body language and behavioral cues.

The participants believed that building a strong communicative bond with the dog improved both training responsiveness and trust between the dog and handler. This aligns with findings by Payne, Bennett, and McGreevy (2015), who demonstrated that close dog-handler relationships characterized by mutual communication and emotional bonding were associated with enhanced performance and more reliable behavior in working dogs. As Participant 10 said that "Communicating with the dog will be beneficial, in my opinion, sir." and Participant 7 expanded on this "Understanding is improved after learning about behavior in psychology, followed by the recognition of both positive and bad K-9 conduct. I know you can comprehend that. After that, you establish a solid communicative bond with the dog."

The participants also noted that knowledge of psychology and behavior supports effective identification and correction of problematic behaviors, Participant 5 stated:

Knowledge in K-9 behavior and psychology for the instructor is very vital. After becoming knowledgeable with regards to behavior in psychology, the un-

derstanding is enhanced, then recognizing positive and then negative K-9 behavior. And then, you develop a strong communication relationship with the dog.

Participant 13 similarly observed that:

Understanding how dogs think, learn, and respond to various stimuli allows instructors to communicate more effectively with the animals and tailor training methods to suit individual dogs. This knowledge helps in identifying stress signals, reinforcing positive behavior, and correcting unwanted actions in a way that builds trust and maintains the dog's motivation.

Finally, some responses linked psychological and behavioral knowledge to the credibility and professionalism of K9 instructors, as Participant 1 reiterated:

Napakahalaga nun sir kasi nga yun yung tinuturo natin. Kailangan pag nagtuturo tayo alam din natin kung ano yung tinuturo natin, and na peperform din natin yung tinuturo natin. Like for K9 psychology sapat alam natin paano basahin yung aso, yung galaw niya, para maturuan din natin yung mga estudyante paano niya basahin yung behavior nung aso niya para for corrections pagdating ng training. *(It's very important, sir, because that's what we're teaching. We need to know what we're teaching and be able to demonstrate it. For example, with K9 psychology, we should know how to read a dog's movements so we can also teach our students how to understand their dogs—especially for making corrections during training.)*

In response to the question, "How should K9 instructors be prepared to manage a variety of training situations, taking into account different dog breeds and specific training goals?", participants said instructors must develop adaptive strategies grounded in a solid understanding of breed characteristics and behavioral science. This is supported by Bray, et al. (2021), who found that tailoring training

approaches to a dog's breed and individual traits significantly enhances performance in working roles.

Participant 1 underscored that a K9 instructor's qualifications must include practical skills in reading canine behavior regardless of the dog's breed. Accordingly, competency is not solely based on academic background but also on observable performance in the field:

Babalik tayo sa qualification, na graduate siya sa ganito. Mag base din tayo sa performance niya kung nasa area siya. And the performance din niya nung nagtetraining siya. Yun pa lang sir is nakikita natin kung bihasa ba siya sa K9 psychology. Kasi yun yung pinakaimportante dyan na alam mo kung paano basahin yung galaw ng aso, ano man breed man yan siya. As per observation during training, ano yung ginawagwa ng aso, meron tayong problem-solving. So ito, ginagawa natin bakit yung aso na ganito medyo matamlay, yun kailangan pagdating sa K9 psychology nalalaman natin sir kung bakit. Babalik pa rin tayo sa qualifications, na kailanangan natin maging criteria. *(We return to qualifications whether someone graduated from a specific program and also evaluate performance in the field and during training. That's how we see if someone is truly skilled in K9 psychology. It's essential to understand how to read a dog's behavior, regardless of the breed. During training, it's essential to closely observe the dog's behavior. For example, if a dog appears lethargic, we need to apply our understanding of K9 psychology to determine the cause. This should be included as a key evaluation criterion.)*

Instructors must be able to adjust their techniques based on the unique characteristics and temperaments of different dog breeds. Participant 3 highlighted this need, stating, 'K9 instructors must be adaptable and aware of the specific needs of each dog.' Similarly, Participant 7 emphasized that, 'K9 instructors need to have versatility and an understanding of the individual demands of each dog to effectively handle a range of training scenarios.'

Participant 9 added that:

Sa mga aso, paano natin i-adapt sa iba-ibang breeds, iba-iba naman din kasi yung approach. Kaya kailangan din marunong mag adapt ang mga instructors natin kung paano i-approach ang bawat breeds ng aso. Combining talaga ng expertise. Marunong din siya mag-approach ng tama sa mga iba-ibang breeds. *(Each breed requires a different approach. That's why our instructors must know how to adapt their methods to suit each one. It's a combination of expertise and the right approach per breed.)*

Practical, hands-on experience was considered crucial in refining instructional skills and developing a deep understanding of canine behavior.

Participant 5 explained:

That's it sir, our instructors should be equipped and then developed, their different skills and then training techniques, methods based on dog's behavior and breeds. And then, we have learned that sir, based on our experiences as instructors. We have learned a lot about different dog behaviors, we have also learned, we have applied those techniques. And then, we will know the negative and then positive impacts on the dog. *(Our instructors should be equipped with various techniques based on the dog's behavior and breed. We've learned that through experience as instructors, we've seen many types of behaviors and applied various methods. This helps us identify the positive and negative effects of different approaches.)*

For the question, "How can organizations such as the PCG best support K9 instructors in maintaining and continually enhancing their professional competencies?", the responses revealed that to best support K9 instructors, the PCG must invest in continuous local and international training and institutionalize standardized programs. Under the theme training/ professional growth, Participant 1 suggested for sustained learning through both local and international programs, as he stated:

Kailangan suportahan nila yung trainings, hindi lang siguro local pati abroad. Meron din tayong mga pinopropose dyan, for example yung mga instructor's course. Yung other countries like Canada, Australia, yung mga K9 dun nag vivist sa atin sir. Mag open din sana sila sa atin ng trainings, or exchange students, na magbebenefit tayo, makukuha natin, kahit papaano makikita natin yung mga bagong techniques at ma maintain natin yung standards nung instructors. *(They should support training not just locally but also abroad. For instance, we've proposed instructor courses involving countries like Canada and Australia. Some of their K9 units have visited us. It would be beneficial to have training exchanges so we can learn new techniques and maintain instructional standards.)*

Under the theme mentorship, Participant 13 shared, "I think sir they need to give chances by giving growth and mentorship program so that the trainer or instructor can adopt or learn new ideas". Participant 7 added that "The PCG sir needs to put more of an emphasis on chances for professional growth, mentorship programs, ongoing training, and a culture of learning and development."

Several participants noted the value of cross-training across different regions and agencies. For example, Participant 12 stated, "Minsan may mga taga-Mindanao na pupunta lang dito sa Luzon para lang mag-cross-train sa ibang sa ibang sa ibang area sa inyo. Regionalized po sir, Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao, nagconduct po kami ng mga K9." *(Sometimes personnel from Mindanao travel to Luzon just to cross-train in other areas. We have regionalized K9 training programs across Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.)*

To summarize, the participants emphasize the training expertise over formal civil service eligibility when hiring K9 instructors, and priority must be given to those who have taken specialized courses. While most of the participants regarded these courses are inadequate, some suggested that a formal education in veterinary science or education can address gaps such as curriculum design and canine health

management and behavior analysis. Also, three years of experience in the field, and those who have the rank of Seaman First Class are preferred. Concerning essential competencies, K9 instructors should possess a holistic skill set that combines adaptive training design, behavioral expertise, and ethical integrity.

Current performance evaluation tool

The existing performance evaluation tool for PCG K9 Instructors has notable limitations in assessing key competencies, as identified through stakeholder interviews. While instructors must undergo specialized K9 training and complete an instructor course, the evaluation tool (Appendix G) is designed with generic Likert-scale questions tied to the task, which are not suitable for measuring essential technical competencies, such as detection techniques and kennel management. Moreover, interviewees emphasized the importance of competencies such as lesson plan development, training scenario design, and assessment development. The evaluation tool's generic questions do not assess the effectiveness of lesson planning, whether it aligns with objectives, or the validity of an assessment, resulting in poor instructional alignment. Professional qualities such as discipline and motivation were not included, which are essential; however, the evaluation form relies on subjective comments that are often poorly aligned, lacking rating scales or clearly defined behavioral indicators. While the instructors are expected to use the feedback they collect, the tool only allowed one layer of feedback and did not assess how the instructor used the feedback received for the development of subsequent sessions, pointing out misalignment.

Best practices from other K9 institutions

The researcher also gathered best practices from other K9 institutions, specifically PNP, PDEA, PA, and the two private K9 institutions, regarding their criteria for selecting, certifying, and evaluating instructors, as well as their policies related to instructors.

Criteria for the Selection, Certification, and Evaluation of Instructors

For the question, "What specific criteria do you use when selecting K9 instructors in your institution, and how do these criteria ensure the quality of training?", participants highlighted the importance of meeting and surpassing qualifications as reflected in their answers. Participant 11 shared that:

Yung requirement dun ganun din sa instructors qualification na sinet ninyo, eligibility, experience, must pass the instructors training course. Then may papakita siya ang output, quality, skill ng K9 handler, capability or character ng NDD. So yan ang standard na dapat naming makita. *(The requirements for instructor qualifications that you've set in eligibility, experience, and passing the instructor training course must be strictly followed. Additionally, we must evaluate the output, quality, and skills of K-9 handlers, as well as the capability or temperament of the Narcotics Detection Dog (NDD). These are the standards we must observe.)*

Similarly, Participant 14 added that:

When selecting a K9 instructor, key criteria include experience, training and certifications, ethical considerations, and a strong understanding of canine behavior and training techniques. Look for instructors with a proven track record, a commitment to continuous learning, and the ability to adapt their methods to individual dog and handler needs.

With regards to the certification process of other K9 institutions, participants were asked, "Can you describe the certification process for K9 instructors in your institution?". They mentioned that the aspiring instructors must pass all certifications and training needed, as noted in their responses.

Participant 11 shared that:

Base sa POI namin, kailangan ipasa niyo yung POI, yung lahat nung mga subject na nandun, written practical

exercises, practical evaluation. Maka develop siya at the end of the course, yung isang dog namin ay ma convert niya sa into a narcotics detection dog. And then we issued diploma or certificate na graduate na sila ng instructor course. *(According to our POI, you must complete all required subjects, including written and practical exercises, as well as practical evaluations. By the end of the course, trainees must demonstrate the ability to train a dog into a fully operational narcotics detection dog. Upon successful completion, we issue a diploma or certificate confirming their graduation from the instructor course.)*

For other institutions, various training courses are required, as mentioned by Participant 14, "Must attend the Canine Trainer Course with pre-requisites like 3 years as a licensed K9 handler." Furthermore, Participant 15 emphasized the training required, "By rigorously training them with all the fundamental requirements and advanced requirements of a canine handler." Moreover, it was emphasized that every instructor must also be certified through a specific program, as mentioned by Participant 12, "All K9 instructors must be certified through ICAP, Instructor Certification Accreditation Program."

With regards to the question, "What methods do you employ to evaluate K9 instructors in your institution?", the respondents articulated that they evaluate K9 instructors through an output-based method and post-evaluation. As mentioned by Participant 11, "Classroom instruction, practical exercises, and then yung output." ("Classroom instruction, practical exercises, and then output.")

Specifically, Participant 14 shared that in their institution:

K9 evaluation methods assess a dog's suitability for specific tasks or purposes, using a variety of techniques to observe and evaluate their behavior, temperament, and skills. These methods can include both behavioral and physiological assessments, ranging from observational tests in controlled and natural

environments to structured behavioral scales and ratings.

Policies related to Instructors

With the question, "How do you support continuous professional development for K9 instructors in your institution?", participants highlighted several key strategies to ensure ongoing growth and skill maintenance among K9 personnel. Participant 15 stated that:

Basically, they go through training. There's a quality assurance program. APEC member countries have monthly tests. There's quarterly evaluation. There's refresher training after six months. After a year, there's recurrency training. So from day one to day 365, the team's performance doesn't change. Because you have a standard that you follow.

Moreover, Participant 12 added that they "Cross-train with other agency AFP, PNP, other private sectors."

The question, "How frequently do you review and update your policies related to K9 instructors in your institution?" revealed variability in review cycles among institutions. Some institutions review and update their policies every three years, as stated by Participant 12, "Every three years, sir. Failure to renew, ibig sabihin hindi ka na authorize magturo sa PNP." (*"The renewal is required every three years, sir. Failure to renew means you are no longer authorized to teach at the PNP"*). Some institutions do it quarterly, as mentioned by Participant 14.

When asked about the question, "Can you share some initiatives or policies that your institution has successfully implemented regarding K9 instructors?", Participant 12 said that "Ang pool of instructors dapat sa amin ay senior handlers na, sa amin yun ang best practice namin sa selection of instructors." (*Our pool of instructors should consist of senior handlers; this is our best practice for instructor selection.*) Also, a participant shared that they are maintaining accreditation, as Participant 15 mentioned, "We've implemented annual re-certification, wellness programs, ongoing education, mentorship, humane handling policies, and

real-world scenario training to support and develop K9 instructors."

In response to the question, "Are there any effective practices from local or international K9 organizations? Can you cite one specific practice and explain its impact?", Participant 12 identified character building as a key effective practice, "Dito pagkatapos namin ng selection, drive development, pinahalian namin ng obedience. Parang na-adapt din namin ang mas suitable na training na magiging working dog ay mas gagaling. So, parang sa inyo dati, nag-evolve din kayo dati." (*"After our selection process and drive development, we integrated obedience training. We also adopted more suitable training methods to further enhance the working dog's capabilities. So, similar to your past approach, your methods evolved as well."*)

In comparison, the PCG K9, it currently lacks formal policies for instructor selection, evaluation, and ongoing training. Most of their efforts rely on external opportunities like invitations to seminars or foreign training, which are not consistent or guaranteed. While the PCG has made some efforts, such as offering instructor courses, these are not yet fully implemented. This shows the need for the PCG to create clear and permanent policies to improve the quality and consistency of K9 instruction.

Challenges and Recommendations of the PCG K9 Instructors

Although not part of the problems stated, the researcher gathered the challenges and recommendations from the participants that can improve the current qualification and policy by addressing practical resource constraints, aligning diverse training approaches, and managing organizational attitudes to facilitate broader acceptance and compliance.

Addressing inadequacies in training protocols and enhancing the overall effectiveness of K9 instruction

In recent years, there has been growing concern about the effectiveness of K9 training programs, particularly regarding the qualifications and readiness of the instructors. With this, participants were asked, "In a study by Viernes (2022), she noted the inadequacy of K9 instructor training protocols. Given this, what

steps would you propose for developing and implementing standardized K9 instructor training protocols?". Participants' statements focused on addressing the inadequacies identified in previous training protocols and enhancing the overall effectiveness of K9 instruction, as indicated in their responses. First, by setting the qualifications for instructors. Participant 1 stated that:

Kung sa recruitment dapat meron tayong set of qualifications for instructors. Next is dapat meron tayong deliberation, may board tayo to deliberate. Meron kasi sir na maganda nga yung background, maganda yung ano niya. Pero pagdating sa pagtuturo at sa performance niya, hindi pa pasa sa atin. (*In recruitment, we need a set of qualifications for instructors. Second, we must establish a deliberation board to evaluate candidates. Some applicants have impressive backgrounds, but when it comes to teaching ability and performance, they might still fall short of our standards.*)

Second, by equipping them with knowledge and credentials. Participant 3 responded, "To equip the instructors with knowledge and credentials." And third, by creating standard protocols which were mentioned by Participant 4, "Gagawa tayo ng standard protocols natin para ma-implement natin. For the betterment of PCG K9 Academy. Gagawa tayo, meron naman ata si Ma'am Viernes, di lang ata natin na-iimplement." (*We need to create standard protocols and implement them effectively. For example, Ma'am Viernes already drafted guidelines, but they haven't been fully operationalized. Let's prioritize this for the PCG K-9 Academy's improvement.*)

Effectiveness and inadequacy of required qualifications

In response to the question, "Could you provide specific instances where these required qualifications were either effective or inadequate?", most of the respondents expressed that the required qualifications were effective, as indicated in the response of Participant 1:

In some way sir, nagiging effective siya kasi nasala na natin siya. Nagiging

ineffective siya kasi yung mga nakitaan natin siya, nasala natin siya, okay siya, pwede siya dito, tumatagal siya dito, gusto nilang ma-reassign. So medyo naapektuhan yung pagtuturo nila. So, sa training kasi sir, kailangan talaga, mahirap yung palitan mo agad siya. Kaya dapat marami talaga tayong recruit para hindi nagtatagal yung ibang meron lang tayong, sige pwede ka hanggang 5 years, pero dapat enough yung instructors natin para pag mawala ito, mayroon pa rin matira, hindi tayo mapaparalyze. *(In some ways, our recruitment is effective because we screen candidates thoroughly. However, it becomes ineffective when instructors approved, who seem qualified are approved, and later request reassignment. This disrupts their teaching continuity. In training, frequent replacements are problematic. We need to recruit more instructors to ensure that even if some leave after 5 years, we still have enough to avoid operational paralysis.)*

Additionally, Participant 2 mentioned that “Dun sa mga qualifications, napatunayan ko na effective is yung pagkakaroon ng yung mga seasoned na instructors, before sila na assign sa pagiging instructor ay nagkaroon sila ng experience sa area, sa pag-hahandle ng explosives, detection dog, narcotics detection dog, and sa operations.” *(Proven qualifications matter. Effective instructors are those with seasoned field experience, such as handling explosives detection dogs, narcotics detection dogs, or operational deployments before being assigned to teaching roles.)*

Moreover, the respondents stated that the required qualifications were also seen as effective in producing K9 handlers and dogs in the field, which Participant 7 stated, “Thanks to the instructors at the CGK9 Academy, we have been able to produce and provide K-9 handlers and working dogs that are effective, efficient, and dependable.”

The responses to the question, “In your experience, how effective are these required qualifications in ensuring competent K9 instructors?” revealed recurring themes reflecting participants' views on the effectiveness of

required qualifications in ensuring competent K9 instructors. This aligns with standards set by several professional associations, such as the International Association of Canine Professionals (2025), which emphasize that formal certifications, practical experience, and ongoing professional development are critical factors that ensure instructor competency and consistent training quality.

Participant 1 and Participant 5 have similar concern regarding the need for clear and uniform standards in instructor preparation. Participant 5 noted that:

Possessing those required qualifications ensures competence for the instructors because it boosts the confidence of the instructor and having those years of experience in the field of K-9 handling and related law enforcement make the instructors credible and knowledgeable to perform as a K-9 Instructor.

Participant 2 emphasized that practical field experience enhances instructional credibility and effectiveness, as he stated:

Pagdating naman sa pagtuturo, kung yung mga instructors natin nagkaroon na ng exposure o experience sa pagdating sa field so mas madali nila, kumbaga, kung magtuturo sila may malaking impact din sa mga estudyante kasi alam nila na totoo yung kinukwento o sineshare nila ng story and hindi lang puro theory. *(When it comes to teaching, if our instructors have already been exposed to or gained experience in the field, it makes their teaching more impactful for the students. The students know that the stories and examples are real and not just theoretical.)*

As experience is seen as an essential element of competence, the combination of theory and practical experience is crucial for impactful instruction, as Participant 13 mentioned, “The instructors years of experience in K-9 handling and related law enforcement make them reputable and qualified to act as K-9 instructors, and having the required certifications ensures their proficiency because it boosts their self-confidence.” In this sense, qualifications are recognized not just as formal requirements but also

as tools for confidence-building and professional validation. In Canada's dog training sector, certified trainers were significantly more inclined toward supporting formal regulation, signaling stronger professional identity and legitimacy (Cavalli & Fenwick, 2023). Participant 7 and Participant 8 also expressed the need for further enhancing current qualifications.

In response to prompts regarding the desired standards for current K9 instructor qualifications, the data reveals a strong emphasis on policy development, experiential requirements, formalized training, certification, and systematization. Participant 1 said "Dapat sir maisulat siya, magkaroon dapat ng policy on recruitment qualifications as well as naka program din yung trainings nila. Si junior anong kailangan niyang training, si senior... para maging effective siya, maging standard siya." (*There should be a clear policy on recruitment qualifications, and the trainings should be properly programmed. For example, what training a junior instructor needs, and what training a senior one requires. This way, it becomes effective and standardized.*) Furthermore, Participant 2 added that, "Pero para sa akin, at least magkaroon sana sila ng at least 3 years na experience sa FOU's bago sila maghahawak ng estudyante para ma-build din nila doon sa area yung leadership skills nila." (*For me, they should have at least three years of experience in the field operations units before they start handling students. This will help them develop leadership skills in the field.*)

Participant 13 emphasized that the training program must follow a standard curriculum, supported by clear protocols that are reviewed and approved by governing authorities:

The training program should adhere to an established standard curriculum and be guided by a clearly defined set of rules and protocols. These standards must be reviewed and approved by the appropriate governing boards or authorities to ensure consistency, quality, and compliance across all levels of instruction.

Additionally, Participant 3 noted that attending training programs is essential and should be a standard practice. This reflects

broader industry consensus: structured training attendance is associated with enhanced theoretical understanding and applied skills. (McConnell, 2016). Another participant pointed out that standardization should apply comprehensively from courses, to instructors, to training institutions to ensure uniformity in instruction:

Unahin natin yung course or training na certified na, yung instructor natin.. Certified na rin at saka training school natin certified din. So siguro sa doon sa tatlo na yun, doon lang naman umiikot yung qualification or standardization lang ng K9 training. Doon lang kami nagstick, sa tatlo na yun. So, for uniformity sa pag-deliver ng instruction, dapat standardize lahat mula sa course hanggang sa instructor papuntang training. Yun ang namang inuulit namin pagka when it comes sa standardization ng training. (*We prioritize certified courses, certified instructors, and certified training schools. So, the qualifications or standardization of K9 training revolve around those three. For uniformity in delivering instruction, everything should be standardized from the course to the instructor, to the training itself. That is what we always emphasize when it comes to training standardization.*)

In response to the question, "What challenges do you see in adopting standardized qualifications and best practices for K9 instructors?", Participant 13 identified several key obstacles, "I think, sir, that implementing standardized qualifications for K9 instructors can be challenging due to differing training methods, limited resources, and inconsistent oversight."

When asked, "Based on your experience, what recommendations would you suggest for developing a comprehensive standard qualification and competencies for K9 instructors?", Participant 12 highlighted the need for system-wide uniformity, and Participant 13 stressed the importance of having multiple training options to accelerate learning and broaden knowledge. Also, the emphasis of having well rounded K9 Instructors and subject matter

experts in training programs, as mentioned by Participant 14:

A K9 instructor requires a blend of formal education, practical experience, and specialized training to ensure they can effectively train and manage canine units. While specific requirements can vary, a typical K9 instructor should have a solid foundation in canine behavior, training techniques, and a commitment to ethical handling.

Finally, participant 15 highlighted the value of engaging more resource persons in training programs, as this would enrich the competencies and knowledge shared with handlers.

Conclusion

The study's findings led the researcher to draw the following conclusions:

Currently, the qualifications of PCG K9 personnel are diverse, as no standard criteria have been established. Standardizing qualifications and competencies would help improve operations and performance.

K9 instructors are well aware of the qualifications and competencies that instructors must possess. Considering them when standardizing would be useful to PCG in pursuing their maritime security and law enforcement responsibilities.

Furthermore, the existing evaluation instrument used by the PCG is limited in scope. While it assesses instructional tasks, it does not adequately measure behavioral competencies, particularly emotional intelligence and adaptability are critical to effective K9 instruction.

Finally, the PCG K9 can learn from institutions such as the PNP, PDEA, and PA, as they have implemented more comprehensive practices in their K9 training programs. These practices include standardized criteria for selecting and certifying instructors, mandatory annual re-certification, structured mentorship programs, cross-agency training initiatives, and regular policy reviews. These measures help maintain a high level of instructor competence, consistency, and operational readiness.

Overall, it can be inferred from the findings that the Philippine Coast Guard needs to

enhance its processes for selecting, training, and evaluating K9 instructors. Currently, many instructors rely heavily on hands-on experience, which, while valuable, is insufficient on its own. Key attributes such as emotional intelligence and adaptability are not adequately assessed using the current evaluation tools. In contrast, agencies like the PNP and PDEA have established more robust systems, including clear criteria, ongoing training, and mentorship programs, which ensure a more comprehensive approach to instructor development.

Several policy implications are recommended to enhance the effectiveness and quality of the Philippine Coast Guard K9 Unit. First, the PCG must review and adopt the proposed standard qualifications and criteria for the selection, certification, and evaluation of K9 Instructors, along with an enhanced performance evaluation tool. Additionally, the PCG K9 Unit should establish partnerships with universities and other K9 institutions to offer micro-credentials in areas such as canine behavior, curriculum design, and veterinary subjects. Integrating educational courses with K9 specialization tracks will help address existing gaps in pedagogical skills. Furthermore, collaboration with other K9 government institutions is essential to implement a train-the-trainer model, facilitating the dissemination of expertise through workshops. To unify standards across various government institutions, drafting a National Training Policy for K9 Instructors is recommended. Adequate resources, including updated training materials, facilities, and support staff, must be provided to improve the quality and consistency of K9 training across units. Lastly, creating a system for regular monitoring and review of instructor performance, training effectiveness, and policy implementation will ensure long-term improvement. For future research, conducting in-depth cross-agency studies that compare PCG practices with those of other government institutions, as well as benchmarking with international counterparts regarding K9 instructors' standard qualifications and evaluation tools, is suggested to further enhance training and operational effectiveness.

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