The Lived Experiences of Non-Education Graduates Teaching in the Department of Education

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Article Info

Abstract

Driven by the persistent teacher shortage in the Philippines, this qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of non-education graduates transitioned into the Department of Education. The study aimed to uncover how these subject-matter experts navigate the "pedagogical gap" between technical mastery and instructional delivery. Utilizing Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis on interviews with eight purposively selected educators, the study identified a central theme: "The Paradox of Competence and Credential." Results and discussions highlighted that while participants possess high content authority, they suffer from professional marginalization, instructional inconsistencies, and a mismatch between industry instincts and educational psychology. Also, institutional support was found to be largely transactional and compliance-driven rather than developmental. The study concludes that the current system prioritizes administrative staffing over pedagogical competence, leaving educators in a state of structural vulnerability. It is recommended that the Department implement differentiated induction programs and formalized mentorship to bridge the instructional gap and ensure long-term educational quality.

Introduction

The quality of basic education in the Philippines centers critically on the competence and readiness of its teaching force. While a professional teacher license and an education degree from the foundational entry requirements for the Department of Education (DepEd), pervasive teacher shortages, particularly in specialized disciplines like Science, Mathematics, and Technical-Vocational subjects, necessitate the hiring of non-education degree holders. Addressing these nationwide shortages requires comprehensive strategies, including improving teacher preparation and recruitment efforts to attract qualified candidates (Sutcher et al., 2019; Roberts, 2022). These professionals, while possessing robust content expertise, lack formal pedagogical training—the core knowledge encompassing teaching methods, curriculum design, and classroom management. This mismatch between subject knowledge and teaching proficiency creates an immediate and inherent pedagogical gap, which introduces significant instructional inconsistencies into the classroom environment.

The reliance on non-education graduates is not a temporary fix but a universal reality rooted in the persistent imbalance of teacher supply and demand. DepEd reports consistently show a significant number of unfilled teaching positions, a challenge particularly evident in the Senior High School (SHS) program, where the expansion requires subject matter experts often hired as non-LET passers. These figures, while dynamic, underscore the necessity for alternative recruitment pathways. Consequently, the Department relies on professionals from non-traditional backgrounds who must rapidly adjust to the complex professional and instructional demands of the public-school environment, creating a continuous tension between content mastery and pedagogical proficiency at the institutional level.

While macro-level administrative data explains the need for this workforce, it fundamentally fails to capture the human element of the professional experience. For the teachers themselves, entering the system without pedagogical training results in a steep learning curve, unique professional anxieties, and an ongoing struggle to construct a valid teaching identity. This situation echoes global findings: novice teachers frequently encounter a steep learning curve as they adapt to classroom demands, which often leads to increased anxiety levels (Vunge & Morais, 2024). Furthermore, the emotional toll of this adaptation is pronounced, with many educators reporting feelings of vulnerability and tension during their early careers (Sydnor et al., 2024). These non-education graduates are forced to reconcile their deep disciplinary knowledge with the unfamiliar requirements of instructional planning, student assessment, and mandated professional duties, revealing a critical need for deeper understanding.

Thus, this study explored and described the lived experiences of non-education graduates teaching in the Department of Education. Specifically, it sought to uncover the essence of their professional journey, focusing on instructional challenges, professional support received, and their self-perceived competence. This was achieved through a phenomenological approach, which was crucial for articulating the depths of their professional identity formation and daily struggles. The ultimate goal was to generate evidence-based insights for the DepEd. These findings will serve as a foundational resource for developing targeted professional development and support systems that can effectively bridge the pedagogical gap and enhance the efficacy and retention of these valuable,

albeit unconventionally trained, educators.

Literature Review

The discussion surrounding the professional exclusion of non-education graduates from teaching roles is fundamentally driven by the tension between addressing critical teacher shortages and maintaining established educational quality standards. This review segregates the literature into three critical areas that frame the pedagogical gap.

The Pedagogical Gap and Instructional Quality

While the integration of non-traditional educators provides essential short-term relief for staffing crises, their lack of formal teacher preparation introduces significant pedagogical deficiencies that compromise the quality of basic education. Research consistently suggests that non-education graduates frequently struggle with core instructional planning, effective classroom management, and the navigation of complex school administrative requirements, all of which hinder their overall classroom performance (Diamas-Palo, 2025). This deficiency is not an isolated local phenomenon but a global challenge; international data, such as a study from Ecuador, revealed that a staggering 78% of teachers identified insufficient pedagogical training as their primary professional hurdle (Mendoza et al., 2024). Without a foundational understanding of educational psychology and developmental milestones, these educators often resort to a "transmission-only" model of teaching—focusing purely on delivering content rather than facilitating learning—which fails to address the diverse needs of younger learners.

Furthermore, the absence of a structured pedagogical framework often results in inconsistent teaching practices that directly diminish student engagement and learning outcomes (Ortega, 2020). Because these professionals lack the "how-to" of teaching—such as scaffolding complex concepts, designing valid assessment rubrics, and implementing differentiated instruction—they often experience a disconnect between their deep subject matter expertise and their students' actual comprehension levels. Consequently, the long-term success and retention of these teachers are heavily contingent upon robust institutional support, including structured mentorship and differentiated professional development programs specifically designed to bridge the substantial gap in pedagogical expertise (Diamas-Palo, 2025). To ensure educational quality is not sacrificed for staffing convenience, the Department must move beyond simple recruitment and focus on transforming these subject matter experts into skilled instructional leaders through targeted, evidence-based training.

The Debate on Professional Status and Exclusion

From a regulatory and professional standpoint, the inclusion of non-education graduates into the public school system prompts a critical debate regarding the professional status of teaching. Reformers advocating for changes in teacher preparation and licensing must contend with a heavy burden of proof, as any policy shift must prioritize public welfare and long-term educational effectiveness over mere administrative convenience or professional self-interest (Ballou & Podgursky, 1999). The presence of individuals who have not undergone traditional teacher

education inevitably challenges established pathways of expertise, creating a concern that such "fast-track" entries could potentially undermine the long-term professional standing of the field (Leonhard, 2024; Korneck, 2020). This conflict underscores a major policy tension: whether short-term solutions to staffing shortages justify systemic actions that may erode the field's professional foundation and negatively impact the prestige and rigor of the teaching profession in the long run.

Furthermore, this debate is anchored in the role of the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) as the primary gateway and regulatory benchmark for the profession. For non-education graduates, the LET serves as a formidable barrier that renders them subject to a form of professional exclusion, where they are often viewed as "placeholders" rather than legitimate members of the academic community until their credentials are met. This exclusion creates a "dual-class" system within schools—separating those with the pedagogical license from those with the subject-matter degree—which can lead to professional friction and a fragmented school culture. Ultimately, while these experts bring vital technical knowledge, their status remains precarious, highlighting the need for a balanced regulatory approach that upholds professional standards while successfully integrating the diverse expertise required by modern educational demands.

Content Expertise, Resourcefulness, and the Policy Balance

While non-education graduates present a pedagogical deficit, their integration introduces a valuable asset often overlooked: significant adaptive resourcefulness rooted in deep, practical subject matter expertise. This group frequently adapts by leveraging their extensive knowledge base, particularly those in technical and vocational fields who utilize real-world industry connections to enhance classroom relevance and provide students with up-to-date practical insights (Rada, 2024). This inherent resourcefulness often translates into innovative and modern teaching methods, as these professionals naturally employ unique, non-traditional strategies learned from their former fields to align with modern educational trends and make lessons directly applicable to the workplace (Obidovna, 2023). Therefore, recognizing and harnessing this practical knowledge and adaptability is crucial for enriching the curriculum and providing a unique, expert perspective unavailable through traditional teacher pipelines. However, this inherent advantage must be carefully balanced against the critical fact that deep content knowledge cannot fully substitute for pedagogical skill. The lack of formal training can still negatively impact overall educational quality, as robust research demonstrates a strong correlation between adequate teacher preparation and positive student performance outcomes (Mendoza et al., 2024). This situation presents policymakers with a demanding task: they must strike a careful balance (Korneck, 2020), ensuring that the valuable content knowledge and practical adaptability of non-education graduates are not only recognized but are meticulously paired with robust, mandatory pedagogical training. Ultimately, achieving high educational standards requires institutional intervention that converts the subject-matter expertise of this group into sustainable, pedagogically sound teaching competence.

Method

This study employed a Qualitative Descriptive Phenomenological Design to explore the lived experiences of non-

education graduates teaching in the Department of Education (DepEd). Participants were selected using Purposive Sampling, targeting an optimum sample size of eight (8) teachers who met the specific criteria: they (1) held a bachelor's degree in a non-education field (with diverse undergraduate programs represented), (2) were teaching in the Junior High School level of a DepEd public school, and (3) possessed at least three (3) years of teaching experience within DepEd. Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews focusing on instructional challenges, professional support received, and self-perceived competence.

The participant group represented diverse non-education professional backgrounds currently teaching across various academic and technical subjects in DepEd, as summarized: BSIE, BSIT, BS Fishery and Automotive Technology teaching TLE; BS Psychology teaching English; former Nurse teaching Science; AB Political Science teaching Araling Panlipunan; and BS Criminology teaching Physical Education. The resulting transcripts were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase model of Thematic Analysis, which involved systematic steps: familiarization, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This process yielded rich, emergent themes that described the essence of the shared experience, with trustworthiness ensured through procedures like member checking and providing a thick description.

Results

The analysis, grounded in Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis framework, yielded one central organizing theme that encapsulates the lived experiences of non-education graduates teaching in the Department of Education (DepEd). This central theme is supported by four inter-related themes which illustrate the complexities of transitioning from specialized professional fields into the teaching profession.

Central Organizing Theme – The Paradox of Competence and Credential: Navigating the Pedagogical Gap

This meta-theme captures the fundamental tension faced by the participants: they possess high, specialized competence in their subject matter (technical/content mastery) but are structurally disadvantaged and feel professionally vulnerable due to a lack of pedagogical credentials (the "pedagogical gap"). Their daily professional lives are defined by balancing content authority with instructional inadequacy.

Theme 1. The Burden of Proof and Professional Exclusion

This theme describes the psycho-social experience of being professionally marginalized and constantly needing to validate one's teaching efficacy within the school environment. Participants feel that their specialized skills are valued, yet their structural position remains risky, forcing them to operate from a posture of professional defense.

Participants' primary identity remains anchored to their original field, viewing their teaching role as a transfer of technical expertise rather than a full adoption of the educator role. This technical self-perception clashes with the holistic demands of teaching.

"I am an engineer first, whose current job is to transfer that knowledge." (BSIE)

"I feel like an excellent technician, but an adequate teacher." (BSIE)

"I am trying to be a mentor, but I worry I'm only seen as the 'security guy' with a whistle." (BS Crim)

"I feel like a reluctant pioneer in a system that's still catching up." (BSIT)

The perceived lack of pedagogical expertise leads to feelings of being an outsider and operating under a perpetual "burden of proof." They experience a constant shadowing of their technical competence by their educational deficit.

"It feels like I have all the substance but none of the style for my subject." (AB PolSci)

"I feel like an outsider... I feel lost [when other teachers discuss] lesson planning templates, domain objectives, and student portfolios." (Automotive Technology)

"I am continually operating from a deficit, constantly having to prove that my technical competence is sufficient to forgive my educational deficit." (BSIE)

The Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) is perceived as the ultimate symbol of structural weakness and conditional status. Failure to pass the examination reinforces the identity of being a "placeholder" rather than a legitimate professional teacher.

"The LET reminds me I am structurally weak. It confirms my status as an 'uncredentialed' teacher." (BSIE)

"It reinforces the idea that I'm a placeholder, not a legitimate member of the teaching community, until I pass that specific exam." (BS Fishery)

Theme 2. Deficient Pedagogy and Resourceful Adaptation

This theme focuses on the practical instructional challenges stemming from a lack of formal teaching methodologies and the participants' subsequent reliance on personal, often isolated, strategies to bridge the instructional gap.

Participants possess the 'what' (content knowledge) but lack the 'how' (pedagogical techniques). They struggle to *translate* complex, professional knowledge into developmentally appropriate and engaging lessons, particularly concepts like differentiation and flexibility.

"My challenge isn't the fish; it's the pedagogy. It feels like translating a technical manual into a children's story every day." (BS Fishery)

"It's like knowing how to treat the patient but not understanding the disease... my teaching foundation feels shaky." (Former Nurse)

"I lacked the 'why' behind the teaching methods." (Former Nurse)

"I struggle to inject 'flexibility' or 'differentiation'—concepts that weren't part of my industrial design

training." (BSIE)

In the absence of formal training, participants engage in self-initiated pedagogical construction. They rely heavily on transactional learning (asking experienced colleagues) and digital resources (YouTube, online DepEd portals) to acquire core teaching skills.

> *"I asked her to mentor me on Bloom's Taxonomy and test construction. I had to swallow my pride and admit my engineering logic wasn't the right teaching logic."* (BSIE)
> *"I essentially taught myself the 'Art of Simplification' by watching educational videos aimed at children and modeling my content delivery after them."* (BS Fishery)
> *"I downloaded standardized teaching modules from DepEd's online portals. I treated it like a case study: I studied the 'how-to' of teaching the subject."* (BS Psychology)
> *"I had to ask colleagues what 'scaffolding' meant, which was embarrassing and proved the training was not differentiated for non-education backgrounds."* (AB PolSci)

Theme 3. Assessment and Management Mismatch

This theme highlights the conflict that arises when management and evaluation practices rooted in industry, law enforcement, or clinical settings are deployed in a public-school classroom environment, leading to a disconnect in handling student behavior and assessing learning.

Professional instincts (e.g., from engineering, criminology, or nursing) lead to management styles based on efficiency, threat control, or clinical triage, which are ill-suited for educational motivation or student psychology. Adaptation to school-appropriate discipline is often sought out of necessity, not training.

> *"My engineering brain views a disruptive classroom as an inefficient system."* (BSIE)
> *"My instinct was triage and medical assessment. But as a teacher, I was completely lost on the correct protocol for non-medical psychological intervention."* (Former Nurse)
> *"I realized my methods were designed for controlling a threat, not for motivating a reluctant learner."* (BS Criminology)
> *"I learned the useful de-escalation tactics, however, by frantically searching YouTube for classroom management tricks the night before class."* (BS Fishery)

Assessment methods primarily reflect the quantitative, task-oriented metrics of the participants' original professions (e.g., technical output, safety protocols) rather than the holistic, developmental rubrics of education. This causes worry about the fairness and completeness of their evaluations.

> *"I often question the effectiveness. I worry I'm only measuring their technical memory and not their ability to troubleshoot or think creatively."* (BSIE)
> *"I rarely use complex performance rubrics. I suspect a certified teacher would use a more holistic rubric*

that assesses critical thinking and affective domain outcomes, not just memory." (BS Fishery)

"I worry that I might be unfairly penalizing students for poor writing skills (a pedagogical issue) rather than poor science knowledge (a content issue)." (Former Nurse)

"My college experience taught me to value depth, but I've been told by my head teacher that my grading scale is too high-level for JHS students." (AB PolSci)

Theme 4. Transactional and Deficit-Focused Support

This theme describes the nature of institutional and peer support received by the participants, which tends to be administrative, compliance-driven, or technical, failing to fundamentally address the core pedagogical deficit.

Formal DepEd induction and training programs are perceived as being tailored for career educators. For non-education graduates, these sessions are primarily focused on system compliance, payroll, or administrative logistics, and do not provide differentiated instruction on fundamental teaching skills.

"It was not directly helpful for the pedagogical gap. It helped me understand the system, but not the teaching." (BSIE)

"It was helpful for safety and liability... but completely irrelevant to my core challenge. The training focused on compliance, not teaching practice." (BS Criminology)

"The greatest gap I face is motivating students who lack interest... No training addressed educational psychology or classroom rapport. I was trained to manage tools, not teenagers." (Automotive Technology)

Relationships with education-trained colleagues are characterized as transactional. Non-education graduates are valued for their technical/content expertise ("fix-it guy," "pedagogical consultants") but often maintain an emotional distance, feeling unable to fully disclose or seek help for pedagogical difficulties.

"I treat them as my pedagogical consultants. There's a clear boundary: I help them with technical issues, and they help me with educational issues." (BSIE)

"I'm often viewed as the 'fix-it guy'—the IT technician who happens to teach." (BSIT)

"I rarely ask my PE colleagues about discipline because I feel my Criminology background should make me an expert in that area." (BS Criminology)

While support is provided, it is often deficit-reinforcing. Administrative oversight focuses on technical functions and avoids critique of teaching methodology. Lack of formal observation, while reducing anxiety, ultimately prevents the acquisition of constructive feedback necessary for development.

"They primarily support my technical functions. However, the Head Teacher's review... offer[s] no constructive feedback on the actual teaching methodology or classroom management." (BSIE)

"The support is future-oriented, focused more on getting me credentialed than on improving my current

teaching practice." (AB Political Science)

"The lack of observation is a relief, as it minimizes formal critique of my pedagogy, but it also means I receive no constructive feedback on how to be a better teacher, leaving the pedagogical gap unaddressed." (Automotive Technology)

Discussion

The core finding of this study, captured by the central organizing theme "The Paradox of Competence and Credential: Navigating the Pedagogical Gap," reveals a fundamental institutional tension. This research moves beyond simply acknowledging the presence of non-education graduates and provides a phenomenological account of how the pedagogical gap is experienced, confirming and deepening existing literature on teacher shortages, instructional quality, and professional identity. The subsequent discussion is organized around the major conceptual tensions identified in the participants lived experiences.

The Fundamental Tension: Content Authority vs. Instructional Deficit

The findings confirm the central concern in educational quality literature: the lack of formal pedagogical training introduces significant instructional inconsistencies (Diamas-Palo, 2025; Mendoza et al., 2024). This fundamental tension is captured by the stark contrast between the deep subject-matter expertise these professionals possess (the "what," or content authority) and their pervasive struggle to translate this knowledge into effective, developmentally appropriate instruction (the "how," or instructional efficacy). The confluence of the themes Deficient Pedagogy and Resourceful Adaptation (Theme 2) and Assessment and Management Mismatch (Theme 3) validate this point, confirming that the absence of a structured pedagogical framework inevitably results in inconsistent teaching practices (Ortega, 2020). This demonstrates that while non-education graduates solve a staffing crisis, they introduce a competence crisis rooted in delivery and methodology.

The study further sophisticated this understanding by showing that these instructional deficits extend far beyond mere classroom delivery. Theme 3 specifically revealed that professional instincts imported from their original fields—such as the systematic logic of engineering, the control-oriented approach of criminology, or the triage mindset of nursing—are often fundamentally incompatible with the principles of educational psychology and developmental assessment. The instinct to manage a classroom as an "inefficient system" or to assess student learning based solely on quantitative technical output demonstrates a systemic failure to induct these teachers into the distinct logic of pedagogy. This reveals a critical need for targeted support, as their professional worldview actively conflicts with the holistic and developmental requirements of the teaching role.

The Psycho-Social Cost of Structural Marginalization

The theme of "The Burden of Proof and Professional Exclusion" highlights the significant psycho-social toll exacted by the structural necessity of hiring non-education graduates. Participants in this study internalized their lack of formal credentials as a deep-seated professional weakness, frequently describing themselves as

"placeholders" and "outsiders" who operate from a permanent "deficit." This finding directly supports existing literature arguing that the integration of non-qualified individuals into the school system inevitably challenges the long-term professional standing and prestige of the teaching field (Leonhard, 2024; Korneck, 2020). By existing on the periphery of the professional community, these educators face an ongoing struggle to validate their presence, suggesting that their inclusion—while administratively necessary—creates a pervasive environment of professional insecurity.

Beyond administrative logistics, the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) functions as a powerful symbol of conditional acceptance rather than a mere certification hurdle. This study demonstrates a lived impact that transcends the typical policy-level debate: the identity struggle forces these teachers to anchor themselves to their former professional personas—identifying as an "engineer first" or a "nurse first"—as a psychological defense mechanism. This fragmentation of identity hinders their full and authentic adoption of the educator role, as they remain emotionally and professionally tethered to their original fields to maintain a sense of competence. This psychological insulation is a critical, under-explored component of the pedagogical gap, suggesting that the "LET barrier" does not just block a license; it actively prevents the internal transformation necessary for a successful transition into the teaching profession.

Institutional Support: The Gap Between Compliance and Competence

The most critical finding for policy emerges from the theme "Transactional and Deficit-Focused Support," revealing a profound gap between institutional effort and instructional need. While educational literature strongly emphasizes the necessity of robust, developmental support and mentorship for the success of non-traditional educators (Diamas-Palo, 2025), this study found that the support received by participants was largely administrative and compliance-driven. DepEd induction focused almost exclusively on immediate logistical necessities like payroll and system compliance, leaving the core instructional gap unaddressed. Consequently, the immense burden of skill acquisition fell entirely onto the individual, forcing them into "Resourceful Adaptation"—a precarious system of isolated self-training via digital resources like YouTube and expedient, transactional peer exchanges. This reliance on self-directed learning is an unsustainable strategy for systemic quality control, as it leaves instructional practices vulnerable to inconsistency and error.

The institutional reliance on individual resourcefulness, coupled with a striking lack of formal pedagogical observation and constructive critique, actively creates a deficit-reinforcing environment. This approach prioritizes short-term staffing goals over the long-term efficacy and retention of these professionals, contrasting sharply with best-practice models for teacher induction globally (Vunge & Morais, 2024). In sum, the study clearly indicates that although non-education graduates successfully fill an urgent staffing need with high content authority, the existing institutional mechanisms designed to integrate them are critically insufficient. The current system addresses compliance but not competence, allowing the pedagogical gap to persist and imposing a heavy, unaddressed professional identity cost on the teachers themselves, ensuring that the problem is simply deferred, not solved.

Conclusions

The study concludes that the integration of non-education graduates into the Department of Education creates a "Paradox of Competence and Credential," where high subject-matter expertise is fundamentally compromised by a profound and unaddressed pedagogical gap. While these professionals effectively fill critical staffing vacancies, they operate in a state of structural and psychological marginalization, perpetually viewing themselves as "outsiders" or "placeholders" due to the looming barrier of the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) and a lack of formal training that results in a significant misalignment of professional instincts. Furthermore, the study reveals that current institutional support mechanisms are critically compliance-oriented rather than competence-based, focusing on administrative logistics while forcing teachers into an unsustainable reliance on "Resourceful Adaptation" through isolated self-study. Ultimately, without a deliberate shift from administrative induction to developmental mentorship, the Department risks prioritizing short-term staffing goals over long-term instructional quality, leaving these educators anchored to their former professional identities and preventing the full realization of their potential as effective instructional leaders.

Recommendations

To address these gaps, it is recommended that the Department of Education implement a specialized, mandatory, and differentiated induction program that moves beyond administrative compliance to focus strictly on foundational instructional pedagogy, including classroom management, lesson scaffolding, and developmental assessment rubrics. This institutional support should be further strengthened by formalizing transactional peer relationships into a structured mentorship program where non-education graduates are paired with veteran, education-trained mentors for confidential guidance, thereby reducing the "burden of proof" and fostering professional identity integration. Additionally, administrative oversight must evolve to include differentiated performance observations that provide constructive, methodology-focused feedback rather than mere technical reviews, ensuring that oversight is developmental rather than deficit-reinforcing. Finally, the Department should actively validate non-traditional expertise through formal recognition and institutional review support for the LET, framing the transition as an integration of diverse professional identities that enriches the academic community rather than a temporary solution to a staffing crisis.

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