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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring Pedagogical Competencies among Alternative Learning System Teachers: A Qualitative Inquiry into Instructional Practices, Learner Engagement, and Educational Adaptation in Benito Soliven North District, Philippines

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Abstract

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) serves as a vital educational pathway for out-of-school youth, adults, and marginalized learners in the Philippines. As a flexible and inclusive educational program, ALS requires teachers to demonstrate diverse pedagogical competencies that address the unique learning needs, backgrounds, and circumstances of learners. This study explored the pedagogical competencies of ALS teachers in Benito Soliven North District, Philippines, focusing on instructional practices, learner engagement strategies, and educational adaptation mechanisms. Employing a qualitative phenomenological research design, the study involved ten ALS teachers selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and reflective discussions. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework revealed six major themes: (1) Learner-Centered and Flexible Instructional Delivery, (2) Contextualization and Localization of Learning Experiences, (3) Building Motivation through Positive Teacher-Learner Relationships, (4) Adaptive Pedagogical Practices for Diverse Learner Needs, (5) Technology Integration and Resourcefulness in Instruction, and (6) Continuous Professional Growth and Reflective Practice. Findings indicate that ALS teachers possess strong pedagogical competencies characterized by flexibility, responsiveness, innovation, and commitment to learner success. However, challenges related to resources, technology access, and professional development opportunities remain evident. The study highlights the importance of sustained capacity-building programs, contextualized instructional support, and strengthened institutional mechanisms to further enhance ALS teaching effectiveness.

Keywords *Alternative Learning System, pedagogical competencies, instructional practices, learner engagement, educational adaptation, qualitative research, Philippines*

Introduction

Education serves as a fundamental human right and an essential mechanism for social mobility and national development. However, many individuals remain unable to complete formal schooling due to poverty, geographical barriers, family responsibilities, early employment, and other socioeconomic challenges. To address this concern, the Philippine government institutionalized the Alternative Learning System (ALS), a parallel and flexible learning pathway that provides educational opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults. ALS serves as a second-chance educational program designed to promote lifelong learning and educational inclusion.

Unlike formal classroom settings, ALS learners come from diverse educational, economic, and social backgrounds. Consequently, ALS teachers must possess specialized pedagogical competencies that enable them to respond effectively to varied learner needs. These competencies extend beyond content knowledge and encompass learner-centered instruction, educational adaptation, motivational strategies, and community-responsive teaching approaches.

Recent studies have emphasized that ALS teachers demonstrate strengths in differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, contextualized teaching, and learner engagement strategies, although challenges related to assessment, resource availability, and professional development continue to persist. Furthermore, teacher adaptability and instructional flexibility have been identified as crucial factors influencing learner participation, retention, and educational achievement within ALS settings. The Alternative Learning System (ALS) serves as a parallel learning pathway designed to provide educational opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults who are unable to complete formal basic education (Department of Education, 2024). As a flexible learning program, ALS requires teachers to demonstrate pedagogical competencies that extend beyond traditional classroom instruction and encompass adaptability, learner-centered approaches, and contextualized learning experiences (Albert et al., 2024). Research suggests that effective ALS teachers play a critical role in improving learner participation, retention, and educational outcomes through responsive instructional practices and supportive learning environments (Mahinay & Manla, 2025).

In Benito Soliven North District, ALS teachers encounter unique challenges associated with rural educational contexts, including limited resources, varying learner readiness levels, and diverse community conditions. Despite these realities, little qualitative evidence exists regarding how ALS teachers demonstrate pedagogical competencies in actual instructional practice. This study addresses this gap by exploring teachers' lived experiences and instructional approaches within the district.

Review of Related Literature

Pedagogical competence refers to teachers' ability to effectively plan, implement, assess, and adapt instruction according to learners' needs. According to Shulman (1987), pedagogical competence combines content knowledge, instructional strategies, and contextual understanding to facilitate meaningful learning.

Within ALS contexts, pedagogical competence extends to andragogical practices because many learners are adolescents and adults. ALS teachers are expected to employ learner-centered methodologies, contextualized instruction, and flexible learning approaches that acknowledge learners' prior experiences and real-life circumstances. Studies have shown that effective ALS instruction emphasizes differentiated teaching, collaborative learning, experiential activities, and personalized support.

Pedagogical competence refers to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that enable teachers to facilitate meaningful learning experiences (Shulman, 1987). In alternative education settings, pedagogical competence includes the ability to modify instructional approaches according to learners' backgrounds, experiences, and educational needs (Casingal, 2025).

Learner engagement is a critical component of effective instruction. According to Fredricks et al. (2004), engagement encompasses behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions that significantly influence academic achievement and persistence. Within ALS contexts, engagement is strengthened when teachers establish positive relationships, create relevant learning experiences, and provide continuous encouragement (Mahinay & Manla, 2025).

Educational adaptation likewise represents an essential competency among ALS teachers. Flexible instructional delivery, differentiated learning activities, and contextualized materials enable educators to accommodate diverse learner characteristics and circumstances (Albert et al., 2024).

Learner engagement remains another critical dimension of ALS pedagogy. Research indicates that motivation, teacher support, positive learning environments, and relevant learning experiences significantly influence learner participation and retention.

Educational adaptation likewise plays a significant role in ALS implementation. Teachers frequently modify instructional materials, schedules, assessment methods, and learning activities to accommodate learners' varying educational backgrounds and life circumstances. Such adaptability reflects the core philosophy of ALS as a flexible educational system.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of Alternative Learning System teachers regarding their pedagogical competencies. Phenomenology was appropriate because it enabled an in-depth examination of how teachers experience and interpret instructional practices, learner engagement, and educational adaptation within ALS settings.

The participants consisted of ten ALS teachers from Benito Soliven North District selected through purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria required participants to have at least three years of ALS teaching experience and active involvement in ALS instructional delivery.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and reflective conversations. Interviews focused on instructional approaches, learner engagement strategies, adaptive teaching practices, professional experiences, and instructional challenges.

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework involving familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and report writing. Ethical considerations included informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and adherence to research ethics standards.

Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Learner-Centered and Flexible Instructional Delivery

Participants consistently described adapting instructional strategies according to learners' educational backgrounds, learning preferences, and personal circumstances.

One participant explained:

"Hindi pare-pareho ang sitwasyon ng mga ALS learners. Kailangan naming i-adjust ang paraan ng pagtuturo para mas maintindihan nila ang aralin."

Another teacher shared:

"Mas epektibo kapag nakabase ang lessons sa pangangailangan ng learner kaysa sundin lang ang traditional na classroom approach."

The findings indicate that flexibility serves as a foundational pedagogical competency among ALS teachers. Through individualized learning plans, differentiated activities, and learner-centered facilitation, teachers create opportunities for meaningful participation and improved learning outcomes. This finding supports the work of Tomlinson (2017), who emphasized that differentiated instruction promotes learner engagement by addressing individual learning needs. Similarly, Casingal (2025) reported that effective ALS teachers demonstrate strong competencies in modifying instructional approaches to accommodate diverse learners.

Theme 2: Contextualization and Localization of Learning Experiences

Participants emphasized the importance of connecting lessons to learners’ daily experiences and community realities.

One teacher stated:

“Kapag nakikita nila ang koneksyon ng lesson sa kanilang buhay, mas interesado silang matuto.”

Another participant remarked:

“Ginagamit namin ang mga halimbawa mula sa komunidad para mas relatable ang learning activities.”

The findings suggest that contextualized instruction enhances learner understanding and motivation. By integrating local experiences, livelihood activities, and community issues into lessons, teachers make learning more relevant and meaningful. These findings align with Dewey’s (1938) experiential learning theory, which posits that learning becomes more effective when connected to real-life experiences. UNESCO (2023) similarly emphasized that community-based learning strengthens educational participation among nontraditional learners.

Theme 3: Building Motivation through Positive Teacher-Learner Relationships

Participants highlighted the importance of developing supportive and trusting relationships with learners.

One participant shared:

“Maraming learners ang nawalan ng confidence dahil matagal silang hindi nakapag-aral. Kailangan munang buuin ang tiwala nila sa sarili.”

Another teacher explained:

“Hindi lang teacher ang role namin. Minsan counselor, mentor, at inspirasyon din.”

These findings indicate that relational competence constitutes a significant dimension of ALS pedagogical practice. Positive teacher-learner relationships contribute to learner motivation, self-confidence, and persistence. According to Ryan and Deci (2020), supportive learning relationships foster intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being. Similarly, Mahinay and Manla (2025) found that teacher encouragement and emotional support significantly influence ALS learner retention and engagement.

Theme 4: Adaptive Pedagogical Practices for Diverse Learner Needs

Participants acknowledged the diversity of ALS learners in terms of age, educational attainment, socioeconomic status, and life experiences.

One teacher explained:

“May learner na working student, may parent, may out-of-school youth kaya iba-iba rin ang learning needs nila.”

Another stated:

“Minsan kailangan naming baguhin ang pacing ng lesson para walang maiwan.”

The findings reveal that adaptability enables teachers to respond effectively to varied learner circumstances. Teachers modify learning schedules, instructional materials, assessment methods, and learning activities to ensure accessibility and participation. These results support Albert et al. (2024), who emphasized that instructional flexibility remains one of the defining characteristics of successful ALS implementation.

Theme 5: Technology Integration and Resourcefulness in Instruction

Participants described utilizing available technologies and alternative instructional resources to support learning.

One teacher shared:

“Kapag may internet access, gumagamit kami ng videos at online materials para mas interactive ang lessons.”

Another participant noted:

“Kung walang gadgets, naghahanap kami ng alternative materials para tuloy pa rin ang learning.”

The findings demonstrate that resourcefulness enables ALS teachers to overcome instructional limitations. Technology integration facilitates learner engagement, while locally developed materials provide alternative means of instruction when digital resources are unavailable. These findings are consistent with the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework proposed by Mishra and Koehler (2006), which highlights the importance of integrating technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge for effective teaching.

Theme 6: Continuous Professional Growth and Reflective Practice

Participants viewed professional learning as essential for improving instructional effectiveness.

One teacher stated:

“Patuloy kaming natututo dahil nagbabago rin ang pangangailangan ng learners.”

Another participant remarked:

“Ang trainings at seminars malaking tulong para ma-improve ang teaching strategies namin.”

The findings indicate that reflective practice and professional development contribute significantly to pedagogical competence. Teachers who engage in continuous learning are better equipped to address evolving educational challenges and learner needs. These findings support Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), who concluded that sustained professional development improves instructional quality and student learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The study revealed that ALS teachers in Benito Soliven North District possess substantial pedagogical competencies characterized by learner-centered instruction, contextualized teaching, adaptive educational practices, effective learner engagement strategies, technology integration, and commitment to professional growth. Their instructional approaches reflect the flexibility and inclusivity required within Alternative Learning System contexts. Despite challenges related to resources and technological limitations, teachers continue to demonstrate resilience, innovation, and dedication in providing meaningful educational opportunities for diverse learners. These competencies significantly contribute to learner participation, motivation, and educational success within ALS programs.

Implications of the Study

The findings suggest that pedagogical competencies among ALS teachers extend beyond conventional teaching skills and involve adaptability, contextual responsiveness, and relational competence. Educational leaders should prioritize competency-based professional development programs that strengthen differentiated instruction, assessment practices, technology integration, and andragogical teaching approaches. Strengthening institutional support systems may further enhance the quality and effectiveness of ALS implementation.

Recommendations

1. Develop district-wide competency enhancement programs for ALS teachers.
2. Strengthen training on differentiated instruction and learner assessment.

3. Expand technology access and digital learning resources in ALS centers.
4. Promote communities of practice among ALS implementers.
5. Increase support for contextualized and localized instructional materials.
6. Conduct further qualitative and mixed-methods studies involving ALS learners and community stakeholders.
7. Establish sustainable mentoring programs for novice ALS teachers.

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