

English Language Teaching in the Contexts of Alternative Learning System (ALS) in South Cotabato Division: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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Abstract

This research investigates the difficulties encountered by Alternative Learning System (ALS) teachers in providing English language instruction, as well as the strategies they use to address these challenges. Recognizing the significant importance of English language teaching, this study sought to examine the personal experiences of ALS teachers, who play a crucial role in the transmission of knowledge. This transcendental phenomenological study aimed at identifying, describing, and construing the lived experiences of English language teachers teaching English language to Alternative Learning System students in the Division of South Cotabato. Five Alternative Learning System teachers served as participants in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather enriching data from the participants. The content experts served as validators of the interview questions. A trial interview was held to ensure the credibility and

validity of the results. Arduous Thematic Analysis of the gathered data revealed 6 emerging themes: Challenges in ALS, Resource, Time and Financial Constraints, Dedication to Teaching, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Teacher Training and Professional Growth, and Future Visions. ALS educators exhibit exceptional resilience, commitment, and dedication to delivering quality education to a variety of learners. Nonetheless, systemic obstacles concerning resources, financial support, and acknowledgment persist, limiting the effectiveness of the ALS program. The research suggests that policymakers, educational organizations, and community partners collaborate to tackle these challenges and provide ALS educators with the essential support, resources, and recognition needed to foster a more equitable and effective educational environment for all students.

Keywords: Alternative Learning System, Contexts, Lived Experiences, Phenomenological Study

INTRODUCTION

English Language Teaching (ELT) is widely acknowledged as a fundamental aspect of educational advancement, particularly in culturally diverse and multilingual environments. In the Philippines, where English serves as a second language and a medium of instruction, the success of ELT significantly affects students' academic achievements and future prospects. Although conventional educational systems have established frameworks for English instruction, the unique challenges and methods of alternative education models, like the Alternative Learning System (ALS), have not been as thoroughly examined.

The researcher observed that earlier research on ALS concentrated on three areas: the effect on students, the creation of instructional materials, and problems related to teaching and learning.

While there has been growing attention to English language teaching (ELT) within mainstream education, research addressing its implementation in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) remains sparse and fragmented. Much research has not been done on the experiences of teachers working in the Alternative Learning System, particularly those who teach English. Existing studies do not sufficiently address the preparedness and professional development of language teachers in Alternative Learning System. These research gaps indicate a need for more focused phenomenological studies addressing their nuanced experiences, ethical and professional development and positively provide ALS teachers trainings and seminars to teach English effectively, especially in resource-constrained environments.

The study was carried out to examine teachers' experiences in teaching English in ALS, given the current situation in the area. How the ALS teachers teach English to the ALS students and how they handle, motivate, participate, and inspire the students to become competitive in the English language. ALS teachers' experiences were the subject of this study, which aimed to offer vital information, giving an issue-based presentation that is contextualized and served as the foundation for establishing the local educational system.

To illuminate the many facets of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) teachers' lived experiences, this study intended to analyze the lifeworld of ALS teachers in teaching English language to ALS students in the Division of South Cotabato for the school year 2024-2025.

Research Questions

1. How do English Language Teachers (ELT) describe their lived experiences in teaching English language to ALS students?
2. What are the contexts of the lived experiences of English Language Teachers (ELT) teaching the English language to ALS students?
3. How do English Language Teachers (ELT) teaching English language to ALS students view themselves in the future?

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the Division of South Cotabato where Alternative Learning System (ALS) program is offered. The researcher used a semi-structured interview created by the researcher and interview questions were validated by validators following the inclusion criteria as follows: (a) at least a master's degree holder in language teaching; (b) have at least 1 published research; (c) a qualitative researcher; and (d) have at least five (5) years of teaching experience from various educational

institutions. Suggestions for improvement were taken into consideration. These interviews provided an opportunity for participants to share their emotions, coping mechanisms, and personal stories.

The information obtained from the interviews underwent thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves recognizing patterns or themes within qualitative data. According to Braun & Clarke (2023), it is recommended as the initial qualitative method to master because it equips researcher with essential skills relevant for various forms of analysis.

Hatch (2002) noted that (a) the process of reading and rereading the data enables the researcher to comprehend what is present in the dataset; (b) creating initial themes, where the researcher identified and codes significant points across the datasets and organized data pertinent to each code; (c) clustering themes, which involved grouping codes into potential themes and assembling all relevant data associated with each code; and (d) the researcher reviewed the themes to verify that they correspond to the coded extracts and the entire dataset; and (e) the researcher also elaborated on the relevant themes by conducting ongoing analysis to refine each theme and the narrative it conveys, offering clear definitions and names for each theme.

Additionally, the transcripts were sent back to the participants of the study. In qualitative research, returning transcripts to participants—a process called member checking—ensures the data's veracity and accuracy by enabling participants to amend and confirm their claims.

Locale of the Study

This research was carried out in various locations within the Division of South Cotabato, where the Alternative Learning System program is offered. The research centered on Alternative Learning System (ALS) teachers in community learning centers and educational institutions in the Division.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were the five identified Alternative Learning System (ALS) teachers who teach English language in the Division of South Cotabato. Purposeful sampling was employed in this selection process. Consequently, the criteria for participants selection included: (a) a language teacher in ALS; (b) having a minimum of two years of teaching experience; (c) a teacher within the Division of South Cotabato; (d) being comfortable engaging in conversation with the interviewer and being willing to share their experiences.

Research Instrument

The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview guide developed personally to elicit participants' emotions, coping strategies, and lived experiences. This format allowed flexibility for follow-up questions, aligning with the goals of transcendental phenomenology in capturing first-person perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d.). All participants received the same core questions, with probing used as needed to explore shared and divergent experiences. Interview questions were validated by experts meeting specific criteria, including advanced qualifications, research experience, and extensive teaching backgrounds. Data collection involved audio-recorded interviews, transcription, and member checking to ensure credibility and trustworthiness.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher issued a communication letter prior to initiating data collection. This study utilized a semi-structured interview tool, consisting of a series of questions that the researcher developed in advance for each participant to respond to.

The researcher initially provided the participants with a consent form outlining the study's objectives, their right to withdraw at any moment was stated, and emphasized that all shared information would remain confidential and solely accessible to the researcher. Following this confirmation, the researcher went to the schools where the participants were located to conduct face-to-face interviews for data collection. After transcribing the interviews, member checking was performed.

Data Analysis Method

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data. As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2023), this approach helps researchers develop foundational analytical skills. The researcher engaged deeply with the transcripts, coding significant statements and organizing them into themes that reflected participants' experiences. Following the steps outlined by Hatch (2002), the process involved repeated reading, coding, theme development, and refinement to ensure coherence and accuracy. Member checking was also conducted by returning transcripts to participants for validation, enhancing the credibility and authenticity of the findings.

RESULTS

Six (6) emerging themes described the Lived Experiences of English Language Teachers Teaching English language in the Contexts of Alternative Learning System. These cover *Challenges in ALS, Resource, Time and Financial Constraints, Dedication to Teaching, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Teacher Training and Professional Growth, and Future Visions*.

The lived experiences of English language teachers teaching English language to ALS students in the Division of South Cotabato.

Emerging Theme 1. Challenges in ALS

The requirement of having 75 learners for each teacher poses a major obstacle. Educators note the considerable effort needed to find and enroll an adequate number of students, especially when compared to the smaller class sizes found in formal schools. The fluctuating nature of the student population, primarily driven by job obligations and family duties, worsens retention issues. Many learners balance work, childcare, and their education, resulting in inconsistent attendance and placing additional pressure on teachers to make home visits and modify their instructional strategies.

This aligns with the insights from research by Arpilleda (2018) and Velasco (2017), which underscore irregular attendance and the necessity for teachers to cater to the varying schedules and professional responsibilities of students. The absence of intrinsic motivation in some learners, who participate solely out of obligation rather than true interest (T1 L320-321), further complicates efforts to maintain student retention.

On the other hand, diversity in the classroom includes a wide range of differences among students, such as cultural, socioeconomic, linguistic, cognitive, and learning abilities. This diversity plays a crucial role in shaping the teaching and learning environment, necessitating that educators modify their teaching methods and content to suit various backgrounds and requirements.

The presence of diversity can enhance the educational experience, offering both students and educators a richer array of perspectives and learning experiences. However, it also presents challenges, including the necessity for differentiated instruction and the risk of misunderstandings or inequities in educational outcomes. The findings of Arzadon and Nato (2015) similarly illustrate the difficulties faced by ALS teachers in addressing the needs of diverse learners. They noted that ALS teachers frequently

encounter the substantial challenge of instructing a highly varied group, which includes individuals from young children to adults.

As one educator noted, the situation becomes more challenging when students come from diverse educational backgrounds and display different levels of interest and engagement in English (T2 L47-51; T5 L211-212).

The difficulties of learner recruitment, retention, and diversity in ALS are multifaceted and require a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which these educators operate. The testimonies of teachers in South Cotabato reveal the pressing need for targeted strategies that address the unique circumstances of adult learners.

Emerging Theme 2. Resources, Time, and Financial Constraints

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) plays a vital role in providing education to learners with diverse backgrounds and needs. In this context, a conducive learning environment and appropriate instructional materials are essential for promoting effective teaching and learning. The availability of customized and relevant resources is especially critical in ALS, where students often face educational challenges. However, the shortage of instructional materials and learning spaces significantly impedes the teaching of English. Teachers report difficulties in engaging learners, explaining complex language concepts, and creating meaningful learning experiences due to a lack of physical, technological, and instructional support.

Several studies, such as those by Mercado (2015), Pinca (2019), and Galima (2021), confirm the shortage of educational materials and the lack of community-based and permanent learning facilities as persistent issues. These limitations disrupt the continuity and quality of instruction, negatively affecting student engagement and learning outcomes. Additionally, financial constraints further exacerbate the problem. With limited government support and funding, teachers often shoulder the cost of necessary materials and transportation, as highlighted by Mercado (2015). This lack of financial support contributes to low teacher morale and hampers their ability to deliver effective instruction.

Beyond material and financial issues, ALS teachers face significant time-related challenges. Educators must frequently adjust to learners' inconsistent schedules, conduct home visits, and manage the distribution of learning modules, leading to insufficient instructional time. According to Arpilleda (2018) and Francisco (2024), these demands limit the depth of instruction and place additional stress on teachers. The need to balance professional responsibilities with personal life results in emotional and physical strain, which may impact teaching quality and educator well-being. Overall, the convergence of inadequate resources, financial hardship, and time pressures defines the complex and demanding environment in which ALS English teachers operate.

The contexts of the lived experiences of English language teachers teaching English language to ALS students in the Division of South Cotabato.

Emerging Theme 3. Dedication to Teaching

Alternative Learning System (ALS) teachers exhibit extraordinary dedication despite the numerous challenges they face, such as working with diverse learners, limited resources, and time constraints. According to UNESCO (2023), these educators often travel long distances, extend their teaching hours, and use personal resources to design flexible and inclusive learning environments tailored to students' varied needs and capacities.

These teachers find deep fulfillment in witnessing their learners' growth, which reflects a strong emotional connection and commitment to their students' development. Their joy is not limited to academic success but includes the learners' perseverance and resilience, emphasizing education's transformative impact. This aligns with existing research recognizing the intrinsic rewards of teaching and the vital role educators play in shaping lives beyond literacy (Pinca & Estrelita, 2019).

Additionally, ALS teachers actively pursue professional development, often collaborating with peers to refine their teaching practices. They incorporate innovative strategies such as multimedia use and differentiated instruction to accommodate varied learning needs (Aprilla, 2019; Resurrection, 2021). Their motivation stems largely from a genuine desire to help rather than financial incentives, as reflected in their readiness to support students even without compensation. However, despite their unwavering commitment, systemic issues such as scarce resources and inconsistent attendance must be addressed to ensure sustained teacher motivation and the long-term success of the ALS program (Ramos & Bautista, 2018; Velasco, 2017).

Emerging Theme 4. Culturally Responsive Teaching

Alternative Learning System (ALS) educators frequently adapt their teaching strategies to accommodate the varied cultural backgrounds, competencies, and learning preferences of their students. Notably, teaching English to learners from Indigenous Peoples (IP) communities presents unique challenges due to cultural and linguistic differences. One educator explicitly highlighted these difficulties, emphasizing the importance of tailoring instruction to be culturally responsive. This need for pedagogical adaptation underscores the relevance of culturally sensitive approaches and differentiated instruction, enabling educators to better meet the distinct needs of learners from diverse communities.

In response to these challenges, ALS teachers have implemented creative and student-centered techniques, such as using YouTube tutorials and interactive learning tools. These innovations reflect a commitment to differentiated instruction, as noted by Aprilla (2019), and help bridge the gap between educational content and students' lived experiences. The incorporation of games and interactive strategies also aligns with research by Delos Santos and Alvarez (2020), which emphasizes the role of functional literacy and real-life relevance in engaging students. Such methods aim to reduce absenteeism and improve motivation by making learning more accessible and enjoyable.

Multimedia tools further enhance classroom engagement, with participants noting increased student cooperation and interest, irrespective of cultural differences. Multimedia content—including presentations, videos, and digital games—addresses varied learning styles, contributing to better comprehension and involvement, as supported by Resurreccion (2021). However, despite their innovative efforts, educators stressed the limited availability of such resources, particularly in remote learning centers. While the dedication of ALS teachers remains evident, there is a pressing need for systemic support and resource allocation to realize the goals set by the Department of Education (DepEd, 2019) and ensure equitable English language instruction for all learners.

The views of English language teachers in ALS of themselves in the future in the Division of South Cotabato

Emerging Theme 5. Teacher Training and Professional Growth

Professional development is vital for enhancing teachers' competencies, especially within the Alternative Learning System (ALS), where educators face the complex task of addressing diverse learner needs. ALS teachers emphasize the importance of continuous training to stay current with modern English

teaching strategies that align with both the evolving curriculum and the distinct characteristics of their students. Their calls for more tailored training reflect the need for differentiated instruction, as supported by educational research.

These educators also highlight the importance of culturally responsive teaching, citing challenges in managing students from various socio-cultural backgrounds. Their requests for training in this area underscore the complexity of the ALS learning environment and resonate with studies advocating instructional adaptability to cater to diverse educational experiences. This points to a critical need for training programs that prepare ALS teachers to effectively respond to the heterogeneity of their learners.

Furthermore, ALS teachers express concerns over unequal access to professional development compared to their counterparts in the formal education system. Their appeal for “Equal Training Opportunities” reflects a sense of marginalization, as documented by previous studies noting insufficient training and resources for non-formal education. Addressing this gap through equitable training access, adequate resource distribution, and stronger professional networks is essential not only for teacher growth but also for improving educational outcomes within the ALS program.

Emerging Theme 6. Future Visions

A conducive learning environment is critical in enhancing student learning outcomes and teacher performance, especially in the context of the Alternative Learning System (ALS). Teachers’ aspirations for better educational settings are clearly evident in their statements. One educator emphasizes the urgent need for improved facilities and proper support for ALS learners, pointing to the necessity of adequate infrastructure and learning tools. This aligns with Barrett et al. (2019), who stress that well-equipped classrooms—featuring good lighting, ventilation, and access to technology—are vital for students’ cognitive development and overall motivation.

The integration of technology emerges as a recurring theme in the educators’ responses. One teacher specifically mentions a preference for using PowerPoint presentations and having access to a room with a TV or projector, underlining the importance of multimedia tools in promoting student engagement and comprehension. This reflects broader academic consensus, including the insights of Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010), who assert that digital learning tools enhance the interactivity of lessons and accommodate various learning styles. The expressed desire for technological resources indicates the persistent gap in access to modern instructional materials, which hinders optimal teaching and learning experiences in ALS settings.

Furthermore, the limited availability of printed educational materials remains a pressing concern. Teachers’ requests for printers and printing supplies reinforce findings from UNESCO (2018), which highlight the essential role of printed resources in successful alternative education programs. The educators’ collective call for better infrastructure, both digital and physical, is not a matter of convenience but a necessary response to the challenges faced in the ALS context. Without sufficient resources, educators are constrained in implementing innovative, student-centered approaches crucial to language acquisition and learner success.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn in light of the results and findings from the data obtained:

1. ALS teachers exhibit adaptability, open-mindedness, and perseverance in teaching diverse learners and continuously seek innovative English language teaching strategies, reflecting a strong alignment with learner-centered and flexible pedagogical approaches.
2. ALS educators employ varied adaptive teaching methods—such as code-switching and interactive techniques—despite facing significant challenges including insufficient resources, financial burdens, and limited technology; their roles extend beyond instruction to mentorship and emotional support, reflecting both professional dedication and systemic strain.
3. ALS teachers advocate for improved resources, professional development, and better working conditions, emphasizing that supporting educators is essential for advancing equitable and inclusive education for marginalized learners.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are drawn:

1. District heads and program makers may work together to offer continuous professional development initiatives, seminars, and workshops that prepare ALS educators with adaptable, innovative, and culturally responsive teaching methods for effective instruction in the English language.
2. Government and program administrators can work together to enhance ALS learning settings by boosting financial support for teaching materials, improving digital tools, and creating community-based learning centers equipped with technology to tackle resource shortages and accessibility issues.
3. Fostering collaboration between educators, parents, community leaders, and policymakers through support groups, parent-teacher meetings, and community engagement can improve student retention and motivation in ALS programs.
4. Elevating the professional standing and acknowledgment of ALS educators through awards, promotions, and recognition may increase their morale and esteem within the education field

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