
Revealing the Lived Experiences of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Volunteer-Teacher in the New Normal: An Inquiry

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Abstract: *This research study aimed to explore the lived experiences of volunteer teachers in Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the new normal modality of teaching. A qualitative research design was employed, specifically utilizing phenomenological approach. The study focused on the experiences, coping mechanisms, and the insights drawn from the experiences of the 14 ALS volunteer-teachers of the Division of Davao de Oro, seven (7) of whom undergone in-depth interviews, while the remaining seven (7) underwent focus group discussion. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed major themes on the experiences of the ALS volunteer-teachers in the new normal: extend extra effort, mixed emotion and limited resources. On the other hand, the participants cope with the challenges through: Tenacity to help and teach, Inspiration from Students' Determination and Collaborating with others. The findings present substantial information for policymakers to review and provide substantial support to the volunteer-teachers who traversed and provided learning resources to the learners despite the pandemic. To be able to capture a more generalizable findings, future study utilizing a bigger group and scope is recommended.*

Keywords: *ALS, Volunteer-Teachers, New Normal, Qualitative, Phenomenological Study.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The sudden shift to a different modality brought about by the pandemic resulted to various concerns for those who are affected. Teachers and students had to adapt to continue the teaching-learning process. Different approaches were used which ranged from the use of social media, modules, and teleconferencing applications [1-3]. Using different approaches

were not easy as it came with challenges on the end of teachers. Likewise, teachers of Alternative Learning System (ALS) have experienced struggles in implementing new instructional approaches demanded by the transition to the new normal.

Varying literature shows that ALS teachers struggle with varying instructional operations during the pandemic. A case in Pakistan revealed ALS teachers have close to no trainings to meet the demands of learners in the new normal [4]. In rural areas of China, ALS teachers had to look for stable network coverage while students were unable to attend online class because they lack gadgets and internet [5]. Similar issues were found in Philippine context wherein ALS teachers struggled with internet connectivity issues. [6].

ALS teachers of the locale (Davao de Oro – Mawab District) face many issues throughout the school year. Teachers had to deal with the limitations that came with limited face to face interactions. Teachers were not able to conduct mapping different areas as a direct result of COVID-19 restrictions. It even became very challenging because teachers had to continue their duties despite the lack of financial resources. Moreover, teachers had to struggle with internet connection problems and added paperwork. Students also struggled as evidenced in the submission of mediocre outputs [7].

The researcher observed that previous studies on ALS focused on three aspects: impact on earners, instructional material development and teaching and learning issues. [8-9]. Given the current circumstance of the locale, the researchers were urged to pursue the study which focused on the experience of volunteer teachers in ALS. This study hopes to provide essential information on the experience of ALS volunteer teachers. Thereby giving a contextualized presentation of problems that can be the basis for the educational system development within the locale.

The following are the research objectives of this study

- Objective 1. Uncover the lived experiences of ALS volunteer-teachers in the new normal.
- Objective 2. Reveal coping mechanisms of ALS volunteer-teachers in dealing with the challenges in the new normal

2. METHOD

Qualitative research was designed to explore and understand the meaning people attribute to a social scenario [10-11]. For this study, the researchers opted to utilize a phenomenology as the research design. The researchers see it fit that a phenomenological design suited the objective as it focused on the subjective experience of the participants. The researchers sought to illuminate specific experience of the participants. This was done by collecting data in two ways: in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussion (FGD). Data obtained from the IDI and FGD were then analyzed with thematic analysis. Patterns or themes in the data were examined to present a detailed description of the subject matter [12].

This study was conducted in Davao de Oro. The researchers identified 14 ALS volunteer teachers. This was based on the established practice in qualitative research to reach

saturation. To comply with this condition, the researchers followed the suggestion of having five to 25 participants [13]. Similarly, qualitative studies in the field of education complied with this practice [14-17]. The 14 participants were split into two groups for the data collection. 7 participants underwent the IDI while the remaining 7 underwent the FGD.

3. RESULT AND FINDINGS

The results generated themes which were extracted from the IDI and FGD of the participants. The results depict ALS volunteer teachers in their lived experiences during the new normal. The theme generated are: extend extra effort, mixed emotion and limited resources.

A. Extend extra effort

The participants' responses regarding their experience show that ALS volunteer teachers extend extra effort. The transition to learning at home learning resulted to limited interactions between teachers and students. As such, ALS volunteer teachers went the extra mile to serve their students regardless of the struggles. Teachers extended efforts as evidenced in the extracted statements from the participants. This experience is consistent with previous studies that detailed ALS teachers that sought for better strategies that suited their diverse learners [18]. Moreover, it was pointed out that the shift to a different modality made teachers do additional work to deliver their lessons [19].

I provide self-learning worksheets for home learning (IDI_1)

I reach out to students who do not give priority to schooling (IDI_5)

I visit learners for the provision of individualized instruction (IDI_7)

I diversify the instructional approach depending on my student (FGD_3)

I assist my students in answering their lessons (FGD_7)

B. Mixed Emotions

ALS Volunteer teachers are responsible for delivering instructional services to out-of-school youth and adults in their communities. The delivery of the services was severely impacted by the pandemic. Challenges were unprecedented which resulted to the ALS volunteer teachers experiencing mixed emotions. Despite many challenges, the desire to serve the learners prevailed for teachers felt privileged in catering their students. This is clear from the culled responses of the participants.

I feel nervous and excited in the delivery of instruction (IDI_3)

I am privileged to impart knowledge to my students (IDI_7)

I feel many emotions in helping the students (FGD_1)

I am happy for the opportunity of helping students but nervous with the many changes (FGD_4)

These results are supported by a study that posited ALS teachers exhibited varying various emotions which depend on how they can guide these learners to achieve their full potential and become community members [20]. Another study asserted ALS teachers have the

tendency to be overwhelmed with emotions as they teach. Teachers look forward to nurturing students with skills that compare to students who attended conventional education [21].

C. Limited resources

ALS volunteer teachers were receiving stipends which entails that funding is sufficient to carry out their tasks. However, ALS teachers confess that funds were lacking. Had classes been conducted face-to-face, the budget provided would have been sufficient. The shift to a different modality demanded additional resources even resorting to students using their own money to compensate for the lack of finances. Similar cases were experienced in various parts of the Philippines. One study emphasized that ALS teachers spent personal resources to for their learners [22]. A different study stressed that ALS teachers felt that funds were limited because they had to travel to each household of their learners [23].

Funds were lacking since we still had the same budget for face-to-face class (IDI_2)

The budget is lacking especially in times that I conduct home visitation (FGD_1)

The new modality made me spend more which entailed more expenses (FGD_6)

In dealing with the experience of ALS teachers in the new normal, coping mechanisms were employed by teachers which allowed them to handle what they are going through. Themes were generated that depict how ALS teachers coped with the changes in the modality. The following themes were generated as coping mechanisms: Tenacity to help and teach, Inspiration from Students' Determination and Collaborating with others.

D. Tenacity to help and teach

ALS Volunteer teachers exhibit an innate drive to provide services to their learners. As ALS teachers experienced struggle, they used their inner strength to push them to continue doing their work. They transformed challenges into motivation to defray all second thoughts that clouded their minds. It is observed that ALS teachers possess the tenacity to help and teach based on their statements.

I have the innate drive to help my learners (IDI_1)

I am being motivated to help others (IDI_7)

I have the desire to teach my students regardless of the circumstance (FGD_4)

One study had similar results with the results. As observed, the tenacity to help and teach students came out as an effective coping mechanism for teachers. Teachers felt that helping their students is innate [24].

E. Inspiration from Students' Determination

The benefits of teaching are rooted in students. For ALS teachers, they draw their inspiration from the determination exhibited by their students. Despite the odds, students remained steadfast in working hard. This became a contributing factor towards inspiring teachers. This was evident in the responses below.

I was heavily motivated by my students' hard work (IDI_4)
Seeing the efforts of my learners made me continue with my work (FGD_1)
I was inspired when I saw the willingness of my students to continue despite challenges (FGD_3)

The results were similar to a study that described an emotion-focused strategy. As teachers experienced challenges, they diverted their attention to something positive emerging from the situation [25]. In the case of this study, ALS teachers considered the determination of their students as motivation in performing their duties.

F. Collaborating with others

Instead of working alone, ALS volunteer teachers productive when they collaborate with others. Collaboration eased the burden that came with changes in the teaching modality. Similarly, one study found that

This is similar with the results of one study that detailed the value of collaboration in the implementation of the ALS program. Internal and external stakeholders contribute to the success of the ALS programs. As such, teachers need to work together with stakeholders to transfer target skills and supplement the lacking resources [26]. Another study even added that the collaboration of stakeholders and ALS teachers immensely contributes to the success of the literacy development of learners [27]. Such was the case in the responses of ALS teachers.

It is important to collaborating and obtaining assistance from others (IDI_3)
The tasks are manageable when I collaborate and ask for support from colleagues (IDI_4)
Resources are no longer lacking because of support from relevant organizations (IDI_7)
I seek help from other ALS teachers for added input (FGD_1)

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study unveiled the lived experiences of ALS volunteer teachers during the new normal and their means of coping with the challenges. Their stories represent the struggle of ALS teachers in bridging the distance and connectivity for students to continue learning. It is evident that ALS teachers advocate teaching from the heart as evidenced in their experiences. Despite challenges experience by ALS teachers, they managed to extend extra efforts for their students. Further, their professionalism and passion for teaching practice are evident in the mindset as demonstrated in response to challenges embedded in their choice to become volunteers in the ALS program.

Recommendation

This study highlighted ALS teachers relative to their experiences and coping mechanism in the new normal. Their stories as ALS volunteer teachers were expressed which led to the results of the study. This study can be the basis in exploring future research. Such studies can delve deeper into related areas that were not covered in this study. Moreover, the study is



qualitative in which the researchers acknowledge limitations. Results cannot be held conclusive outside the context of the participants. As such, future researchers may explore a broader scope to validate the results of the generated themes of this study. The results of this study may also be used as basis for a program intended to alleviate the woes of ALS teachers in the locale. The data being qualitative provides a contextualized perspective of ALS teachers which may be used for data driven decision making of stakeholder of the ALS program.

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