



# AT THE FRONTLINES OF EARLY LEARNING: NARRATIVES OF THE TEACHING EXPERIENCES OF NON-LICENSED EDUCATION GRADUATES IN PRIVATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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## ABSTRACT

This narratological study explored the lived experiences of non-licensed education graduates teaching in private elementary schools. The participants were three (3) non-licensed teachers. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, and the study was completed in March 2026 during the School Year 2025–2026. Thematic analysis was employed to identify essential themes from their narratives. The findings revealed that participants' entry into teaching was shaped by role-model influence, life circumstances, and a sense of purpose. Their early teaching experiences were characterized by adaptation to challenges and the development of commitment to student learning. Moreover, participants encountered various challenges, including early career adjustment, classroom and institutional demands, workload pressures, managing diverse and inclusive learners, and difficulties in parent-teacher relationships. Despite these challenges, they demonstrated resilience with support systems, collaboration, resourcefulness, learner-centered practices, and adaptive teaching strategies. Furthermore, their experiences contributed to their professional growth and identity formation, highlighting that teaching competence can be developed through experience, adaptability, and strong personal commitment. Based on the findings, the study recommends the implementation of support systems, capacity-building programs, and professional development opportunities to assist non-licensed teachers in enhancing their teaching practices.

**Keywords:** *Education, non-licensed teachers, lived experiences, narratology, teaching challenges, professional growth, Davao del Norte, Philippines*

## INTRODUCTION

The employment of non-licensed graduates as teachers has become quite common in some private elementary schools. This has raised some issues with the quality and level of support that these teachers receive. Although it is true that some non-licensed graduates have impressive educational backgrounds, they may not have the required knowledge and skills in the areas that are essential in elementary education. Furthermore, according to Olvido et al. (2024), teacher preparation is different as the schools continue to find ways to fill the staffing gap and the ever-changing educational demands, the issue involving non-licensed teachers has become quite significant and worthy of examination, especially in its effects on the teaching process.

Similar situations are also observed in other Asian nations as well, where non-licensed graduates enter the teaching profession due to teacher shortages. In Japan, Sakuma and Shimazaki (2024) reported that non-licensed or laterally entering graduates experience difficulties due to limited preparation, challenges in role adaptation, and the demands of professional teaching responsibilities. In the case of Indonesia, Alifia et al. (2022) observed that the situation is quite challenging for non-licensed graduates who opt for the teaching profession. These graduates often find it difficult to cope with issues related to their professional identity as teaching staff, the lack of support from the school management, and the lack of professional growth opportunities, which affect their confidence level as teaching staff. In the case of India as well, Sarangapani et al. (2023) observed that a significant number of private schools employ non-qualified or less licensed teaching staff, especially in the lower primary grades. These problems often include having poor salaries, inadequate training, and insufficient professional support, which makes it difficult for them to deliver efficient instructions effectively.

In the Philippines, this same problem is also observed especially in some private institutions where non-licensed teachers or graduates of education without taking their Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). According to Masa and Estrellas (2025), there are some private schools that hire non-licensed teachers or education graduates without taking their LET due to teacher shortages and financial constraints in these institutions. For this reason, some non-licensed teachers have had exposure to teaching without adequate professional preparation and experience some challenges when it comes to teaching, especially in instruction planning, management, and adaptation to the requirements of teaching in the early grades. Furthermore, according to Olvido et al., (2024), teacher preparation is different from training institutions and could affect some of these non-licensed teachers as well in the manner of teaching at the early grades, where students develop their basic literacy and numeracy skills, highlighting the importance of strengthening teacher preparation, professional support, and licensing in the Philippine education System.

Locally, similar conditions can be seen in Davao del Norte. Some private elementary schools in Davao del Norte employ non-licensed education graduates who teach in different positions in elementary schools, especially in kindergarten and early elementary grades. Although these individuals seem to be enthusiastic in their work and knowledgeable in their subjects, they still face difficulties in planning, managing, and

evaluating their work because they lack training in child-centered approach in teaching (Viterbo et al., 2025). Such experiences can be seen in how these teachers cope with their work in teaching young students and how they perform their responsibilities in their instruction. In this regard, it is essential to examine the stories of non-licensed teachers to examine how these teachers cope with their work in teaching young students and how they perform their responsibilities in instruction.

Despite existing literature on non-licensed education graduates teaching in higher education and senior high school levels, there is a gap in the research on the teaching experiences of non-licensed education graduates in private elementary schools, especially those who work with young learners. Studies such as Faseel and Siddiqui (2025) highlight that non-licensed teachers are employed due to teacher shortages and financial constraints, exposing them to instructional and classroom challenges. However, these studies primarily discuss the conditions and issues faced by non-licensed teachers rather than their personal narratives and lived experiences. Thus, there remains a gap in understanding how non-licensed education graduates in private elementary schools experience their teaching journey, cope with challenges, and develop their professional identity. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the lived experiences of non-licensed education graduates teaching in private elementary schools in Davao del Norte.

This study is both urgent and socially relevant because the elementary years form the foundation of a child's lifelong learning, and the teachers working in this stage have a major influence on students' academic and social development. Most of these early grades in private elementary schools are also taught by non-licensed graduates in early education, but so little is heard about their experiences or raised in policy discussions. Through allowing them to tell their stories, this research aims to bring to the forefront the struggles these teachers and the ways in which they go about doing their work. This information can be used to create better induction programs and professional development opportunities for educators. It is necessary that this problem be addressed now to ensure that there is not further degradation in the quality of teaching and the knowledge of students. Research regarding the relationships between policies and non-licensed teachers in the private primary sector is not only important for research purposes but also to the teaching profession and society at large. It highlights the realities faced by teachers who are involved in early childhood education despite not yet having a professional teaching license.

The findings of this research will be shared during research colloquia and conferences, as well as in-service training, to reach more people through this project. An overview summary will also be distributed to the participating schools, teachers, and interested groups in the community. The study will be expanded to be published in peer-reviewed journals later.

## **Research Questions**

1. What personal stories do non-licensed education graduates share about their journey of teaching in private elementary schools?

2. What struggles and challenges emerge in the narratives of non-licensed education graduates while performing their teaching roles in private elementary schools?
3. What strategies and coping mechanism they used in dealing with the demands of the teaching and learning process?
4. In what ways have their experiences as non-licensed teachers influenced their professional growth and approach to teaching in private elementary schools?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This presents the research methodology and design used in the study. It describes the research participants, the role of the researcher, and the methods of data collection and analysis. Furthermore, it discusses the procedures undertaken to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, as well as the ethical considerations observed throughout the research process.

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a qualitative research design, which focuses on exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research aims to examine the lived experiences, perspectives, and realities of participants rather than measuring variables or testing hypotheses. This approach is appropriate for the study as it allows an in-depth understanding of the experiences of non-licensed education graduates, capturing rich descriptions of how they make sense of their teaching roles and challenges.

This was related to the present study as it aimed to explore the actual experiences, feelings, and perspectives of non-licensed teachers as they transitioned from teacher education programs to private elementary schools. Through this, the researcher obtained a broader understanding of the professional lives that these teachers considered significant. The study also provided insights into how beginning teachers perceived and made sense of the demands of the profession and how they responded to these while teaching young learners. Furthermore, it allowed the researcher to examine the emotional, social, and occupational aspects of their professional lives.

In particular, the approach of narrative inquiry was used in this study, which involved the investigation and interpretation of how individuals constructed meaning about their lives over time and how they engaged with stories of others. Narratives presented a method for us to hear from the participants themselves, as they described their personal understandings of non-licensed teaching and how their experience influenced who they were, what they believed about teaching, and how they practiced within the general school context. This dialogue made it possible to give voice among perceptual and physical underdevelopment of work in classrooms. This was most relevant to this study, because it enabled all non-licensed educators to capture their lived experiences and coping strategies in a reflective, intentional way. The aim of the study was to uncover how these teachers made professional sense and meaning out of their

non-certified/non-licensed status in early learning settings, while at the same time offering rich descriptions of the role that they played.

This study was supported by a narrative inquiry research design, from the point of view that stories could assist in making sense of lives. This inform a pro focus enabled the researcher to gain insight into how non-licensed teacher education graduates were constructing their professional identities, managing the classroom, and developing their coping strategies in their early learning environments. The experiences that the participants shared and the meaning that they gave to their life as a teacher were in focus. Furthermore, this approach was used to uncover the anecdotes and musings as they pertained to all the realities of teaching without an actual license in a private school gained through traditional channels by the participants who were living these realities day by day.

Moreover, the qualitative narrative methodology also facilitated an in-depth exploration and description of the complexity of experiences in real-life situations. In addition, it also facilitated the sharing of successes, where the stories were able to emphasize the challenges, skills, and wisdom of the non-credentialed education grads. Moreover, this methodology also facilitated an understanding of the heart of the teachers' professional experiences and the significance of experiences in their development as professionals. The narrative research design methodology also facilitated the researcher in developing interpretations that made sense and were rooted in the experiences of humans who practiced teaching at a grassroots level in early childhood education.

## **Research Participants**

The participants of this study were non-licensed education graduates who were currently employed as classroom teachers in private elementary schools in Davao del Norte. Specifically, three participants were included, which was appropriate for a narrative inquiry as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of individual teaching experiences.

The researcher, using purposive sampling, sought to select suitable candidates who were able to share their teaching experiences effectively in narrative compendium. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are selected based on specific criteria relevant to the study (Creswell, 2013). The private schools with significant populations of non-licensed local teachers were given precedence in selecting the local participants. No eligible participant, hence, was excluded based on their age, gender, socio-economic status, or ethnicity, and the ethical considerations of the study were applied across all participants. In addition, all members shared equally in the risks and benefits of the research. Teaching in public elementary schools and teaching outside Davao del Norte were not included in the study.

The following criteria were used in selecting the participants of the study. Participants: a. were non-licensed education graduates who were currently employed as classroom teachers in private elementary schools in Davao del Norte; b. had at least two years of teaching experience at the elementary level; and c. willing to participate voluntarily and were open to sharing their personal teaching experiences during interviews or discussions.

The selected participants engaged in in-depth, one-on-one interviews, where they were encouraged to tell their individual teaching stories openly. The interviews were the main data, and any further discussions or follow-up that was necessary were conducted. Anonymity of participants was maintained during the entire process, and fictitious names were applied in all research papers. The participants' narratives were windows into how the non-certificated education graduates constructed and interpreted their professional identities within the context of becoming teachers in early childhood settings.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Data were collected through a deliberate and planned manner to create rich stories for this research. These actions were needed to respect integrity and ethical concerns, verify the research, and ensure the validity of the reflection of participants' experiences. By following a careful process of informed consent, selecting cases, interviewing individuals, and analyzing the interviews, it was the goal of the researcher to generate credible findings which gave representative accounts of non-licensed education graduates lived experiences.

The research data were collected by the researcher in the following manner. The research sought permission from the chosen private elementary schools in Davao del Norte to conduct the study in an official manner and ensured that school authorities collaborated with the researcher. Obtaining such formal consent enhanced the credibility of the study, which encouraged the non-licensed education graduates to participate in the research. Before conducting any data collection, potential participants were informed about the objectives of the research, the procedures involved, and their rights. This action was undertaken to ensure that the participants understood the entire research process prior to giving consent.

Second, participants were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure that knowledgeable individuals who were able to offer in-depth and meaningful narratives of their teaching experiences, coping strategies, and insights were identified. They were expected to be able to read and understand the consent and assent forms before signing them. These forms indicated that participation was completely voluntary and that respondents voluntarily contributed their teaching experiences as they related to the study's purposes. Participants were informed that their identities were completely confidential, as were their responses for thematic coding. Participants were given a separate Data Privacy Notice for Research Participants explaining data processing, storage, sharing, and disposal procedures. Participants signed and returned this document, and it formed part of the study appendix.

During the interviews, the data from the participants' responses were recorded using a smartphone or audio-recording device, with their permission. Interviews were conducted on an individual basis and lasted about 45–60 minutes, allowing participants the opportunity to candidly discuss their experiences. The researcher translated the participants' native language into standard English without losing the meaning or context of the responses. The researcher then reviewed the transcribed and translated data for recurring words or ideas, which formed simple and straightforward open-ended sub-

items. During the orientation session, additional privacy measures were observed. For online sessions, participants were allowed to turn off cameras or wear face-concealing materials. For face-to-face sessions, a private venue free from disturbance was ensured to protect confidentiality.

The researcher then analyzed the narratives collected by conducting thematic analysis, which included reading and re-reading the data, identifying common themes, organizing the data into thematic categories, and interpreting the participants' experiences. The extracted themes were critically examined and refined before developing the final set of findings based on the study results. Thirdly, the identified themes were submitted to a qualitative data analyst specializing in educational research for verification and evaluation purposes to establish the rigor of the findings.

As for data protection, all audio recordings, transcripts, and consent forms were stored electronically using passwords and physically in locked filing cabinets. After five years, the data were deleted or shredded. Access to personal information was limited only to the researcher and the adviser, and the anonymous data were used for academic publications and presentations.

## **Data Analysis**

In qualitative enquiry, data analysis was a key tool in developing some sense of people through their stories, experiences, and perspectives. Data analysis was a systematic interpretive process where the researcher engaged in the data to find patterns of meanings that reflected the experiences of the participants. For that reason, the data analysis technique used in this research was consistent with narrative inquiry to do justice to the voices of non-licensed education graduates. The researcher utilized a simple yet adaptable analytic approach to help unpack and construct meaning from unstructured interview narratives, which presented participants lived experiences, professional challenges, and identity development as non-licensed educators.

In this life story narrative qualitative study, data analysis entailed not only identifying but also interpreting personal narratives and common themes emerging from the lived experiences of non-licensed graduates in education. In conducting the analysis, a thematic narrative approach was used, and the researcher engaged in close reading and re-reading of the data collected from the interviews in order to identify recurrent themes, critical incidents, as well as information that pertained to the professional role of the graduates, issues arising from this role, and identity construction. The study sought to gain a rich contextualized representation of the experiences and practices of non-licensed educators in elementary classrooms by organizing findings into coherent themes and storylines.

Thematic analysis was applied to both phases of data collected from the participants. It was used as the main approach for the systematic analysis of narratives from interviews. It made it possible for the investigator to recognize, categorize, and make sense of the patterns of meaning found within the participants' accounts. This approach was utilized as it was effective for discovering and describing the components and factors

that affected the lived teaching experiences and coping resources of non-licensed education graduates. Thus, the participants' interpretations were crucial in generating meaningful accounts of their actions, feelings, and beliefs as teachers. Thematic analysis, according to Creswell (2003), included three main phases: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, all of which aimed at interpreting and validating the findings.

Data reduction consisted of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming the data found in field notes and interview transcripts. This process served as a means of structuring and focusing large amounts of narrative data into manageable and meaningful units. It also involved the researcher determining which parts of the data to highlight and which to set aside as not directly relevant to the study's focus. Throughout the analysis, the researcher consulted with a qualitative data analyst to ensure rigor and that the data were handled systematically (Creswell, 2003). The purpose of this step was to identify repeated words, phrases, or concepts that reflected the participants' accounts.

Data were displayed after reduction; this meant that the information was organized in a condensed and structured form to allow clearer interpretation. This enabled the researcher to identify relationships, similarities, and differences among the participants' responses. Data display provided a structured and condensed arrangement that facilitated the interpretation of qualitative data. This process allowed the researcher to organize themes and categories that clearly represented the participants' multiple narratives, thereby presenting their voices in the study.

In the final phase, data interpretation and conclusion drawing helped confirm the findings. The researcher examined patterns and relationships among themes to determine how they were connected. The researcher identified both similarities and differences across participants, forming categories that captured shared experiences. Furthermore, relationships among variables were examined to ensure that the findings were conceptually consistent and theoretically coherent. This process ensured that conclusions were credible, consistent with the theoretical framework, and reflective of the real-life experiences of the participants.

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

Trustworthiness is important to qualitative research, as Shenton (2004) stated, because it allowed the investigator to communicate the worth and standards of the inquiry beyond standard quantitative metrics. Terms such as generalizability, internal validity, reliability, and objectivity were replaced with the following qualitative terms: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. In conclusion, trustworthiness served as the signpost for this narrative inquiry and ensured that the study remained rigorous by reflecting the experiences of the participants truthfully. This allowed the study to focus on experiences and the meanings people made of them, instead of counting numerical data.

First, **credibility** ensured that the results of the study were believable and aligned with the participants' accounts. This study focused on quality rather than quantity, and quality was concerned with the richness and depth of the lived experiences shared by the

participants, not just the amount of data collected. The researcher ensured the validity of the data collected in a variety of ways. First, the data were accurately reported through the researcher's prolonged engagement, which involved spending considerable time with the participants to gain a full understanding of their situation and through meticulous transcription. Iterative questioning was employed during the interviews to verify responses, probe emerging ideas, and ensure that participants' perspectives were accurately captured. Second, the interview procedure was designed to make participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and reflections about teaching as non-licensed education graduates. In addition, member checking was implemented by providing transcribed or summarized data back to participants to verify the accuracy of their responses and ensure that their voices were represented. Third, to achieve thick description, participants' direct quotations were presented under each theme, and narrative accounts were used to provide detailed expressions of their views and experiences. This approach aimed to create a rich and structured body of data based on the participants' narratives.

Following this, **dependability** ensured that the results of the study were consistent and could be replicated under similar conditions. This consistency depended on the quality of the research design, data collection, and data analysis. All methods applied in the study were described so that other researchers could replicate the study and obtain similar results. To ensure dependability, the researcher used two overlapping methods of data collection: in-depth individual interviews (IDI) and follow-up narrative conversations until data saturation was reached. The use of these approaches enhanced the validity of the findings through triangulation of themes from different perspectives. Methodological details of the process were also reported to allow future researchers to replicate or adapt the study in their own contexts.

To further support dependability, a record of the researcher's reflections during the study was maintained. The audit trail was significant in enhancing dependability, as highlighted by (Carcary, 2020). This meant that a reliable record of the steps taken in data collection, analysis, and interpretation was available. The audit trail was made accessible to external reviewers or data analysts to check the consistency and accuracy of the findings. This process ensured that bias was minimized, and that the findings were grounded in the participants' own narratives rather than the researcher's assumptions.

Moreover, **confirmability** ensured the objectivity of the results by confirming that the findings reflected the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's interpretations (Shenton, 2004). To ensure confirmability, the study employed meticulous transcription, member checking, and peer debriefing. The researcher transcribed the interviews and allowed participants to review and validate their responses to ensure accurate interpretation. This process enhanced both credibility and confirmability. Furthermore, an independent qualitative data analyst reviewed the coded themes to ensure consistency and accuracy in theme development. Confirmability was ensured by grounding all interpretations in the participants' actual words and narratives.

Moreover, **transferability** was examined by providing sufficient information about the participants, context, and research procedures so that readers could determine the

applicability of the findings to other settings. The context of the study was clearly described to establish its scope and boundaries, particularly focusing on non-licensed education graduates teaching in private elementary schools in Davao del Norte. This detailed contextualization allowed readers to understand the specific conditions under which the findings were generated.

In addition, a detailed and transparent account of the research process—from design and sampling strategy to data collection, analysis, and reporting—was presented without revealing participants' identities. Thick descriptions of participants' experiences were provided to give a deeper understanding of their lived realities. These descriptions enabled readers to compare the findings with similar contexts and determine whether the results could be applicable to other educational settings, particularly those involving non-licensed teachers.

## **RESULTS**

The findings of the study revealed several themes that emerged from the narratives of the participants regarding their teaching experiences as non-licensed education graduates in private elementary schools.

### **INSPIRED TEACHER'S NARRATIVE**

The researcher assigned a code name of Inspired Teacher for this narratology as the participant showed a high degree of inspiration which guided her decision to become a teacher. The participant is a non-licensed education graduate working as a teacher in a private elementary school. Though she does not have her license, she chose to be a teacher because of her admiration of her former teacher and her growing love for teaching children. Her journey toward the classroom began as a serendipitous detour—a "blessing in disguise" where the echoes of a former role model and the realities of practical constraints revealed a hidden calling she had not initially planned to follow.

#### **Entry into Teaching as a Blessing in Disguise Shaped by Role-Model Influence and Practical Constraints**

For Inspired Teacher, the road to the classroom was not a destination planned since childhood, but rather a path that revealed itself through the unfolding circumstances of her life. She recalled how her interest in the vocation first emerged during quiet, everyday interactions where students would approach her for advice, leading to the realization that teaching was a "blessing in disguise" that resonated with her personality. This inner calling was given a clear direction by the enduring influence of a former teacher she had once idolized—a role model whose impact served as the bridge between her personal admiration and her own professional aspirations. She described this defining transition by sharing:

(My teaching began when there were children who would ask me what they should do, and at that time I realized that teaching is

nice. I admired my subject teacher before that is why I idolized him/her, and that is why I have reached this point now.) inspired by my teacher.)

This newfound admiration soon collided with the harsh realities of financial limitation, forcing him to embrace teaching as a practical necessity that would eventually transform into a true vocation. He pointed out that teaching was not his main goal at first; on the contrary, he was dreaming of being an engineer, but due to the lack of finances, he had to choose teaching as a second option. Despite this initial constraint, he made the choice to pursue the degree as a practical step that later became deeply important to him because of his evolving love for the craft. As he officially stepped into this role, the initial inspiration was quickly met by the daunting task of adapting to the actual pressures of the school environment, as he stated:

(Teaching is not my first dream, my first dream was to become an engineer but we could not afford it financially that is why I chose my second option, which is education. I was also inspired by my teacher.)

He further revealed that despite teaching not being his dream at the start, he made the choice to go for a degree in teaching as something practical that would later become important to him because of his newfound love of teaching and his former teacher. However, this growing affection for the craft was soon put to the test as he moved from the inspired choice of his studies into the stark, often overwhelming realities of his first actual classroom assignment.

### **Adaptation to Challenges Fostering Continued Engagement in Teaching**

This transition from an inspired choice to a professional reality was marked by a period of intense "reality shock" where his theoretical background met the practical confusion of the frontlines. As the researcher continued interviewing Inspired Teacher, he explained how his introduction to teaching was characterized by problems and doubt, particularly on his first few days in class. He indicated that the start of his teaching was difficult for him because he felt uncertain and confused on what to do. However, he decided to accept the problems and keep up with teaching, as he shared:

(When I started teaching it was challenging but I like challenges that is why I continued.)

He further remembered that during his first day, he felt very anxious and confused since he did not know how to do his job. In order for him to be able to cope with this situation, he resorted to observing and learning the procedures inside the classroom. Moreover, he mentioned that having the right attitude is very important when teaching, especially passion and patience, as he stated:

(On my first day, I felt nervous because I did not know what to do. I just observed to understand the school processes, especially

since I was new. During the first week, I just watched to see what things needed to be done, and I realized that you really need to have passion and patience.)

From these accounts, the participant's early teaching was marked by a steep learning curve during the initial stages of his career, as he had to rapidly acclimate to new conditions and experiences. Nevertheless, through his readiness to face these challenges and the flexibility with which he learned from experience, he maintained his active involvement in teaching. In fact, he came to understand that passion and patience are two vital traits needed for teaching—qualities that served as the inner tools allowing him to persist through the "reality shock" of the classroom. This internal growth in character eventually expanded into an outward focus on his students' success, as he began to realize that his true value as an educator lay in the tangible progress of his learners.

### **Emerging Commitment to Student Learning and Developing**

Building on this outward shift in focus, Inspired Teacher began to express a deeper sense of fulfillment through his evolving duty as an educator. According to his narrative, while teaching remained his primary professional responsibility, he reached a pivotal point where he developed a profound urge for his learners to not only gain knowledge but to effectively put it into practice. This sense of accountability is most clearly illustrated by his dedication to instilling mathematical competence in his students, as he viewed these skills as essential for their ability to endure and succeed in the future. He expressed this growing mission by stating:

(I want the students to learn, especially in mathematics, because it is our most major subject. Even if you do not finish your studies, as long as you know these basics, you will truly be able to endure in life.)

Inspired Teacher believed that teaching entails not only lesson delivery but also making sure that the learners acquire competencies that will be useful in their daily lives outside of the learning institution. Teaching, for him, involves educating learners in a manner that enables them to tackle situations that may occur in the future. This visionary commitment to his students' long-term empowerment, however, was immediately met by the daunting reality of his own professional unreadiness as he officially stepped into the classroom.

### **Early Career Challenges and Adaptation**

As he moved from these broader reflections on his purpose to the specific hurdles of his first assignment, Inspired Teacher further elaborated on the problem of having to manage diverse students in a classroom setting. The point here is that students are diverse and some have special requirements, and thus, it becomes difficult for the teacher to deal with students, especially when he lacks experience in this regard. Therefore, the new teacher had to make some emotional and professional adjustments, as he shared:

(The learners are different they are diverse, there are those with special needs, so you really would not know what to do at first, you would just be overwhelmed, you really need to have passion in teaching and more patience.)

Ultimately, it can be understood that the participant's beginning phase of teaching was very challenging, especially in terms of dealing with the school environment and catering to learners' different needs. Nevertheless, through observation and learning to become patient and passionate, he managed to cope with the situation. From the above experience, it is clear that early career difficulties form the basis of adaptation and coping with the profession. While these initial hurdles laid the essential groundwork for his professional resilience, they were soon met by a more complex set of structural and specialized hurdles that awaited him within the school's broader institutional framework.

### **Classroom and Institutional Challenges**

Moving beyond the general anxiety of his first weeks, Inspired Teacher delved into the specific systemic pressures he faced as he attempted to balance diverse classroom needs with school-wide expectations. Inspired Teacher explained some of the difficulties that he encountered while working in the classroom setting and in the institution. Some of the most challenging aspects include handling special education learners without being trained as a special education teacher. As he explained, "handling special learners was not an easy task, especially when behavioral issues arise that affect the entire class, as he narrated:

(In one elementary classroom, there is a student with special needs it is very difficult, it is really a struggle especially when the child has tantrums it affects the whole class, the class becomes disrupted.)

This instructional pressure was further magnified by the introduction of specialized curricular demands that forced him to become a student of his own lessons. In addition to classroom management challenges, another problem he faced was that of the difficulties he had to face regarding the curriculum adopted in that particular school. This was because the content was new to him, and thus it became difficult for him to prepare lessons as he had to first study the content thoroughly before teaching it, as he shared:

(Sometimes our curriculum is different, so I find it difficult to know what topic to teach next and the book we use is more on Singaporean, if you are not used to it, it is really challenging because you still have to study it.)

Beyond these academic pressures, he emphasized that administrative chores were also a major contributing factor to his daily struggles. He emphasized that apart from the duties associated with teaching, administrative chores were also a contributing factor behind his problems. The volume of documentation and other tasks restricted his available time for preparing lessons, resulting in added stress, as he expressed:

(There are really many paperwork. For example, there are tasks assigned to you, especially outside teaching, you no longer have time to do them, so they pile up, that is where I really find it difficult.)

From all these stories, there are several difficulties that were experienced by the participant both within and outside the classroom setting, including dealing with learners with special needs, adjusting to new curriculum materials, and managing heavy administrative duties. These experiences highlight the complex demands placed on teachers, especially those who are still developing their skills and adjusting to the profession. Faced with this heavy accumulation of instructional and administrative weight, he realized that he had to find reliable ways to navigate the pressure, leading him to develop a multifaceted system of support.

### **Support Systems as Coping Mechanisms**

To bridge the gap between these daunting classroom realities and his goals for professional growth, Inspired Teacher cultivated a resourceful approach to problem-solving. He highlighted the various coping mechanisms he employed when facing difficulties while teaching, specifically turning toward external aids to supplement his emerging skills. First and foremost, he revealed that he relies heavily on technology, viewing the internet as an indispensable mentor in his pedagogical development. For Inspired Teacher, digital resources serve as an essential means to master complex lessons and refine his teaching techniques. Whenever he encounters unfamiliar subject matter, he utilizes online platforms to generate ideas and deepen his understanding of the material, as he explained:

(The internet, for example, when I find it difficult and there is a topic in the book that I do not know, the internet is really my main tool because the internet is our friend. Whatever you search, it is there so we just have to use technology in a good way that is where I get my ideas.)

In addition to this, he emphasized on the need to seek help from peers and the school management. He said that working together with his fellow teachers helps him to share information and learn from each other on areas where they might not have adequate knowledge. He also appreciated the role of school management in helping him, especially when things get too hard for him to manage alone, as he stated:

(I also ask other teachers, especially when I really do not know something. There are things I know that they do not, and there are things they know that I do not, so I ask them there is also admin support when things become difficult, you can really go to them. If you can no longer handle it, you can report it to them so it can be addressed they are the ones you can rely on because they know the school system.)

On a personal level, he also discussed some easy means of dealing with stress, stressing the importance of rest and self-rejuvenation. This is because, according to him, relaxing, eating, and sleeping enable him to restore himself from his rigorous teaching responsibilities, as he expressed:

(For me, the way I handle stress is just by eating then relaxing, staying in a quiet place, resting, eating, and sleeping that is how I manage my stress.)

It is evident that his survival in the classroom depended on a synergy of external resources and personal resilience. By integrating technology, seeking colleague cooperation, accepting administrative aid, and prioritizing personal care, he successfully navigated the daily pressures of his role. While these support systems provided the necessary relief to sustain his career, they also served as the foundation for his shift from mere survival toward the intentional development of his own pedagogical style and professional identity.

### **Developing Teaching Strategies and Identity**

With a stable support network in place, Inspired Teacher began to refine his instructional approach by drawing directly from his lived experiences at the frontlines of the classroom. He specifically focused on adopting collaborative learning strategies, such as the strategic grouping and pairing of students with various abilities. Through this method, he encourages students with advanced capabilities to guide those who are struggling, a process that fosters both academic understanding and active participation among all learners, as he described:

(In teaching, I mostly use collaboration, for example, after teaching the lesson, I group them, then they are paired, I ask questions, and in one classroom there are those who are weak and those who are advanced. So, I pair them, and in the end, I let them report, but the one who reports is the weaker student. So, the brighter student will really try to teach the one who struggles and help them understand.)

In addition to developing strategies, he also concerned about what his experiences have meant for him as a teacher. He explained that teaching competency goes beyond holding a valid teaching license because competency is something else altogether. As such, he said that it is not enough to have academic excellence; one must be able to gain real experience from teaching as well in becoming an effective educator, as he expressed:

(It's really experience, there are some who are cum laude, but when they start, especially for the first time, they also do not know what to do. If you know something, you teach them even if you do not have a license, but they do, you are the one teaching them. So, it is really about experience and your skills, whether you are

licensed or not, as long as you have the passion and the desire to teach others, you can be called an educator.)

The participant's teaching techniques and professional identity evolved through consistent practice and first-hand experience. His incorporation of collaborative learning reflects an adaptive teaching style, while his belief that passion and practical experience often outweigh formal qualifications underscores his deep-seated commitment to the craft. However, this growing self-assurance was soon confronted by a deeply personal professional trial that forced him to choose between retreating in defeat or rising with newfound resilience.

### **Resilience and Professional Growth**

As he looked back on the defining moments of his career, Inspired Teacher recalled a particularly painful encounter with school leadership that tested the very identity he had worked so hard to build. He thought back to one of the most difficult times in his teaching career involving a mistake during a school event that led to a sharp warning from his principal. He stated that the words he heard from the principal that day were very insulting and hit him deeply. Rather than feeling disheartened or allowing the criticism to break his spirit, he decided to view the experience as a vital opportunity for growth, as he shared:

(The most challenging part was during a school event there was a time when I made a mistake, and I was scolded by the principal, the words really hit me deeply but after that, I took it as an opportunity, like advice, and I chose to think of it positively.)

He further explained that this experience became a defining moment in his career, as it tested his ability to endure pressure and remain in the profession. Instead of giving up, he realized his commitment to teaching, recognizing that overcoming such challenges is part of being an educator, as he expressed:

(That was when I told myself that I am truly a teacher, because if I were not, I might have already resigned since I could not handle the pressure.)

Inspired Teacher's journey in the teaching profession began with uncertainty, since being a teacher was never what he had dreamed of, and he stepped into the teaching profession without having prepared himself for the job adequately. However, despite all the problems, uncertainties, and difficulties that Inspired Teacher faced on his way, he persisted and managed to build his skills and develop his teaching identity through practice, assistance from other teachers, and personal approaches used to cope with the challenges he faced. It is clear from the narrative that he was able to transform all the challenges he faced into an advantage for himself, which helped him to progress in both personal and professional aspects. Consequently, even if the career progression of Inspired Teacher began with uncertainty, due to determination and dedication, he was able to establish himself in the teaching profession.

## **STRIVING TEACHER'S NARRATIVE**

The researcher assigned the code name Striving Teacher to this participant, as her narrative was defined by a relentless dedication to her calling despite significant professional hurdles. As a non-licensed education graduate teaching in a private elementary school, she chose to enter the field not as a placeholder, but out of a genuine desire to implement her college training and an ever-increasing love for teaching children. Her journey is a testament to how personal commitment can bridge the gap between academic preparation and professional practice. This commitment was not a sudden realization but rather the culmination of a journey that began the moment she transitioned from the lecture hall to the helm of her own classroom.

### **The Entry into Teaching Profession**

Her journey into teaching began with a sense of purpose even before formally entering the profession. During her practice teaching, she encountered meaningful experiences that shaped her motivation and deepened her understanding of the role of a teacher. Through direct engagement with young learners, she realized the significance of guiding them not only academically but also in building their confidence and this became the foundation of her purpose-driven approach to teaching. As she shared:

(My practice teaching experience made me realize how meaningful it is to guide young learners. And I also wanted to help children develop their skills and confidence in learning.)

Upon graduating with a Bachelor of Elementary Education in 2023, Striving Teacher stepped into the teaching profession despite not yet passing the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). Rather than waiting for formal recognition, she embraced the opportunity to teach in a private elementary school, driven by her desire to apply her knowledge and gain real classroom experience. She recalled:

(My journey into teaching began after I graduated with my college degree, I graduated with a BEED degree in 2023, and even though I had not yet passed the LET exam, I was given the opportunity to work in a private elementary school. I wanted to apply the knowledge I gained from college and gain real classroom experience, and until now I am still teaching, and I have been teaching for about two years and three months.)

While her entry into the profession was marked by this clear sense of mission and purpose, the transition from academic theory to the visceral reality of her first official assignment soon brought forth an intense period of emotional and professional adjustment.

### **Early Teaching Experiences and Adaptation**

As she moved from the idealism of her purpose into the practical frontlines of her career, she recounted her initial experiences upon entering the teaching profession. She

described her first day as a time when she experienced feelings of both joy and nervousness, as it represented her formal transition from a trainee teacher to an actual educator. Though she was enthusiastic about passing her knowledge to her learners, she also faced significant anxiety due to the unfamiliarity of the actual workplace setting. She shared:

(On my first day I felt excited, of course you would be excited because it is your first time teaching in your actual workplace. You feel excited about what you can do and what you can share with the students, but at the same time, you also feel nervous because it is your first time entering and stepping into the real work setting, which is different from practice teaching.)

This emotional duality reflects the common experience of beginning teachers navigating new professional realities. As she continued in her role, Striving Teacher, drew from her training and experiences as a student teacher. Her background in the BEED program instilled in her essential values such as patience, understanding, and encouragement, which became central to her teaching practice. She emphasized that teaching goes beyond delivering lessons, as she shared:

(My experiences as a student teacher and my training in the BEED program taught me the importance of patience, understanding, and encouragement. Because of this, I see my role as a teacher not only to teach lessons but also to guide and support my students in their personal growth.)

From these stories, it can be observed that the initial teaching practices of the participant were accompanied by an emotional transition period in her career. Though she felt a mixture of emotions, her previous training influenced her teaching philosophy in terms of the significance of being patient and supportive to nurture her students. While this nurturing philosophy provided her with an emotional anchor, it was quickly challenged by the grueling physical and mental toll of her daily instructional responsibilities.

### **Workload and Teaching Challenges**

As she moved deeper into her role, Striving Teacher began to confront the heavy structural demands that defined her daily life at the school. She noted that among the most persistent difficulties in her job was the relentless cycle of lesson planning. In spite of using only basic instructional materials, the act of preparing for each subsequent day proved to be physically and mentally exhausting, particularly as these tasks often began only after a full day of teaching was completed. She articulated this burden by stating:

(One of the challenges I encountered is preparing lessons every day. It is really not easy to prepare daily lessons, you still have to make lesson plans and instructional materials, even if they are simple, it still takes time to create them. After teaching at school,

when you get home, you still prepare again, so it is really tiring... balancing multiple responsibilities.)

Beyond the fatigue of preparation, the actual environment of the classroom presented a different kind of trial: the unpredictable nature of the students themselves. Striving Teacher found that handling various behavioral traits was a continuous test of her resilience, as students brought varying personalities and modes of learning that made maintaining order a constant effort. She emphasized that discipline in this environment was not about control, but about a steady, guided presence, as she stated:

(Managing learner behavior can be challenging because each student has a different personality and learning style. Some students are active and easily distracted, so maintaining discipline requires patience, clear classroom rules, and consistent guidance.)

This constant need for behavioral management often collided with her primary instructional goal, leaving her to worry about whether the actual substance of her lessons was being absorbed. She explained that one of her most persistent internal struggles was the uncertainty of whether each student was comprehending the material at an equal pace. This highlighted the difficulty of addressing individual learning needs while trying to keep the class moving forward together, a concern she often reflected on:

(I sometimes experience difficulty ensuring that all students understand the lesson at the same pace. I find myself thinking if my students really understood what I taught.)

The complexity of this instructional balance was further intensified by her commitment to an inclusive classroom where diverse learners were integrated into a single setting, often without the benefit of specialized training. She pointed out that incorporating children with varying abilities required significant extra effort to organize activities and manage behaviors that differed from the rest of the group. Without a background in special education, she found the task of meaningful inclusion to be one of her steepest learning curves:

(Since we are in an inclusive setting, they are part of the classroom and should not be separated. However, since we are not SPED teachers, it is really difficult to create activities for them and include them in the class because they have different behaviors and preferences.)

Perhaps the most personal hurdle, however, was the requirement to deliver instruction in a subject that sat squarely outside her professional and personal comfort zone. She admitted that she had to handle Mathematics—her least preferred subject since her own childhood—simply because it was the only available opportunity at the school. This mismatch between her strengths and her assignment frequently impacted her confidence, particularly when the nuances of a lesson did not go as planned:

(In our school, I handle Mathematics, which is actually my least favorite subject since elementary, high school, and college. I even asked why it had to be Math, but it was the only available position, so I grabbed the opportunity. Until now, I am still teaching Math, and it is difficult because it is not my strength, especially when lessons do not go as planned and students have difficulty understanding.)

It is clear that her early career was defined by a heavy accumulation of systemic and instructional pressures—ranging from the physical toll of preparation to the emotional weight of inclusive teaching—which demanded constant adaptability. These overlapping challenges highlight the complex reality of a beginning educator who must maintain patience and continuous effort while still discovering her own professional footing. To navigate this overwhelming landscape, she realized that she could not rely on willpower alone, leading her to establish a deliberate system of instructional, social, and personal support.

### **Support Systems and Coping Mechanisms**

Rather than succumbing to the exhaustion of her workload, Striving Teacher developed a proactive approach to managing the daily demands of her profession. She began by implementing various methods to handle the problems she faced in the classroom, placing significant weight on the power of structure and positive reinforcement. In her view, creating a reliable routine and consistently validating her students' efforts was essential to fostering a stable and encouraging learning environment. She maintained that clear communication of expectations and regular emotional affirmations were the keys to keeping both herself and her students focused and motivated:

(I use clear classroom rules, especially at the start of the school year, because you really need to introduce them to the students. They cannot immediately internalize them, so you need to repeat them and post them in the classroom so they can always read them. You also need to give positive feedback and encouraging words. Before I start my class, I sing or say positive affirmations to boost their mood.)

Beyond maintaining classroom order, she recognized that her own pedagogical growth required a commitment to constant innovation to keep her students actively engaged. Striving Teacher emphasized the need to continually refine her teaching techniques, noting that repetitive strategies often lose their effectiveness over time. To combat this, she actively researches new methods, incorporating visual aids and interactive activities that transform abstract concepts into tangible learning experiences. She explained this drive for innovation by stating:

(Using different teaching strategies is important because if you keep repeating the same strategies, they may no longer be

effective for the learners. You need courage to try new approaches, so I keep researching strategies and use visual aids and interactive activities to help them understand better.)

This quest for engaging methods led her to embrace digital tools as a primary means of capturing her students' attention in a fast-paced learning environment. She acknowledged the significance of utilizing ICT and online materials, such as video clips, to supplement traditional workbooks. For Striving Teacher, digital resources are not just accessories but essential tools that prevent instructional stagnation and keep learners focused. She elaborated on this technological integration, noting:

(We have workbooks for teachers and students, and online materials are a big help. Online resources, especially videos, really help because using ICT captures the students' attention. If you only talk, they will not listen, so you need to integrate ICT to engage them.)

While technology provided a bridge to her students, she found that her own professional confidence was bolstered most significantly through the collective wisdom of her peers. She highlighted the importance of cooperation among her fellow teachers as a vital supportive resource. By consulting with more experienced colleagues, she was able to navigate complex instructional problems and streamline her workload, turning a potentially isolating profession into a collaborative journey. She expressed deep gratitude for this professional community:

(I ask advice from my co-teachers, especially when there are things I do not yet understand. I go to them and we collaborate with each other, helping address our concerns so we can improve our work. It does not feel too heavy for me because I am happy with my co-workers.)

Even with these professional supports in place, she remained mindful of the internal toll of the classroom, developing personal rituals to protect her mental and emotional well-being. Striving Teacher spoke candidly about the coping strategies she employs whenever the stress of the job becomes overwhelming. Whether through the simple comfort of a shared meal, the joy of singing with friends, or the restorative power of solitude in nature, she has learned how to recharge her energy after a long school day. She described these personal moments of recovery:

(When I feel stressed after school, I go straight to eat anywhere and feel like I can eat everything—that is one way I realize I am stressed. Another is singing videoke with friends or even alone, or going to quiet places like the mountains.)

Ultimately, her ability to sustain her commitment to the classroom was a testament to a multifaceted approach that harmonized instructional skill, social collaboration, and personal resilience. By weaving together structured classroom management, adaptive

teaching techniques, and a reliance on the collective wisdom of her peers and the power of technology, she moved beyond the initial shock of the profession. These diverse coping mechanisms did more than just ease her daily burdens; they provided the necessary stability for her to step back and reflect on the educator she was becoming, marking the transition from a struggle for survival to a journey of intentional professional evolution.

### **Professional Growth and Identity**

In the final chapters of her story, Striving Teacher realized that the classroom had transformed from a place of daunting pressure into a living laboratory for her own development. She described how every challenge, particularly the steep learning curve of teaching subjects like Mathematics, served as a mirror reflecting both her current limitations and her future potential. This period of intense practice led her to a pivotal realization: that effectiveness in teaching is not a static trait but a continuous process of reflection and refinement. She articulated this shift in perspective by sharing:

(Of course, it is really difficult to explain Math lessons to students, especially to Grade One learners, and it made me reflect that my teaching strategies are not effective. I told myself that what I was doing was not effective, and while teaching, I realized that I need to improve my strategies, my preparation of learning materials, and my classroom management skills.)

This commitment to self-improvement eventually sparked a fundamental shift in how she perceived her entire professional purpose. Moving beyond the mechanics of lesson delivery, she emphasized that her role had evolved into a holistic mission to nurture her students in every aspect of their lives. Seeing herself as both an instructor and a mentor, she articulated this expanded vision by stating:

(I see my role as a teacher not only to teach lessons but also to guide and support my students in their personal growth.)

This deepening sense of accountability toward her students has also fueled a renewed ambition for her own professional journey. Striving Teacher expressed a clear intent to further refine her craft through continued classroom experience while simultaneously preparing for the official milestone of licensure. She views her current role not just as a job, but as an essential training ground for her future as a certified educator, sharing her goal with quiet determination:

(I want to gain more teaching experience while preparing to take and pass the LET soon.)

Striving Teacher's journey in teaching was marked with a definite purpose at the start of her journey when she began teaching soon after graduation without holding a license for doing so. Throughout the period she spent learning and teaching, she had faced many issues including the problem of burden of work, managing the classes, and dealing with difficulties in teaching the material she had never studied before.

Nonetheless, she stayed dedicated to her position through adjusting her techniques and strategies, getting help from her colleagues, and using the resources that were accessible to her. In this way, her experiences have helped her get an idea of how effective she was as a teacher in terms of meeting her responsibilities. Her journey may have started with uncertainties, but through perseverance, dedication, and a desire to improve, she continues to grow as an educator while working toward achieving her professional goals.

### **RESILIENT TEACHER'S NARRATIVE**

The researcher assigned a code name of Resilient Teacher to this participant as she possesses qualities of determination and endurance in handling the obstacles that came her way as a teacher. She is a non-licensed education graduate who is now teaching in a private elementary school. Despite lacking a professional license—a limitation that might discourage others and often impacts perceptions of job security and salary—she did not view it as an insurmountable barrier but rather as a temporary condition that persistent effort and practical experience could eventually compensate. This resilient outlook is rooted in her unique path to the classroom, which was defined by significant life transitions and a strong internal sense of purpose.

#### **Entry into Teaching Influenced by Life Decisions and Intrinsic Motivation**

When she reflected on her career, she shared that her journey into the teaching profession began later in life, shaped by personal circumstances and family-related decisions. She narrated that at the age of 38, she entered teaching in a private school after making a difficult choice between family and career. Her transition into the profession was unexpected, as she moved to a new place without prior connections and independently sought employment opportunities, as she expressed:

(At the age of 38, I started teaching in a private school it felt like I had to choose between family and career, so I needed to resign, I went to New Corella, it was unexpected that I was able to work there because I did not know anyone. I applied, got a call, and that is how I became engaged in teaching there.)

Beyond these situational changes, Resilient Teacher emphasized that her true motivation for teaching was anchored in a deeply held value system and a natural sense of responsibility toward the growth of others. She viewed her inclination toward the profession not as a mere job choice, but as an innate part of her personality—an "instinct" first nurtured through her role within her own family that she eventually felt compelled to extend to the learners in her classroom. She articulated this internal calling and her specific focus on fostering student potential by sharing:

(The motivation that led me to teaching even though I am not a licensed teacher. It is already part of my personality. I am more concerned with the skills development of children, it starts within the family at the same time, you teach your family and then extend it outside into teaching.)

Her journey reflects a shift that is determined by the context, while her dedication to teaching is driven by deeply ingrained values and a sense of accountability for the growth of learners. This foundational motivation proved essential as she transitioned into addressing the specific instructional and emotional demands found within her inclusive classroom.

### **Inclusive Classroom Challenges**

When discussing her classroom experiences, Resilient Teacher highlighted some of the difficulties she faced in managing inclusive classrooms, especially when dealing with learners who have special needs. She pointed out that meeting the needs of such learners requires considerable changes in teaching methods and a lot of patience and empathy. She emphasized that teaching in such situations demands both emotional and professional commitment, as she narrated:

(There is one student with special needs, it is a big concern, it really requires patience and your activities need to be adjusted for him/her.)

Parallel to these instructional trials, Resilient Teacher remained deeply anchored in her ethical responsibility to protect the fairness and integrity of every child in her care. In spite of the daily struggles of managing an inclusive environment, she was still acutely aware of the professional role she was meant to fulfill—a position that required her to guard against labeling students or allowing the pressure of her job to turn into discrimination. She expressed this moral commitment by stating:

(You should never show discrimination, you should not label the child, even if they are difficult to handle...)

Resilient Teacher's journey highlights the multifaceted difficulties of managing an inclusive classroom, particularly when striving to meet the specialized requirements of learners with special needs. Despite these pressures, her persistent commitment to patience and the thoughtful modification of her teaching methods underscores a profound dedication to fostering a conducive learning environment. This broad focus on classroom inclusion naturally evolved into more specific and intimate observations, leading her to navigate the delicate task of identifying and responding to the unique, individual needs of each student.

### **Experiences in Handling Diverse Learners**

The narrative shifted to specific student interactions as Resilient Teacher recounted the difficulty of determining which learners should be treated more specially, especially if they show behavioral problems. She emphasized the difficulty of having to explain certain issues to their parents because of the sensitivity of the matter. She expressed that such situations are difficult to manage, as teachers must be careful in addressing these matters while considering the feelings of the parents, as she narrated:

(When I observed the child, when I noticed that the child was at a different level it was really difficult to say because it is also hard for the parents, you cannot just easily tell them that there is something about their child.)

In response to these challenges, she shared that she tried to know more about the learner through observation of how he behaves. She did not make any hasty judgments but took time to observe the learner's behavior to understand his needs. In this way, she could adapt her methods of teaching, as she stated:

(I really studied the child's personality, why the child would suddenly dance, I wondered what was going on in the child's mind and what they were feeling.)

These interactions illustrate how she navigated difficulties that were both emotional and professional in nature. By prioritizing careful observation and a genuine desire to understand her students' unique personalities, she transformed these challenges into opportunities for adaptive instruction. Her evolving style exemplifies the core of her professional journey: that true teaching proficiency is forged through direct experience, demanding a high degree of sensitivity, patience, and a deep understanding of each learner's specific requirements. While these classroom-level adjustments were vital, her commitment to the students' growth eventually necessitated looking beyond the school walls to address the complex dynamics within the home environment.

### **Challenges in Parent-Teacher Relationship**

In extending her care for the students into the domestic sphere, Resilient Teacher encountered a new set of hurdles regarding parent communication. She revealed that one of the most taxing aspects of her role involved engaging with parents who remained in denial about their child's developmental or behavioral struggles. This lack of shared understanding created a significant barrier, as she emphasized that the collaboration between the home and the school is the essential foundation for a child's progress. She described this struggle in her own words:

(It is really difficult with parents, sometimes they are in denial, they say that their child is not like that at home, even if you can already see it in the classroom.)

Faced with these communicative barriers, Resilient Teacher approached her role with a sense of profound humility, openly acknowledging the boundaries of her own expertise. She realized that while she was not a specialist in child psychology, her daily presence in the classroom allowed her to act as a vital witness to each child's unique struggles. For her, the absence of an expert title did not diminish her impact; rather, it emphasized the critical need for teachers to serve as the bridge between classroom observation and parental collaboration. She firmly believed that a united front between the school and the home was the only way to truly support a student's progress, as she articulated:

(I am not a psychologist but I can observe. However, teachers and parents really need to work together to help the child.)

These experiences underscore the teacher's struggle when trying to communicate and collaborate with the learners' parents. What emerges from her narrative is that while she recognizes her limits, she remains focused on the need for both parties to work together in meeting the needs of the learners. This shows that teaching is indeed a tough task since teachers have to go beyond the classroom and involve themselves with the learners' parents in supporting student development. Beyond the demands of fostering this external collaboration, her journey also highlights how she prioritized the specific interests and emotional needs of her students through the adoption of learner-centered teaching practices

### **Learner-Centered Teaching Practices**

Driven by a desire to bridge the gap between classroom challenges and student progress, Resilient Teacher shared how she employs a learner-centered technique by establishing deep connections with her students. She proactively dedicates time to interact with her learners through informal conversations and personal interviews, allowing her to understand their emotional states, interests, and specific needs. This intimate knowledge serves as the foundation for her classroom management, as she narrated:

(I talk with my learners, sometimes I even interview them, so I can understand what they want and what they are feeling.)

This emotional understanding enables her to adapt her teaching strategies to align with the unique interests of the learners, transforming the classroom into an enjoyable and responsive space. By implementing methods that the students genuinely appreciate, she is able to monitor their movements and behavior more effectively, as she stated:

(I use the activities that they like, because that is where I can observe and understand their movements and behavior.)

Her professional evolution is marked by the realization that the role of an educator extends far beyond the mere transmission of information. She emphasized that addressing a learner's requirements appropriately necessitates a holistic study of their character and personality. This perspective underscores her comprehensive approach to instruction:

(Teaching is not the only role of a teacher; you also need to study the personality of your student.)

Ultimately, this commitment to a learner-centered philosophy highlights her reliance on communication, observation, and flexibility as primary tools for instruction. By viewing education through a holistic lens—one that prioritizes individual needs, interests, and behaviors—she ensures that her teaching remains deeply person-centered. However, she recognized that the insights gained through this classroom-level

observation could not be fully utilized without the active participation of the family, prompting her to focus on ways to bridge the gap between home and school.

### **Strengthening Communication and Collaboration**

Focusing on these professional bonds, Resilient Teacher shared how she proactively improves communication and cooperation with parents to better assist her learners. She indicated that she always tries to take the initiative when a problem emerges, by contacting the parents herself to talk openly about their children and ensuring they understand any underlying issues. Through open and honest dialogue, she aims to build mutual understanding and cooperation, as she narrated:

(I really called the parents and we had a heart-to-heart conversation so they could understand their child's situation.)

Even as she pursued this closer alliance with families, she remained mindful of the need to maintain a careful balance between professional guidance and parental duty. Resilient Teacher emphasized the significance of maintaining clear professional boundaries while still collaborating effectively with the home. She noted that while teachers contribute immensely to a learner's development, it is vital that the weight of that responsibility is shared with the parents. This understanding helps create a balanced partnership, ensuring that the child's needs are addressed through a united front rather than an isolated effort, as she articulated:

(It is also important to have boundaries because not all responsibilities belong to the teacher; parents also need to cooperate.)

This proactive way of interacting shows a joint effort to help learners both in and out of the classroom environment, reflecting her growing sense of professional identity and accountability. However, her commitment to the student's success required her to look beyond the immediate circle of parents and school, driving her to tap into a wider network of community resources.

### **Support Systems and Resourcefulness**

Building on this spirit of collaboration, Resilient Teacher elaborated on her resourcefulness and initiatives in overcoming material and instructional problems encountered in the classroom. She actively seeks assistance from different people and organizations in order to sharpen her skills in the profession. In this way, she manages to benefit from the expertise of external agencies to compensate for her lack of a formal license, as she narrated:

(I really look for agencies and people who can help me improve my skills and enhance my teaching.)

Beyond seeking professional mentorship, her resourcefulness extended into the broader community as she took personal responsibility for the physical environment of

her classroom. Rather than waiting for resources to be provided through traditional channels, she took the initiative to contact local authorities, private sponsors, and even the mayor's office to secure the necessary materials for her students' activities. This proactive stance allowed her to bypass institutional limitations and build a network of external support that directly benefited her classroom, as she shared:

(Sometimes I approach the mayor, ask for help from sponsors, and even from parents to support the activities in the class.)

The fact that she can proactively solicit help and access diverse resources shows that she is flexible and determined to improve the learning experience for her students despite systemic limitations. This resourcefulness was not limited to external support but also manifested in her creative ability to transform the available environment into a learning laboratory through innovative methods.

### **Adaptability and Innovation in Teaching**

This external drive for community support was mirrored by a deep-seated internal creativity, as Resilient Teacher learned to navigate the daily challenges of limited resources through innovation. Rather than being deterred by a scarcity of formal educational tools, she embraced a mindset of flexibility, refusing to rely solely on provided materials. Instead, she began to see the immediate environment as a primary laboratory for her teaching, a process she described with determination:

(Even without materials, I find ways by innovating and using the available resources in the environment.)

Her innovative spirit extended beyond mere survival in the classroom and became a core part of her instructional method. By intentionally incorporating contextual elements, such as indigenous artwork, and organizing engaging events like classroom competitions, she succeeded in capturing her students' imaginations in ways that standardized materials might not have achieved. This intentional use of the surroundings proved highly effective in maintaining student engagement, as she explained:

(I utilize the environment, such as indigenous art, and I conduct contests to engage the students.)

These experiences highlight how the intersection of necessity and creativity fostered a powerful form of instructional adaptability in her practice. Her capacity to transform her surroundings into significant learning opportunities reflects a profound dedication to her students, proving that flexibility and resourcefulness can effectively bridge the gap left by a lack of traditional materials. Ultimately, these creative victories in the face of scarcity were not just pedagogical wins; they served as the fundamental building blocks for her emerging professional self-assurance and the final shaping of her identity as an educator.

## Professional Growth and Identity Formation

The cumulative effect of these classroom successes and creative triumphs ultimately led to a significant shift in her professional self-perception. Resilient Teacher observed that developing a strong sense of self-confidence was the vital cornerstone for successfully navigating the diverse pressures of the school community, from instructional demands to complex stakeholder interactions. For her, this growth in confidence served as the primary indicator of her professional development, helping her overcome the initial insecurities associated with being a non-licensed educator. As she expressed:

(You really need to have confidence in facing people because without it, you will not achieve anything, I really said that if you don't have, that confidence to face the agencies, no one will really help you with those things.)

Beyond the acquisition of pedagogical skills, she emphasized that true effectiveness in the classroom is anchored in a clearly defined professional identity. She explained that while being skillful and knowledgeable is necessary, an educator must also cultivate an internal identity shaped by personal values, lived experiences, and a commitment to continuous learning. This perception highlights her belief that teaching requires a balance of both technical competence and deep self-awareness:

(It is not enough to just have skills; you must also have your own identity as a teacher.)

Her narrative concludes as a powerful testament to the transition from a circumstantial career start to a purpose-driven vocation. Although her journey began unexpectedly at age 38 due to life transitions, and was marked by the absence of formal certification, she refused to let these limitations define her effectiveness. She faced the delicate hurdles of inclusive classroom management and the often-strained dynamics of parental denial with an unwavering persistence. By strategically utilizing community resources and "thinking outside the box" to overcome material scarcity, she transformed her classroom into a laboratory for innovation. Ultimately, these experiences did more than just build her skills; they forged a resilient professional identity that found deep meaning and purpose in the frontlines of early learning, proving that the heart of an educator is defined by the commitment to grow alongside their learners.

## DISCUSSION

This highlights a detailed and complete discussion of the outcome revealed while conducting the study. In this chapter of the research, the focus will be on linking the literature review with the main issues emerging from the narrative of the participant of this research. In addition, the importance of this research in different fields, especially in the areas of education and research, will be explained here. Moreover, this also includes significant research recommendations drawn from the overall implications of the study.

## **Personal Stories and the Journey of Teaching in Private Elementary Schools**

The personal narratives of the participants reveal that the journey into teaching for non-licensed graduates is often an unexpected path shaped by situational constraints and an emerging sense of calling. For instance, Inspired Teacher and Striving Teacher both entered the profession not as a primary dream, but as a practical response to life circumstances and role-model influence. This finding aligns with the observation by Sunariati et al. (2023), who note that many non-licensed educators begin their careers at a disadvantage regarding pedagogical grounding. Furthermore, Liu and Sammons (2021) suggest that these educators often rely on individually acquired experiences to align their practice with curriculum demands. Nevertheless, as argued by Somosot and Relox (2023), many private institutions continue to rely on these graduates, who undergo a significant "on-the-job adaptation" to fulfill their roles.

The findings regarding the teaching journey of non-licensed education graduates suggest that while entry is often indirect and prompted by practical or personal constraints, it evolves into a purpose-driven vocation through experiential learning and emotional adaptation. The narratives illustrate a transition from the "shock" of the first day to the development of a professional identity anchored in passion and student-centeredness. This evolution is supported by literature suggesting that while a lack of formal pedagogical training creates initial barriers, it is eventually mitigated by peer collaboration, intrinsic motivation, and reflective practice. Consequently, the journey of these educators is defined not by their starting credentials, but by their resilience and commitment to growing alongside their learners within the classroom laboratory.

## **Struggles and Challenges in Performing Teaching Roles**

The narratives of the participants highlight that the transition into a teaching role for non-licensed graduates is often marked by a "reality shock" caused by significant pedagogical gaps. Inspired Teacher and Striving Teacher both described an initial period of intense anxiety and confusion, as they were thrust into classrooms without the benefit of formal teacher preparation. According to Sunariati et al. (2023), this disadvantage in content delivery and classroom management is common among non-licensed educators who lack the incompetent grounding usually provided during formal training. Building on this, Faseel and Siddiqui (2025) observe that many educators in this position face immediate difficulties in designing structured lessons simply because they are unfamiliar with formal methodologies. This lack of training often forces teachers to rely on personal anecdotes and trial-and-error rather than evidence-based pedagogical approaches, a struggle that Krishna et al. (2026) identify as a leading cause of variable instructional outcomes.

The struggles and challenges identified in this study suggest that the experiences of non-licensed education graduates are characterized by a multifaceted "burden of unreadiness" that spans instructional, institutional, and emotional domains. The findings illustrate that a lack of formal pedagogical training leads to a heavy reliance on trial-and-error, which is further complicated by the high-pressure demands of inclusive classrooms and specialized curricula. These internal classroom struggles are intensified by external

factors, including administrative paperwork and the delicate, often strained, task of communicating with parents in denial. Supporting literature confirms that without robust institutional support and professional development, these teachers are at high risk for burnout and professional isolation. Consequently, the narratives reveal that while these educators are "at the frontlines," they navigate their roles through a precarious balance of meeting school standards while simultaneously forging a professional identity amidst feelings of status-related insecurity.

### **Strategies and Coping Mechanisms in the Teaching and Learning Process**

To navigate the multifaceted demands of the classroom, non-licensed education graduates often rely on social learning strategies such as imitating veteran colleagues and engaging in collaborative efforts. The participants, particularly Inspired Teacher and Striving Teacher, emphasized seeking advice from co-teachers and observing established school processes to fill their pedagogical gaps. This proactive approach is consistent with the findings of Saito et al. (2021), who observed that non-licensed graduates frequently imitate the instructional styles of licensed teachers and utilize existing online materials to manage their classes. Furthermore, Vuong et al. (2024) identify peer collaboration and informal mentoring as primary tools for mitigating classroom-related stress among teachers. In the Philippine setting, De Guzman (2023) notes that working alongside licensed educators allows non-certified teachers to bridge their knowledge gaps through reflection and experience-based learning.

The strategies and coping mechanisms utilized by non-licensed education graduates reveal a transition from reactive survival to proactive professional adaptation. These educators effectively combine individual resourcefulness—such as self-directed digital learning and emotional regulation—with external support from peers, mentors, and family members. The findings suggest that while their lack of formal licensure presents significant initial hurdles, their ability to seek collaborative guidance and utilize informal learning networks allows them to sustain their teaching roles. Consequently, the narratives illustrate that the "frontline" experience of these teachers is characterized by a resilient spirit that leverages both social capital and personal devotion to overcome institutional and pedagogical challenges.

### **Professional Growth and Influence on Teaching Approach**

The findings indicate that for non-licensed education graduates, professional growth is a dynamic process where a circumstantial career start evolves into a resilient professional identity. Participants, such as Resilient Teacher, demonstrated that entering the field later in life requires a significant shift in self-perception to navigate the complex social and professional demands of the school. This evolution is supported by Abdalina et al. (2022), who emphasize that continuous exposure to real teaching contexts is what ultimately supports a teacher's professional growth. Furthermore, Chen and Chen (2025) observe that non-licensed educators develop practical knowledge of classroom dynamics through repeated "battle" and reflection. Consequently, as noted by Zhang and Kim (2024), this process allows teachers to build an emerging professional identity where dedication is viewed as equal to formal qualifications.

The professional growth of non-licensed education graduates is an experiential journey where practical classroom demands serve as the primary laboratory for identity formation and skill development. The narratives show that these teachers transition from a state of "nervousness" and unreadiness to becoming resilient educators who prioritize holistic student development and innovative instructional practices. This growth is sustained by a combination of personal reflection, a learning mindset, and the emerging pursuit of professional legitimacy through licensure. Consequently, their influence on the teaching approach in private elementary schools is defined by a deep-seated commitment to student-centeredness and an adaptive pedagogical philosophy that values real-world experience as much as formal certification.

## Conclusions

The assumption that teaching is an area that can only be accessed by individuals who are licensed, and formally trained individuals is, in reality it is not always hold ground. While licensure and formal preparation processes are very essential in professional teaching, but what the findings of this research prove is that individuals do not necessarily need license or training in order to become teachers. The fact is that teaching is not all about license and training, it is about willingness to learn, adapt, and commit to the development of learners despite existing limitations.

During the conduct of this study, the process presented certain challenges, particularly in trying to find participants that fit the criteria of being non-licensed teachers who are currently engaged in their profession. However, with perseverance and hard work, the research was successfully conducted. This research provided an opportunity into the actual experiences of the participants, including the struggles they faced in handling diverse learners, managing classroom demands, and establishing communication with parents, as well as the strategies they employed to overcome these challenges. Most importantly the stories of these participants revealed not only the difficulties of teaching but also the strength and resilience they developed through experience.

Similarly, this study highlights that the path of teaching, particularly for non-licensed and without any prior formal training individuals. It became obvious that teaching can be challenging, but it needs to be flexible, dynamic, and accompanied by support from peers and other educational institutions. Although having encountered various barriers, the participants were able to stick to the process, and step by step gain their professional identities. Their stories serve as a testament that growth in the teaching profession is possible through perseverance and dedication.

From the conduct of this study, the researcher have learned that the research process itself mirrors the teaching journeys explored; it required significant perseverance and hard work, especially when navigating the initial challenges of locating participants who met the specific criteria for this narratological inquiry. This process provided me with a profound opportunity to look into the actual lived experiences of these educators, teaching me that the heart of the profession lies in a deep-seated willingness to learn and adapt rather than just possessing a license. Ultimately, practicing reflexivity throughout

this investigation was essential to ensure that my own assumptions did not overshadow the authentic voices of the participants, leading to a deeper personal understanding that teaching competence is truly forged in the "classroom laboratory" through experience and commitment.

It is hoped that this study may shed some light and encouragement to individuals who are currently in or considering entering the teaching profession despite not having formal licensure and training. In this context, support systems, professional development programs, and personal commitment seem to be crucial for developing effective teachers. Most importantly, it highlights that teaching is a dynamic and evolving profession where experiences play a crucial part in the development of competence and professional identity.

Finally, this study gives opportunity to non-licensed teachers to speak up about their experiences, which are often ignored in educational research. By bringing their stories to light, it affirms that they are an integral part of the teaching community because they are individuals who continue to strive, adapt, and grow in the profession. Their journeys reflect not only the realities of teaching but also the enduring commitment to making a difference in the lives of learners.

## **Recommendations**

The purpose of this narratological study is to explore and capture the actual experiences of non-licensed education teachers who entered the teaching profession through various ways, reflecting on the struggles they faced as well as techniques used to perform their job responsibilities. The findings of this qualitative research, however, are limited to the experiences of a few individuals who teach in selected private elementary schools in Davao del Norte. As such, the data do not support broad generalizations beyond the scope of the participants involved in the study.

Nonetheless, the findings of this study still a need for more research to be conducted. The insights that have been gathered can act as the basis for future research concerning teachers who enter the profession without formal licensure or preparation in the teaching and learning process. It is therefore recommended that similar studies be done across a wider range of educational settings including public schools or different regions using larger number of participants in order to gather more comprehensive and diverse data.

In addition, future research there might be a need for the use of alternative techniques in collecting data such as conducting interviews virtually or combining several types, to accommodate participants from geographically distant areas. Using this technique will enable researchers to have wider geographical coverage, involving participants coming from other provinces or even other regions to get more insights into the situation of non-licensed teachers.

Moreover, it is recommended and wise that future researchers design and employ various interview guides to investigate issues that have not been discussed sufficiently in

this study, such as long-term career development, preparation for licensure, and the specific impact of institutional policies on teaching practices. While this study utilized a qualitative narrative inquiry to capture lived experiences, future studies should consider employing quantitative research designs, such as descriptive-correlational studies, to measure the prevalence of these challenges across a broader population of non-licensed educators. Additionally, a mixed-methods approach could be utilized to combine the rich, in-depth narratives of teachers with statistical data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how institutional support correlates with teacher retention and professional success. To investigate the "long run" development mentioned by participants, longitudinal research designs are highly suggested to track the professional journey of non-licensed graduates from their entry into the classroom through their eventual transition to licensed status. Finally, future researchers may also adopt comparative research designs to examine the differences in support systems and teaching experiences between non-licensed educators in public schools versus those in private elementary institutions.

Subsequently, future studies may go into other specializations within the education profession, with particular emphasis on those professionals who teach without undergoing any formal training in the areas that have been allocated to them. For instance, future researchers can look into the lives of teachers who teach subjects they are not specialized in or those in inclusive and resource-limited environments. Through this, future research can further highlight the resilience, adaptability, and commitment of educators who continue to pursue teaching despite all challenges as well as provide valuable insights for improving support systems within the profession.

### **Compliance with Ethical Standards**

The researcher ensured that all ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the concerned authorities prior to data collection. All participants voluntarily participated in the study after providing informed consent. The participants were informed about the objectives of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. Anonymity was maintained through the use of pseudonyms and removal of identifying information. The researcher complied with the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 in handling and storing research data. Participants' well-being, dignity, and safety were protected throughout the research process. There was no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study. Plagiarism was strictly avoided, and all sources were properly acknowledged using APA citation format. The interpretation of findings was conducted objectively and without bias. The results of the study were used purely for academic and research purposes.

### **Acknowledgments**

The researcher would like to express his sincere gratitude and appreciation to all those who contributed to the completion of this research.

First and foremost, the researcher thanks the ALMIGHTY GOD for the gift of knowledge, wisdom, and strength that made the completion of this study possible.

The researcher extends his deepest appreciation to his adviser, Gina M. Oracion, PhD, for her guidance, patience, and invaluable support throughout the conduct of this study. Her expertise and encouragement greatly contributed to the successful completion of this research.

The researcher is also profoundly grateful to the members of the Thesis Review Panel, led by Felvic B. Pernito, EdD., Joju Amor D. Villajos, PhD., Socorro L. Neri, PhD., Jeanilyn T. Muico, PhD., And Henry C. Ligan, PhD. for their constructive feedback, insightful suggestions, and professional guidance, which significantly improved the quality of this study.

The researcher also extend his sincere appreciation to the SMCTI Research Ethics Committee (SMCTI-REC) for carefully reviewing this study and ensuring that it adhered to ethical standards throughout the research process.

Most of all, the researcher is deeply thankful to the participants for generously sharing their time, experiences, and personal narratives, which served as the foundation of this study. Their openness and willingness to share made this research meaningful and possible.

Heartfelt gratitude is also extended to the researchers' family, friends, and colleagues for their unwavering moral support, encouragement, and understanding throughout the research journey.

Lastly, the researcher would like to acknowledge the authors, researchers, and scholars whose works served as valuable and enlightening references for this study. Their contributions to the field greatly supported the completion of this research.

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**APA Citation:**

Genir, G. E., & Oracion, G. M. (2026). AT THE FRONTLINES OF EARLY LEARNING: NARRATIVES OF THE TEACHING EXPERIENCES OF NON-LICENSED EDUCATION GRADUATES IN PRIVATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS. *Ignatian International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 4(6), 1592–1628. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20748014>

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