

From Scholars to Teachers: Narratives of Non-Education Junior Level Science Scholarship (JLSS) Graduates in Their Mandatory Teaching Return Of Service

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the narratives of non-education JLSS graduates under the DOST-SEI who rendered their mandatory teaching return of service in secondary schools in Bukidnon Province. Using a qualitative descriptive design with reflexive thematic analysis, the study examined their experiences, successes and accomplishments, struggles and challenges, coping strategies, and recommendations in relation to their teaching responsibilities. Fifteen (15) participants were purposively selected based on their eligibility as non-education JLSS graduates currently or previously assigned as secondary school teachers. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and written responses, and were analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns across participants' narratives. Findings revealed five major themes. First, participants initially experienced unfamiliar teaching demands and pedagogical challenges due to limited formal training but gradually adapted through experiential learning, collegial support, and institutional assistance. Second, they derived fulfillment primarily from students' academic growth and personal development. Third, they encountered pedagogical overload and classroom management difficulties, particularly in lesson planning, instructional design, and behavioral management. Fourth, they employed adaptive coping strategies such as peer support, self-directed learning, and work-life balance to sustain teaching effectiveness. Lastly, they strongly advocated for mandatory pre-service pedagogical training, structured mentorship, and flexible program implementation to enhance teaching readiness and support systems. The study concludes that while non-education JLSS graduates initially face significant adjustment challenges, they progressively develop teaching competence through experience and support systems. However, strengthening pre-service training, mentorship, and institutional support is essential to ensure a smoother transition, improved instructional quality, and more effective implementation of the JLSS return of service program.

Keywords: non-education JLSS graduates, return of service, pedagogical challenges, coping strategies, mentorship programs

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Science and Technology – Science Education Institute (DOST-SEI) Junior Level Science Scholarship (JLSS) Program, implemented under Republic Act No. 10612, also known as the “*Fast-Tracked Science and Technology (S&T) Scholarship Act of 2013*,” aims to strengthen science and mathematics education in the Philippines by fast-tracking graduates in science, mathematics, engineering, and technology fields who are expected to teach in secondary schools. The law emphasizes the State's commitment to developing competent professionals in science and mathematics in order to encourage more students to pursue careers in science and technology. Under this Act, scholarship recipients are required to enter into a service contract agreeing to render a return of service (ROS) by teaching science, mathematics, or related technology subjects full-time in secondary schools, whether public or private, for a minimum period as specified in their service agreement (Republic Act No, 10612, 2013)

In practice, many JLSS scholar-graduates assigned to teaching positions come from non-education degree programs such as engineering, information technology, biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, and other science and mathematics-based disciplines. While these graduates possess strong content knowledge in their respective fields, they often enter the teaching profession without formal pedagogical training or comprehensive preparation in instructional strategies, classroom management, and education assessment. As a result, their transition into science and mathematics teaching in secondary schools may present significant challenges, as they are expected to assume full teaching responsibilities despite limited exposure to education-centered training during their undergraduate studies.

Recent phenomenological studies have shown that non-education DOST scholars-teachers experience a “*teaching beyond degrees*” reality, where they rely heavily on adaptability and self-directed learning to meet classroom demands. Despite their strong disciplinary background in science and mathematics, they encounter challenges in lesson delivery, classroom management, and instructional planning due to limited professional growth as they gradually develop teaching competencies through immersion and experience in the field (Alalid et al., 2025).

Similarly, another study highlights that their lived experiences as secondary school teachers are shaped by the demands of rendering scholarship obligations alongside the realities of classroom teaching. These scholar-teachers often undergo a transitional period marked by adjustment difficulties, role negotiation, and the development of coping strategies as they adapt to their teaching responsibilities (Condino et al., 2023).

Although studies on DOST scholar-graduates rendering their return of service have grown, further exploration and documentation of the personal narratives of non-education JLSS graduates rendering their teaching duties remain necessary, particularly in the local context of Bukidnon Province. Understanding their narratives is essential in uncovering how they navigate the gap between their academic preparation and professional teaching demands. Thus, this study sought to examine the narratives of non-education JLSS graduates assigned as science and mathematics teachers in secondary schools in Bukidnon, aiming to gain deeper insights into their experiences, successes and accomplishments, struggles and challenges, coping strategies, and recommendations throughout their mandatory teaching return of service journey.

Statement of the Problem

This study explored the narratives of non-education JLSS graduates rendering their mandatory teaching return of service in secondary schools in Bukidnon. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do non-education JLSS graduates describe their experiences in rendering their mandatory teaching return of service?
2. How do non-education JLSS graduates describe their successes and accomplishments during their mandatory teaching return of service?
3. How do non-education JLSS graduates describe the struggles and challenges they encounter in rendering their mandatory teaching return of service?
4. How do non-education JLSS graduates describe the coping strategies they employ to manage the demands of their teaching return of service?
5. What recommendations do non-education JLSS graduates propose to improve the support systems and implementation of the mandatory teaching return of service program?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design using reflexive thematic analysis to explore the narratives of non-education JLSS graduates rendering their mandatory teaching return of service in secondary

schools. A qualitative descriptive approach was chosen to systematically document participants' lived experiences using clear language while preserving the richness of their narratives.

The study followed the principles of reflexive thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2019), which include data familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and interpretation. This approach allowed the identification of patterns across participants' accounts while recognizing the researcher's role in interpreting meaning.

Since some responses were collected in written form, the study also aligns with a qualitative descriptive narrative approach, focusing on participants' teaching experiences, successes and accomplishments, struggles and challenges, coping strategies, and recommendations during their return of service period.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in selected secondary schools in the province of Bukidnon, where the identified participants are currently or were previously deployed as teachers under the JLSS return of service program. The selection of schools was not guided solely by geographic distribution but by the presence of non-education JLSS graduates who met the inclusion criteria of the study.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were non-education JLSS graduates who are currently or previously employed as secondary teachers rendering their return of service obligation in Bukidnon. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants had direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: (1) JLSS scholar-graduates under Republic Act No. 10612, (2) non-education degree holders (e.g. engineering, science, information technology and related programs), and (3) currently or previously employed as secondary teachers under the return of service program. A total of fifteen (15) participants were included in the study. The sample size was determined based on data saturation, where data collection continued until no new themes emerged from the participants' narratives.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide, allowing participants to freely share their narratives while enabling the researcher to probe for deeper insights and clarification. The interview guide was validated by three (3) experts to ensure content relevance, clarity, and appropriateness, and a certificate of validation was secured as evidence of expert review.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission was secured from the appropriate school authorities and administrative offices, and informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining the study's objectives, procedures, and ethical considerations. Data were gathered primarily through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to freely share and elaborate on their narratives, with a total of 13 participants interviewed in person. Due to time and accessibility constraints, 2 participants responded through a structured Google Forms version of the same open-ended interview guide, and their written responses were treated as narrative data. All face-to-face interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim, while written responses were likewise transcribed and integrated for analysis. Data collection continued until saturation was reached, where no new themes emerged from the participants' accounts.

Data Analysis

The transcribed data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive thematic analysis, which involves familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final analysis. This approach enabled the identification of recurring themes and meaningful interpretations of the participants' narratives as non-education JLSS

graduates rendering their teaching return of service. Direct quotations were used to support and enrich the presentation of themes, ensuring that participants' voices were accurately represented.

Limitations of the Study

This study acknowledges several methodological limitations. First, the use of hybrid data collection methods, including face-to-face interviews and Google Forms responses, may have affected the depth of participant narratives, as written responses may limit elaboration compared to interviews. Second, social desirability bias may have influenced participants to present their experiences in ways that reflect professionalism or compliance with institutional expectations. Third, the cross-sectional design captured experiences at a single point in time, limiting the ability to examine long-term changes in teaching competence, coping strategies, and professional identity. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the transitional experiences of non-education JLSS graduates entering the teaching profession.

Research Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of Central Mindanao University prior to the conduct of the study. Formal permission was also secured from the Schools Division Superintendent and the respective school heads. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with clear explanations of the study's objectives, procedures, and their right to participate voluntarily or withdraw at any time. In compliance with Republic Act No, 10173 (Data Privacy Act of 2012), confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained, and all data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On the experiences of non-education JLSS graduates while rendering their mandatory teaching return-of-service:

Theme 1: Navigating Unfamiliar Teaching Demands Through Adaptation and Support

The theme "Navigating Unfamiliar Teaching Demands Through Adaptation and Support" captures participants' shared experiences of entering the teaching profession without formal pedagogical preparation. Most participants described their initial transition into teaching as overwhelming due to unfamiliar responsibilities, particularly those not directly related to their academic specialization. Many expressed feelings of uncertainty and lack of confidence during their early months of deployment, as they were expected to perform teaching duties despite limited exposure to instructional practices.

Participants consistently reported that teaching required skills beyond subject matter expertise. Several participants noted that they initially struggled with understanding educational processes and classroom responsibilities, highlighting the gap between disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical competence. One participant described the experience as being "*deployed in the field unprepared for teaching*" (Participant 11), emphasizing the sudden transition into professional responsibilities without prior training. Another participant explained that teaching demanded an entirely different skill set beyond technical expertise, reinforcing the challenges of adapting to unfamiliar expectations (Participant 6).

Despite these early difficulties, participants reported gradual adaptation through experiential learning. Many indicated that repeated exposure to classroom tasks allowed them to improve their confidence and teaching practices over time. Several responses described learning through observation, trial-and-error methods, and consistent reflection on their classroom experiences. One participant reflected this progression by stating that "*I did not know the basics of teaching at first, but as time went by, I was able to adapt and learn*" (Participant 5). This transition illustrates how participants developed competence through continuous engagement with teaching tasks.

Another significant factor supporting participants' adjustment was the presence of collegial and institutional support systems. Many participants emphasized that assistance from co-teachers, mentors, and administrators

played a crucial role in easing their transition into the profession. Participants frequently described receiving guidance on lesson preparation, classroom management, and administrative tasks from more experienced educators. One participant shared that *“supportive colleagues were always willing to help and guide me”* (Participant 2), highlighting the importance of collaborative relationships in facilitating professional growth.

Overall, the findings show that non-education JLSS graduates initially face adjustment challenges but gradually develop competence through experiential learning and strong support systems, with progress shaped by mentorship and workplace collaboration. This finding aligns with previous studies emphasizing the importance of mentorship and collegial collaboration in supporting novice teachers' adjustment to professional demands. Research suggests that structured mentoring and collaborative learning environments improve early-career teacher confidence and competence (Davis & Park, 2025; Diab & Green, 2024). Similarly, peer collaboration has been shown to enhance professional learning and promote adaptive teaching practices among novice educators (Hamdan et al., 2024; Boukhari, 2021). Furthermore, continuous learning through reflective practice has been identified as a key factor in developing adaptability and resilience among teachers transitioning into professional roles (Nkolika, 2024).

On the successes and accomplishments of non-education JLSS graduates while rendering their mandatory teaching return-of-service:

Theme 2: Deriving Fulfillment from Students' Academic Growth and Personal Development

The theme “Deriving Fulfillment from Students' Academic Growth and Personal Development” reflects how participants defined their sense of success and accomplishment as teachers. Despite the initial challenges they experienced in adapting to the profession, participants consistently described fulfillment as closely tied to the progress and development of their students. Their narratives suggest that teaching satisfaction was not measured by personal achievements alone but by the positive outcomes observed among learners.

Participants commonly associated fulfillment with improvements in students' academic performance. Many described feeling successful when students demonstrated understanding of lessons, performed well in assessments, and showed increased participation during classroom activities. Several participants reported that observing students' improved scores and consistent engagement validated their teaching efforts and reinforced their sense of purpose as educators. One participant expressed this sense of achievement by stating that *“seeing my students grasp the lesson after each period”* confirmed the effectiveness of their teaching strategies (Participant 1). This response highlights the importance of observable learning outcomes as indicators of instructional success.

Beyond academic improvement, participants also emphasized the significance of students' long-term educational achievements. Several responses indicated that teachers experienced fulfillment when students advanced to higher education or pursued science-related fields aligned with the subjects taught. Participants described moments of pride when learners successfully entered college programs or demonstrated interest in professional careers. One participant shared that fulfillment was experienced when students *“excel in college”* and continue pursuing their chosen academic paths (Participant 4). These experiences illustrate how teachers perceive their role as extending beyond classroom instruction toward shaping learners' academic futures.

In addition to academic success, participants highlighted the importance of students' personal development and confidence-building. Many reported observing positive behavioral changes such as increased classroom participation, improved discipline, and greater confidence in expressing ideas. These developmental changes were often viewed as meaningful indicators of teaching effectiveness. Participants noted that students who became more motivated and confident demonstrated readiness to pursue further opportunities, including scholarships and leadership roles. One participant explained that students becoming more confident and engaged in classroom activities contributed significantly to their sense of fulfillment (Participant 3). Such responses underscore the value of teaching as a transformative process that supports both intellectual and personal growth.

Overall, the findings suggest that non-education JLSS graduates derive fulfillment primarily from observing meaningful changes in their students' academic performance, aspirations, and personal development. This indicates that teacher satisfaction among participants is strongly learner-centered, reflecting a professional identity shaped by student progress and achievement. The ability to influence students' growth appears to serve as a powerful motivator that sustains teachers' commitment to their roles despite initial challenges.

These findings are supported by literature emphasizing that teachers' job satisfaction is closely linked to student achievement and engagement. Studies indicate that improvements in learners' academic performance significantly enhance teachers' sense of accomplishment and professional fulfillment (Wartenberg et al., 2023). Similarly, research highlights that emotionally supportive teaching practices contribute to increased student participation, confidence, and motivation, which in turn reinforce teachers' professional satisfaction (Xu et al., 2026; Prananto et al., 2025). Furthermore, transformational teaching frameworks emphasize the role of educators in shaping learners' aspirations, attitudes, and long-term goals, supporting the observation that participants experienced fulfillment when students demonstrated both academic success and personal growth (Omodan & Addam, 2022). Overall, the findings reinforce the idea that teaching effectiveness is not solely defined by instructional delivery but by the lasting impact educators have on students' academic trajectories and personal development.

On the struggles and challenges of non-education JLSS graduates while rendering their mandatory teaching return-of-service:

Theme 3: Experiencing Pedagogical Overload and Classroom Management Difficulties Due to Lack of Formal Training

The theme "Experiencing Pedagogical Overload and Classroom Management Difficulties Due to Lack of Formal Training" highlights the major struggles encountered by non-education JLSS graduates upon entering the teaching profession. Participants consistently described feeling overwhelmed by the multiple responsibilities associated with teaching, particularly due to the absence of formal pedagogical preparation. Their narratives revealed that the transition from subject matter expertise to full instructional responsibility created a steep learning curve, requiring them to simultaneously manage lesson preparation, student behavior, and administrative requirements.

One of the most frequently reported challenges involved lesson planning and instructional design. Many participants expressed difficulty in preparing structured lesson plans that aligned learning objectives, instructional activities, and assessment strategies. Several participants described spending extended periods preparing teaching materials, often sacrificing personal time to meet instructional expectations. One participant explained that creating detailed lesson plans was particularly demanding, noting that preparation sometimes required an entire weekend to complete weekly instructional plans (Participant 2). This response reflects the time-intensive nature of instructional planning among teachers with limited prior exposure to educational frameworks.

Participants also reported difficulty in translating their content knowledge into effective teaching strategies suitable for diverse learners. Many indicated uncertainty in selecting appropriate instructional methods and designing activities that matched students' abilities and learning needs. Several responses suggested that participants relied heavily on trial-and-error approaches while gradually learning how to structure lessons effectively. One participant described struggling with understanding the "*structure of lesson planning and educational terms*" (Participant 1), illustrating the challenges associated with navigating unfamiliar pedagogical language and frameworks.

In addition to instructional preparation, classroom management emerged as another significant area of difficulty. Participants frequently described challenges in maintaining discipline, establishing authority, and managing diverse student behaviors. Many reported difficulties in balancing strictness with approachability, particularly when addressing disruptive behavior or maintaining classroom boundaries. Some participants noted that handling behavioral concerns required patience and consistent effort, especially in the absence of formal training in behavioral management techniques. One participant reported encountering classroom

disruptions that required administrative support, highlighting the complexity of managing behavioral concerns without adequate preparation (Participant 10).

Despite these challenges, participants indicated that their struggles served as opportunities for professional growth. Many described gradually improving their competence through continuous practice, observation, and feedback from colleagues. Several participants emphasized learning through experience, often relying on self-directed efforts to refine their teaching methods. Over time, participants reported increased confidence in handling classroom responsibilities, suggesting that early pedagogical overload eventually contributed to the development of instructional skills.

Overall, the findings suggest that non-education JLSS graduates experience significant pedagogical and classroom management challenges during their initial transition into teaching roles. These difficulties stem primarily from limited exposure to formal pedagogical training, resulting in increased workload demands and uncertainty in managing classroom responsibilities. However, the process of overcoming these challenges appears to foster professional growth, enabling participants to gradually build competence and confidence through experience and support.

These findings align with existing literature indicating that non-education graduates and novice teachers commonly experience difficulties in lesson planning, instructional design, and classroom management due to limited pedagogical preparation (Alalid et al., 2025; Diamas-Palo, 2025). Similar studies have documented that novice teachers often struggle with aligning instructional objectives, managing student behavior, and maintaining classroom discipline during their early teaching years (Condino et al., 2023). Additionally, research highlights that classroom management challenges are prevalent among teachers transitioning from non-education backgrounds, particularly when dealing with disruptive behaviors and diverse learner needs (Rodriguez & Andrade, 2025; Nguyen & Tran, 2024). Collectively, these studies support the present findings, emphasizing that pedagogical overload is a common and expected challenge among non-education graduates entering the teaching profession.

On the coping strategies of non-education JLSS graduates while rendering their mandatory teaching return-of-service:

Theme 4: Adaptive Coping Through Peer Support, Self-Directed Learning, and Work-Life Balance

The theme “Adaptive Coping Through Peer Support, Self-Directed Learning, and Work-Life Balance” highlights the strategies employed by non-education JLSS graduates to manage the demands of teaching despite limited formal pedagogical training. Participants described coping as a multidimensional process involving interpersonal support, continuous learning, and intentional efforts to maintain emotional well-being. These strategies demonstrate their adaptability and resilience in responding to the pressures associated with teaching responsibilities.

A primary coping mechanism identified among participants was reliance on peer support and collegial collaboration. Many participants emphasized the importance of seeking guidance from colleagues, mentors, and school administrators when encountering instructional or classroom challenges. They described collaborative interactions such as sharing teaching materials, discussing instructional approaches, and receiving feedback on lesson preparation. Several participants indicated that support from experienced educators significantly eased their transition into the profession. One participant explained that assistance from “*department heads and head teachers*” provided reassurance and practical guidance during challenging situations (Participant 1). This highlights the essential role of mentorship and collaborative relationships in strengthening teachers’ confidence and competence.

Another commonly reported coping strategy was self-directed learning. Participants described actively seeking knowledge through various sources, including educational materials, digital platforms, and observation of experienced teachers. Many reported using online resources, research-based strategies, and reflective practices to improve their instructional skills. Some participants noted that they relied on technology and digital tools to supplement their teaching knowledge, demonstrating initiative in addressing their pedagogical gaps. One

participant shared that they coped by engaging in research, online resources, and peer feedback to improve their teaching practices (Participant 3). These responses illustrate how independent learning served as a proactive strategy for professional growth and adaptation.

In addition to professional coping strategies, participants highlighted the importance of maintaining work-life balance as a means of managing stress and sustaining emotional well-being. Many described engaging in leisure activities, resting during weekends, and setting boundaries between professional and personal responsibilities. Participants reported that taking time for relaxation and personal interests helped prevent burnout and allowed them to return to teaching tasks with renewed focus. One participant mentioned coping through engaging in leisure activities and personal time to relieve stress (Participant 2), emphasizing the role of self-care in maintaining emotional stability. These practices suggest that personal well-being is closely linked to sustained professional performance.

Overall, the findings suggest that coping among non-education JLSS graduates involves a combination of interpersonal support, independent learning, and self-care practices. These strategies reflect a proactive approach to managing stress and overcoming professional challenges, enabling participants to remain effective in their teaching roles despite initial difficulties. The presence of supportive colleagues and accessible learning resources appears to play a critical role in sustaining teachers' motivation and resilience during their transition into the profession.

These findings are consistent with existing literature highlighting the importance of coping strategies among novice teachers facing demanding workloads and emotional stress. Research indicates that teachers experiencing high workload demands frequently rely on social support, time management, and self-care practices to sustain effectiveness and well-being (Fernandez & Ducot, 2025; Suttles, 2024). Similarly, studies have shown that collaborative professional environments and peer mentoring significantly enhance teachers' ability to cope with instructional challenges (Naparan & Castañeda, 2021). Furthermore, engagement in stress-reducing activities and reflective practices has been identified as an essential factor in maintaining teacher resilience and preventing burnout (Fernandez & Ducot, 2025). Collectively, these findings support the view that coping strategies among non-education graduates are essential mechanisms for sustaining both professional competence and personal well-being.

On the recommendations of non-education JLSS graduates to improve the support systems and the implementation of the mandatory teaching return-of-service:

Theme 5: Advocacy for Mandatory Pre-Service Pedagogical Training and Flexible Program Options

The theme "Advocacy for Mandatory Pre-Service Pedagogical Training and Flexible Program Options" reflects participants' recommendations for improving the implementation of the return-of-service program for non-education JLSS graduates. Participants consistently emphasized the need for stronger preparatory systems and structured professional support to ensure that incoming scholars are adequately equipped for teaching responsibilities. Their narratives highlight a collective call for systematic improvements that address the pedagogical gaps experienced during their early teaching years.

One of the most strongly emphasized recommendations was the implementation of mandatory pre-service pedagogical training prior to classroom deployment. Participants widely expressed that structured training programs focusing on lesson planning, classroom management, assessment design, and administrative tasks would significantly improve readiness and reduce early-career difficulties. Many suggested that such preparation should include practical exposure to classroom environments and essential teaching frameworks. One participant proposed the need for "*a three-month seminar on the basics of pedagogy, assessments, and teaching strategies*" (Participant 3), highlighting the importance of comprehensive preparation before assuming full teaching responsibilities. This recommendation reflects the participants' recognition that foundational pedagogical knowledge is necessary for effective teaching performance.

Another commonly identified recommendation involved the establishment of structured mentorship and continuous professional development programs. Participants emphasized that guidance from experienced

teachers should be formalized to support novice educators during their initial years of service. Many indicated that mentorship programs would help reduce feelings of uncertainty and improve confidence in managing instructional responsibilities. Several participants described mentorship as essential in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical classroom application. These responses underscore the importance of institutionalizing mentorship systems to provide consistent support and professional guidance.

Participants also recommended improvements in program implementation, particularly in ensuring alignment between teachers’ academic specialization and assigned teaching subjects. Many indicated that teaching outside their area of expertise contributed to instructional challenges and increased workload demands. Some participants suggested providing immersive orientations or trial teaching experiences before official deployment to better prepare scholars for real classroom conditions. One participant emphasized the importance of assigning teachers to subjects aligned with their field of specialization to enhance teaching efficiency and effectiveness (Participant 12). These recommendations reflect participants’ awareness of how subject alignment contributes to both instructional quality and professional confidence.

Overall, the findings suggest that non-education JLSS graduates advocate for systemic improvements that prioritize preparation, mentorship, and flexibility within the return-of-service program. These recommendations indicate that strengthening institutional support structures can significantly enhance teacher readiness and reduce the challenges associated with transitioning into teaching roles. The emphasis on pre-service training, mentorship, and subject alignment demonstrates participants’ recognition of the need for sustainable professional development systems that support long-term teaching effectiveness.

These findings align with existing literature emphasizing the importance of structured training and mentorship in supporting teachers from non-education backgrounds. Research indicates that non-licensed educators often face challenges in instructional planning and classroom management due to limited pedagogical exposure, highlighting the need for comprehensive onboarding and professional development programs (Diamas-Palo, 2025). Similarly, studies have shown that targeted pedagogical training significantly improves instructional confidence and classroom effectiveness among novice teachers (Blanco, 2025; Leigh et al., 2024). Furthermore, mentorship and subject alignment have been identified as essential components in strengthening teaching performance and professional identity among early-career educators. Collectively, these studies support the participants’ recommendations for strengthening preparatory systems and improving the flexibility of program implementation to ensure successful transitions into the teaching profession.

Table 1. Summary of Thematic Findings

Theme	Sub-Themes	Representative Quote
Navigating Unfamiliar Teaching Demands Through Adaptation and Support	Initial uncertainty; experiential learning; collegial support	<i>“I was deployed in the field unprepared for teaching”</i> (Participant 11).
Deriving Fulfillment from Students’ Academic Growth and Personal Development	Academic achievement; student confidence; career progression	<i>“Seeing my students grasp the lesson after each period”</i> (Participant 1).
Experiencing Pedagogical Overload and Classroom Management Difficulties	Lesson planning challenges; instructional design; classroom management	<i>“Preparing lesson plans took most of my weekends”</i> (Participant 2).
Adaptive Coping Through Peer Support, Self-Directed Learning, and Work-Life Balance	Peer collaboration; self-directed learning; emotional regulation	<i>“My colleagues were always willing to guide me”</i> (Participant 2).
Advocacy for Mandatory Pre-Service Pedagogical Training and Flexible Program Options	Pre-service training; mentorship; subject alignment	<i>“A structured pedagogy seminar before deployment is necessary”</i> (Participant 3).

Table 1 summarizes the thematic findings, which collectively show that non-education JLSS graduates experience initial teaching difficulties, followed by gradual adaptation, learner-centered fulfillment, coping through various support systems, and advocacy for improved training and program implementation. These themes reflect a developmental process from uncertainty to growing competence shaped by experience and institutional support.

In comparison with international studies on alternative certification teachers, similar patterns are observed in programs such as Teach For America, where novice teachers commonly encounter challenges in instructional planning, classroom management, and early pedagogical adjustment during their initial years of teaching. This is supported by Dori et al. (2023) Teacher-Classroom-Community Model, which highlights that alternative certification teachers typically develop instructional competence progressively through mentorship, experiential learning, and structured professional support systems rather than through pre-service preparation alone.

Overall, both local and international findings emphasize that teacher development is largely experiential in nature. Competence and professional satisfaction are not immediate outcomes of entry into the profession but are gradually built through classroom experience, reflective practice, and continuous support. In both contexts, teacher fulfillment is strongly anchored on student-centered outcomes, particularly learners' academic progress, engagement, and personal development. However, a key distinction lies in the preparation phase, as JLSS graduates tend to undergo a more abrupt transition into teaching due to limited structured pre-service pedagogical training compared to some international alternative certification programs.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The following conclusions and implications are drawn from the study: (1) non-education JLSS graduates initially experience unfamiliar and demanding teaching responsibilities while rendering their mandatory teaching return of service due to limited pedagogical preparation but gradually adapt through experiential learning, collegial support, and institutional assistance, implying the need for structured induction and mentorship programs; (2) their sense of success and accomplishment is largely anchored on students' academic improvement and personal development, indicating that teacher fulfillment is learner-centered and suggesting the need to further strengthen instructional support to enhance student outcomes; (3) they experience pedagogical overload and classroom management difficulties, particularly in lesson planning, instructional design, and behavioral management, implying the necessity of mandatory pre-service pedagogical training to bridge the gap between subject expertise and teaching practice; (4) they cope through adaptive strategies such as peer support, self-directed learning, and work-life balance, highlighting the importance of institutionalizing mentoring systems, collaborative support, and wellness programs to sustain teacher well-being and effectiveness; and (5) they strongly advocate for mandatory pre-service pedagogical training and flexible program implementation, including structured seminars, mentorship, and alignment of assignments with specialization, implying improved readiness and a more effective transition of non-education JLSS graduates into the teaching profession.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends strengthening the support systems provided to non-education JLSS graduates through the implementation of structured pre-service pedagogical training, comprehensive induction programs, and continuous mentorship to promote a smoother transition into the teaching profession. Emphasis should be placed on enhancing instructional practices and providing adequate teaching resources and professional development opportunities to improve both student outcomes and teacher fulfillment. In addition, the institutionalization of peer support systems, collaborative learning communities, and teacher wellness programs is essential to sustain effective coping strategies and maintain work-life balance. Furthermore, ensuring flexible program implementation and proper alignment of teaching assignments with academic specialization, along with regular evaluation, may improve readiness, reduce adjustment challenges, and strengthen the overall effectiveness of the JLSS return of service program among non-education graduates.

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