

Second Chances, Shared Struggles: BEED Graduates Navigating Secondary Teaching in ALS

Jorbelyn M. Lo^{1*}; James L. Paglinawan, PhD²

¹Master of Science in Mathematics Education, Central Mindanao University Musuan, Bukidnon, Philippines

²Associate Professor IV, Central Mindanao University Musuan, Bukidnon, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) graduates handling secondary subjects in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in Valencia City, Bukidnon. Using a phenomenological research design, the study aimed to understand the motivations, challenges, coping mechanisms, and recommendations of these educators as they navigate teaching beyond their field of specialization. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with nine purposively selected ALS teachers and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed four major themes. First, altruistic commitment amidst systemic gaps highlights teachers' strong sense of purpose to serve marginalized learners despite limited specialization. Second, the complexity of pedagogical displacement reflects the challenges of content mastery gaps, multi-level instruction, and experiences of impostor syndrome. Third, strategic resilience through self-directed development demonstrates how teachers utilize digital resources, contextualization, and adaptive strategies to address instructional difficulties. Lastly, advocacy for curricular reform and collaborative mentorship emphasizes the need for ALS-specific curriculum design, institutional support, and professional collaboration. The study underscores a significant mismatch between teacher preparation and the demands of ALS secondary instruction, pointing to the need for systemic interventions rather than reliance on individual teacher adaptability alone. It concludes that strengthening professional support systems, integrating foundational skills into secondary modules, and fostering collaborative networks are essential to improving instructional quality and sustaining ALS effectiveness. The findings offer valuable insights for educators, school administrators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in promoting inclusive and equitable education.

Keywords: Alternative Learning System (ALS), BEED graduates, content mastery gaps, teacher resilience, pedagogical displacement

INTRODUCTION

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) in The Philippines Serves as a Vital Parallel Learning System, Providing a "Second Chance" for Out-of-School Youth and Adults to Complete Their Education and Improve Their Future. Within This System, Educators Often Navigate Complex Instructional Terrains, Frequently Teaching Multi-Grade Levels Ranging From Elementary to Junior High School in a Single Session. A Significant Current Situation Involves Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) Graduates Being Tasked With Handling Secondary-Level Subjects Due to a Lack of Specialized Secondary Teachers. While These Educators are Motivated By a Deep "Passion to Serve" and a Commitment to Inclusive Education, They Often Find Themselves Operating Outside Their Field of Specialization. This Mismatch Creates a Unique Educational Landscape Where Elementary-Trained Teachers Must Adapt Their Pedagogical Skills to Meet the Rigorous Demands of a Secondary Curriculum.

This Study is Grounded in Teacher Identity Theory and Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy). Teacher Identity Theory Provides a Lens to Understand How BEED Graduates Reconcile Their Formal Elementary Training With the "Mission-Driven" Role Required in ALS, Where Their Professional Identity Often Transcends Subject

Specialization to Prioritize Inclusive Education. Furthermore, Knowles' (2020) Adult Learning Theory Highlights That Effective Non-Formal Education Requires Andragogical Approaches That Prioritize Real-Life Application, a Shift These Educators Must Navigate While Simultaneously Bridging Their Own Content Gaps. Despite Their Dedication, a Critical Research Gap Exists Regarding the Specific Lived Experiences and "Content Mastery Gaps" of BEED Graduates in the ALS Context. The Sources Indicate That While These Teachers are Proficient in Child Development and Foundational Instruction, They Often Feel "Lost" When Confronted With Advanced Secondary Topics Such as Quadratic Equations, Probability, and Physics. Many Participants Report Experiencing "Impostor Syndrome" and Significant Emotional Toll When They Cannot Confidently Explain Complex Concepts. Existing Literature Often Focuses on the General Challenges of ALS, But There is a Lack of Deep Narrative Inquiry Into How Elementary Majors Bridge the Gap to Secondary Instruction Through Self-Learning and Contextualization. Furthermore, the Struggle of Managing Multi-Level and Multi-Subject Teaching Simultaneously—Where a Teacher Must Guide a Grade 7 Learner on Integers While Helping a Grade 10 Learner With Statistics—Remains an Under-Researched Phenomenon in The Philippine Non-Formal Education Sector.

Supporting Local Literature Reinforces These Findings. in The Philippines, Arrieta and Duka (2020) Highlighted That ALS Teachers Face Overwhelming Workloads and a Lack of Specialized Training for the Diverse Modules They Must Deliver. Furthermore, Bacolod (2022) Noted That "Out-of-Field Teaching" in The Philippine Public School System is a Systemic Issue That Forces Teachers to Rely Heavily on Personal Resourcefulness Rather Than Institutional Support. Internationally, Research By Pitiyanuwat and Sujiva (2021) Emphasizes That Non-Formal Education Teachers Globally Struggle With a "Competency Mismatch," Where Their Formal Training Does Not Align With the Multi-Faceted Needs of Adult Learners in Non-Traditional Settings. Additionally, UNESCO (2021) Reports That the Professionalization of Non-Formal Education Staff is Often Neglected, Leading to High Burnout Rates Among Those Teaching Subjects Outside Their Primary Expertise. The Importance of This Study Lies in Its Potential to Inform Policy and Practice for ALS Stakeholders. By Documenting the Narratives of These Teachers, the Study Provides a Roadmap for School Administrators to Design "Secondary Content Clinics" and Specialized Training for BEED Graduates. It Underscores the Need for Curriculum Designers to Develop ALS-Specific Secondary Modules That Integrate Foundational Elementary Reviews, Rather Than Simply Duplicating the Formal School Curriculum. Ultimately, This Research Advocates for a More Supportive, Collaborative Culture Where Resource Sharing and Peer Mentoring Can Alleviate the Professional Isolation and Academic Struggles of ALS Teachers, Ensuring That the "Second Chance" Offered to Learners is of High Quality.

This Study Aimed to Explore the Lived Experiences of the ALS Teachers in Their Challenges in Teaching Secondary Subjects. Specifically, It Sought to Answer the Following Research Questions:

1. What Motivated You to Take on Handling Secondary Subjects in Alternative Learning System as a BEED Graduate?
2. What Struggles and Challenges Did You Face in Handling Secondary Subjects as a BEED Graduate?
3. What Coping Mechanisms Did You Use to Manage These Teaching Challenges in Alternative Learning System?
4. What Recommendations Do You Have for Working Smarter, Using Hacks, or Making Secondary Subjects Teaching Easier in Alternative Learning System, and What Suggestions Can You Provide to Stakeholders—Such as School Administrators, Curriculum Designers, and Fellow Teachers—to Support These Improvements?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of the Bachelor of Elementary Education graduates who handles secondary subjects in Alternative Learning System. A semi-structured interview using the interview guide questions, which was content validated by the experts, was utilized to gather data from the ALS teachers in Valencia City, Bukidnon who were selected as research participants through purposive sampling.

Participants and Setting

This design is appropriate as it allows for a deep exploration of the "stories" and "meaning-making" processes of educators navigating a curriculum outside their primary specialization. The participants and settings consist of nine (9) purposively selected BEED graduates currently serving as ALS teachers. These educators bring diverse experience levels, ranging from three-year volunteers to veterans with over 13 years in the field. The research setting encompasses various district learning centers, including community-based sites and specialized environments such as the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP).

Research Instruments

The primary research instrument is a semi-structured interview guide composed of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed narratives regarding teacher motivation, struggles in handling secondary subjects like higher Mathematics and Science, coping mechanisms, and recommendations for stakeholders

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedure involves conducting in-depth interviews where participants share their humbling and difficult journeys, detailing specific instances of content mastery gaps and the emotional toll of impostor syndrome. These sessions are recorded and transcribed to ensure the responses of the teacher is preserved.

Data Analysis Procedure

The study utilizes the Reflexive Thematic Analysis framework by Braun and Clarke (2019) to identify recurring patterns across the narratives, such as the transition from "elementary-level concepts" to "secondary competencies" and the shift toward "contextualization and localization" as a survival strategy.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical guidelines by prioritizing participant anonymity and confidentiality by using pseudonyms (e.g., Participant #1 to #9). Informed consent is obtained, ensuring participants understand their right to withdraw and that their professional standing will not be affected by their disclosures regarding their struggles with "advanced topics". The research also received approval from the Schools Division Superintendent of the Division of Valencia, ensuring alignment with institutional policies and safeguarding the well-being of the teachers during the research process. These measures collectively ensured that the study was conducted in an ethically responsible manner while preserving the integrity of the participants lived experiences.

Scope and Delimitation

The Scope and Delimitation of the Study are Centered on the Specific Phenomenon of BEED Graduates Teaching Secondary Subjects in the Alternative Learning System. It Does Not Cover Secondary-Trained Teachers (BSED) or Teachers in the Formal School System, Focusing Instead on the Unique "Multi-Level and Multi-Subject" Juggling Act Inherent to the Alternative Learning System Context. However, the Study is Subject to Certain Limitations, Including a Small Sample Size Consisting of Only Nine Purposively Selected Participants. Furthermore, the Research is Restricted to a Single Location, Specifically the Division of Valencia City, Bukidnon, Which May Limit the Generalizability of the Findings to the Broader Population of ALS Educators Across The Philippines.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study explored the narratives of BEED graduates handling secondary subjects in Alternative Learning System at the Division of Valencia City as they state their lived experiences and struggles in teaching. Analysis of teacher responses, revealed four key emerging themes: (1) altruistic commitment amidst systemic gaps, (2) the complexity of pedagogical displacement, (3) strategic resilience through self-directed development, and (4) advocacy for curricular reform and collaborative mentorship.

Altruistic Commitment Amidst Systemic Gaps

The primary motivation for Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) graduates to handle secondary subjects in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a profound altruistic commitment to providing "second chances" to marginalized learners, necessitated by a systemic shortage of secondary-trained teachers. The analysis of teacher narratives reveals that while these educators recognize their lack of specialized secondary training, their professional identity is rooted in a mission-driven desire to ensure that out-of-school youth and adults are not "left behind" due to life challenges or poverty. This suggests that in the ALS context, the teacher's role transcends subject specialization, prioritizing inclusive education and the transformative potential of schooling over formal curriculum alignment. This is illustrated by Participant #3, who noted that their decision was guided by a "passion to serve" and a "commitment to inclusive education". Similarly, Participant #6 highlighted that despite their elementary specialization, they accepted the role because they witnessed "how education can transform lives" and wanted to help learners continue despite "life challenges". Participant #8 further emphasized this by stating that the role "goes beyond specialization—it is about responding to the real needs of our learners". Consequently, the motivation of these educators is fundamentally humanitarian, viewing the teaching of secondary subjects as a necessary sacrifice to bridge the educational divide for those who missed formal schooling. Local literature supports this findings, (Arrieta and Duka, 2020) found that ALS teachers are primarily driven by social responsibility and the intrinsic fulfillment of seeing marginalized learners succeed. Internationally, (UNESCO, 2021) underscores that non formal education personnel globally rely on high levels of "intrinsic motivation" to navigate environments characterized by a lack of institutional resources and specialized training.

The Complexity of Pedagogical Displacement

Educators experience significant instructional strain characterized by a "Content Mastery Gap" and the overwhelming logistical demands of multi-level and multi-subject instruction. It suggests that BEED graduates face a form of "pedagogical displacement" where their foundational training in elementary concepts is insufficient for the rigors of Junior High School subjects like Algebra, Physics, and Chemistry. This mismatch leads to "impostor syndrome," as teachers must simultaneously manage learners from Grade 7 to Grade 10 within a single session, often pausing secondary instruction to re-teach basic elementary skills. Participant #9 poignantly described this as a "humbling and difficult journey," noting they felt "lost" when handling quadratic equations or the periodic table and had to "study the lessons the night before". Participant #5 explicitly admitted that while they could teach basic mathematics, "higher math... was really a struggle". Furthermore, Participant #10 noted the "emotional and psychological toll" of seeing learners struggle, which led to sleepless nights and burnout. Ultimately, these struggles highlight a critical gap between teacher preparation and the actual multi-faceted requirements of the ALS secondary classroom. (Bacolod, 2022) argues that "out-of-field teaching" in the Philippines results in heightened teacher anxiety and diminished instructional confidence. Globally, (Pitiyanuwat and Sujiva, 2021) identify a "competency mismatch" in non-formal education as a systemic barrier, where teachers are forced to become "instant experts" in subjects outside their domain.

Strategic Resilience through Self-Directed Development

To navigate instructional challenges, BEED graduates employ "Strategic Resilience" by leveraging digital resources, modular instruction, and the contextualization of lessons to real-life experiences. Rather than relying on formal institutional support, teachers become autonomous learners, utilizing technology to bridge their own content gaps while adapting their elementary pedagogical skills to simplify complex secondary topics for their students. This adaptation strategy transforms the classroom into a collaborative learning environment where the teacher and learner often progress together. Participant #9 utilized "YouTube tutorials on Algebra" and "Khan Academy" to upgrade their skills and implemented a "modular approach" to manage different competency levels simultaneously. Also, Participant #7 illustrated proactive collaboration through the "STEP" (Synergize Teaching for Education on PDL) program, partnering with math-literate jail officers to assist with specialized instruction. Participant #15 also described using "contextualization" by computing "daily wages or harvest yields" to make abstract math relevant to the learners' daily lives. These narratives demonstrate that the coping mechanisms of ALS teachers are characterized by high levels of resourcefulness and a commitment to "working smarter" through self-directed professional growth. This findings is supported by (Magalong, 2021) emphasizes that

Filipino ALS teachers increasingly rely on "Open Educational Resources" (OERs) to augment teaching materials. Internationally, (Knowles, 2020) posits that "andragogical" or adult-centered approaches—which prioritize real-life application—are the most effective strategies for educators in non-formal settings.

Advocacy for Curricular Reform and Collaborative Mentorship

To improve ALS delivery, there is a collective call for an ALS-specific secondary curriculum and the institutionalization of collaborative mentorship between formal and non-formal educators. The findings suggest that stakeholders must move away from "copy-pasting" the formal school curriculum and instead develop modular, spiral materials that integrate foundational reviews. Teachers advocate for a "culture of sharing" where digital tools and peer mentoring are utilized to reduce individual workloads and increase instructional efficacy. Participant #9 recommended the creation of a "Modular Bank" to reuse resources and suggested "secondary content clinics" where high school teachers mentor ALS staff. Participant #5 suggested leveraging "AI (ChatGPT)" for generating quizzes and activities to save time. Participant #1 emphasized that curriculum designers should "integrate foundational elementary skills into secondary modules," such as arithmetic reviews before Algebra. These recommendations underscore a shift toward a more technologically integrated and collaborative framework for ALS teacher support. The (Republic of the Philippines, 2021) via the ALS Act (RA 11510) acknowledges the need for specialized training and resources. Internationally, the (World Bank, 2022) highlights that "mentorship loops" between specialized and generalist teachers are essential for improving secondary education outcomes in developing nations.

This study provides a multi-faceted contribution to the field of non-formal education by bridging theoretical, methodological, and practical gaps in current literature. Theoretically, it advances Teacher Identity Theory by illustrating how professional identity in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) is reconstructed through an "altruistic commitment" to marginalized learners rather than traditional subject-matter expertise. It also strengthens the application of Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy) by demonstrating how educators successfully utilize real-life contextualization to bridge the gap between elementary training and complex secondary content. Methodologically, the research employs a phenomenological design that offers a deep narrative inquiry into the internal "meaning-making" processes and emotional struggles, such as impostor syndrome, which are often overlooked in broader systemic studies. Practically, the findings provide a tangible roadmap for stakeholders, advocating for the institutionalization of "secondary content clinics," the development of an ALS-specific spiral curriculum that integrates foundational reviews, and the use of digital tools like "Modular Banks" to alleviate the professional isolation and instructional burden of out-of-field teachers. By shifting the focus from individual teacher resilience to systemic institutional support, this study ensures that the "second chance" provided to learners is sustained by high-quality, specialized instruction.

CONCLUSION

The narratives of BEED graduates in the Alternative Learning System reveal a profound paradox: they are the backbone of a "second chance" educational system, yet they operate in a state of professional displacement. While their altruistic commitment drives them to accept the challenge of teaching secondary subjects, they are often overwhelmed by content mastery gaps and the psychological weight of impostor syndrome. Their resilience, demonstrated through self-directed digital learning and creative contextualization, serves as a temporary bridge for systemic deficiencies. However, for ALS to truly succeed, the burden of adaptation must shift from the individual teacher to the institution. True progress requires curricular reform that integrates foundational skills into secondary modules and the formalization of collaborative mentorship networks. By addressing these systemic gaps through targeted policy and technological support, the Department of Education can ensure that the dedication of ALS teachers translates into high-quality, sustainable education for the country's most marginalized learners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the lived narratives and professional insights shared by BEED graduates navigating the complexities of the Alternative Learning System (ALS), the following recommendations are offered to enhance the instructional delivery of secondary subjects:

For Educators: Teachers should simplify complex instruction by adopting the "Spiral Progression Hack," which prioritizes foundational elementary concepts before building up to advanced secondary topics, while also creating a digital "Modular Bank" to organize and reuse contextualized materials. Teachers are further encouraged to leverage technology, such as YouTube for content mastery and AI tools for generating activities, and to use "contextualization" to link abstract concepts to the daily lives of learners, such as computing harvest yields or wages.

For School Administrators: School heads must institutionalize support by organizing "secondary content clinics" where formal high school specialists mentor ALS staff and by allocating specific budgets for simplified, low-text instructional materials tailored to the ALS environment. Additionally, administrators should recognize the heavy workload of multi-level teaching through compensation adjustments and, where possible, hire subject matter majors for Mathematics and Science to bridge specialization gaps.

For Curriculum Developers: Curriculum designers need to move away from duplicating formal school curricula, instead designing an ALS-specific spiral curriculum that integrates "Quick Review" sections for foundational skills within secondary modules and allows for flexible assessments like portfolios and oral exams.

For Parents and the Community: Fostering a "culture of sharing" is essential, which includes supporting home visits and participating in collaborative initiatives like the "STEP" program, where subject-literate volunteers assist with specialized instruction.

For Future Researchers: It is suggested that they should explore the psychological impact of "impostor syndrome" on displaced teachers and evaluate the effectiveness of peer mentoring loops and AI-assisted tools in improving both teacher confidence and learner passing rates..

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