

Exploring Non-Graded Assessment Practices of Teachers in Alternative Learning System

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Abstract— This study explored the perceptions and experiences of Alternative Learning System (ALS) teachers from various clusters within SDO Sorsogon, focusing on the implementation of non-graded assessments. The analysis of transcripts revealed six key themes. The researcher examines how these assessments are perceived in terms of effectiveness, the challenges teachers encounter, their impact on learner motivation and learning outcomes, and how teachers adapt to meet the diverse needs of learners. The study also explores the role of professional development in supporting teachers to implement non-graded assessments effectively. By gathering insights from participants, this inquiry provides a comprehensive understanding of ALS teachers' experiences and thoughts regarding this assessment approach.

The study highlighted the non-graded assessments in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) enhance learners' motivation, self-efficacy, and engagement by fostering a supportive, growth-oriented environment. By eliminating traditional grades, learners focus on personal growth and mastery, leading to better attendance and deeper engagement. Teachers facilitate this shift through strategies like differentiated instruction and constructive feedback, addressing diverse learner needs. However, challenges remain, as some learners struggle with self-regulation and accountability without traditional grading, emphasizing the need for clear expectations and reinforcement.

The findings also underscored the need for ongoing training and support for ALS teachers to implement non-graded assessments effectively. While the Functional Non-Graded Assessment Framework aids in customizing assessments and promoting individualized learning, gaps in teacher expertise and access to resources hinder full implementation. Teachers valued peer collaboration and professional development but identified the need for a unified handbook and additional tools to ensure consistent and inclusive practices across ALS settings.

The study concluded that non-graded assessments promote a growth mindset and improve educational experiences, but engagement challenges and inconsistencies in teacher proficiency hinder effectiveness. Clear expectations, ongoing support, and standardized guidelines are crucial for the successful implementation of these assessments.

The recommendations suggested that relevant training designs and clear guidelines for non-graded assessments should be implemented to enhance teacher proficiency and learner's engagement. Additionally, continuous professional development programs and a dedicated handbook are essential to ensure consistency and effectiveness in applying non-graded assessments.

Keywords— Non-Graded Assessments Practices/ Alternative Learning System/Functional Assessment Framework/Inclusive Education/ ALS Teacher Experiences/ Instructional Strategies.

I. INTRODUCTION

Non-graded assessments in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) offer flexibility in evaluating diverse learners, yet ensuring consistent progress remains a challenge. This study explores how ALS teachers apply non-graded assessments, highlighting their effectiveness, challenges, and impact on learner engagement.

Globally, non-graded evaluations are gaining traction as alternatives to traditional grading. Deeba et al. (2023) emphasized the role of portfolio assessment in student achievement, while Guskey and Jung (2020) advocated for a holistic, learner-centered paradigm prioritizing continuous feedback. In the Philippine context, Santos et al. (2021) underscored the need for alternative assessments tailored to non-formal learners.

Kelly-Vance et al. (2000) found that students in nongraded schools outperformed their graded peers in reading, math, and social skills. Applying these findings to ALS suggests that non-graded methods may enhance learning outcomes for Basic Literacy, Accreditation & Equivalency (A&E) Elementary, and A&E Junior High School learners.

Sorsogon operated 79 Community Learning Centers in 2022–2023, yet completion rates remained low: 9.21% for Basic Literacy, 18.63% for A&E Elementary, and 22.44% for A&E Junior High School. ALS completion rates fluctuated between 2020 and 2022, with a significant drop in 2021 (13.75%) before rebounding in 2022 (43.59%). This study investigates the role of non-graded assessments in addressing these inconsistencies and aligning ALS evaluation methods with learners' needs. By examining program adjustments and support mechanisms, it aims to inform strategies for improving completion rates and fostering long-term success in ALS.

The identified issue centered around the inconsistency in ALS completion rates, particularly the sharp decline experienced in 2021. This comprehensive research initiative delved into the underlying factors contributing to these fluctuations and informed strategic program improvements. Essential to this investigation was research on non-graded assessments, which aimed to assess whether the ALS curriculum and evaluation methods aligned effectively with the diverse learning needs of participants.

This phenomenological study uncovered the ALS Teachers' practices in the implementation of non-graded assessment in the Alternative Learning System.

Specifically, it answers the following questions:

1. How do ALS teachers perceive the effectiveness of non-graded assessments in promoting the learning and engagement of teachers?
2. What challenges do ALS teachers encounter when implementing non-graded assessments?
3. What impact do non-graded assessments have on learner motivation, self-efficacy, and learning outcomes in the ALS context?
4. How do ALS teachers adapt and tailor non-graded assessments to meet the diverse needs of their learners?
5. What role does teacher professional development play in enhancing ALS teachers' understanding and implementation of non-graded assessments?

6. What functional assessment standard framework could be designed for ALS?

This study had the following assumptions:

1. ALS teachers perceived non-graded assessments as effective in promoting learner engagement and fostering a supportive, growth-oriented learning environment.
2. ALS teachers encountered challenges such as maintaining learner accountability, managing diverse needs, and addressing the lack of standardized resources and frameworks.
3. Non-graded assessments positively influenced learner motivation, self-efficacy, and learning outcomes by encouraging personal growth and reducing the pressure associated with traditional grades.
4. ALS teachers adapted non-graded assessments by employing differentiated instruction and flexible strategies to address the unique needs and abilities of their learners.
5. Teacher professional development enhanced ALS teachers' skills and confidence in implementing non-graded assessments, equipping them with innovative tools and strategies.
6. Functional assessment standard framework for ALS was designed to provide clear guidelines and practical tools to support consistent and inclusive non-graded assessment practices.

These assumptions guided the exploration of non-graded assessment methods within the ALS, shaping the research questions and methodology of the study.

This study investigated the perceptions and experiences of ALS teachers in SDO Sorsogon concerning the implementation of non-graded assessments. The research focused on five key areas: (1) the perceived effectiveness of non-graded assessments in promoting learner learning and engagement, (2) the challenges faced by ALS teachers when implementing these assessments and the strategies they used to overcome them, (3) the impact of non-graded assessments on learner motivation, self-efficacy, and learning outcomes, (4) how ALS teachers adapted and tailored non-graded assessments to meet the diverse needs of their learners, and (5) the role of teacher professional development in enhancing ALS teachers' understanding and implementation of non-graded assessments.

The study included a total of 21 ALS teachers from various clusters within SDO Sorsogon, ensuring a

diverse representation across different geographical areas and schools. The participants were selected from the following clusters: Cluster 1 (Donsol East, Donsol West 1 & 2, Pilar 1, Pilar 2, Castilla East & West) with 5 participants, Cluster 2 (Casiguran, Juban, Magallanes North & South, Irosin 1 & 2) with 5 participants, Cluster 3 (Bulan NHS, Bulan 1 & 2, Matnog 1 & 2, Sta Magdalena) with 6 participants, and Cluster 4 (Barcelona, Gubat North and South, Pto. Diaz, Bulusan) with 5 participants.

This study was limited to ALS teachers only, excluding Community ALS Implementors (CAIs), Literacy Facilitators (LFs), and Education Program Specialists because they had different terms of reference as stated in RA 11510. It focused on ALS teachers' direct experiences and perspectives in implementing non-graded assessments, thereby providing a specific lens on this subset of specialized teachers. The study was geographically confined to the SDO Sorsogon Province, particularly within the identified clusters, making the findings specific to this context and not necessarily generalizable to other regions or educational settings.

The study primarily utilized qualitative research methods, such as interviews and focus group discussions, to gather in-depth insights into the experiences and perceptions of ALS teachers regarding non-graded assessments. Quantitative measures, if employed, were limited and primarily descriptive. Data collection occurred during the 2024-2025 academic year, providing a current snapshot of non-graded assessment practices. Ethical standards of informed consent and confidentiality were strictly adhered to, ensuring the protection of participants' identities and personal information throughout the research process.

II. METHOD AND PROCEDURE

This study used a phenomenological approach that focused on exploring the non-graded assessment in Alternative Learning System Teacher practices. This discussed possible interventions that could be proposed and implemented to create improved teaching practices and enhanced learning outcomes.

Phenomenology was highly appropriate as a research design for exploring the intricacies of non-graded assessment in ALS teacher practices. This qualitative approach focused on understanding the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals, in this case, ALS teachers, regarding the phenomenon of non-graded assessment. The thematic areas you identified—

perceptions of effectiveness, challenges in implementation, impact on learner motivation and learning outcomes, tailoring assessment for diversity, and feedback practices—aligned well with phenomenological inquiry. Phenomenology allowed researchers to delve deeply into how teachers experienced and made sense of non-graded assessments within the ALS context. By exploring these themes through phenomenological lenses, you uncovered rich, nuanced insights into teachers' subjective experiences, beliefs, and practices related to non-graded assessment.

Moreover, phenomenology was particularly suited for capturing the essence of subjective experiences and meanings attributed by individuals to phenomena. In your study, this approach enabled you to explore not only what teachers did in terms of non-graded assessment but also why they did it, how they perceived its effectiveness, and how they navigated challenges. By focusing on ALS teachers' lived experiences and interpretations, phenomenology provided a comprehensive understanding of how non-graded assessment influenced teaching practices and learner outcomes in diverse ALS settings.

Research questions are fundamental inquiries that shape and define a research study. They establish the scope and direction of the research, guiding the investigation towards addressing specific problems or objectives.

The specific questions of this study are:

1. How do ALS teachers perceive the effectiveness of non-graded assessments in promoting the learning and engagement of teachers?
2. What challenges do ALS teachers encounter when implementing the non-graded assessments?
3. What impact do non-graded assessments have on learner motivation, self-efficacy, and learning outcomes in the ALS context?
4. How do ALS teachers adapt and tailor non-graded assessments to meet the diverse needs of their learners?
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The American Psychological Association (2020) defined population as the entire group of individuals or units that met the criteria for potential inclusion in a research study. Qualitative research employed diverse

sampling techniques to determine participants. Purposive sampling, a prominent strategy, involved intentionally selecting units that possessed specific characteristics required for the sample. This method allowed researchers to group participants according to predefined criteria pertinent to the research question.

Moreover, this method was employed to choose a group of 21 ALS Teachers from SDO in Sorsogon. Purposive sampling allowed researchers to gather a sample that met predetermined characteristics relevant to the research question. Below is the distribution of the participants.

Table A. Target Participants

Cluster	n
Cluster 1 - Donsol East, West 1&2, Pilar 1, Pilar 2, Castilla East & West	5
Cluster 2 - Casiguran, Juban, Magallanes North & South, Irosin 1 & 2	5
Cluster 3 – Bulan NHS, Bulan 1 & 2, Matnog 1 & 2, Sta Magdalena	5
Cluster 4 - Barcelona, Gubat North and South, Pto. Diaz, Bulusan	6
Total	21

Conducting a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in qualitative research involved several phases designed to gather in-depth insights from participants regarding their experiences, perceptions, and practices. The first phase was the preparation, where the researcher defined the objectives of the FGD, determined the participant criteria (in this case, ALS teachers), and developed a semi-structured discussion guide that outlined key topics and questions. The guide allowed for a natural conversation flow while ensuring all relevant areas were covered (Krueger & Casey, 2014).

The second phase was the implementation, where the FGD was conducted with a small group of participants—typically 6 to 12 individuals. During the session, the researcher facilitated the discussion based on the prepared guide, encouraged open dialogue and interaction among participants, and created a comfortable environment that fostered honest and detailed responses. It was essential to ensure that each participant had an opportunity to contribute their perspectives (Morgan, 1997).

The final phase was analysis, where the data collected from the FGD was systematically reviewed and interpreted. This involved transcribing the discussions, identifying recurring themes or patterns, and analyzing the depth of participant responses to uncover nuanced insights relevant to the research questions. This analytical process helped generate rich qualitative data that informed the broader study on non-graded assessment in ALS teacher practices (Krueger & Casey, 2014).

In research, ethical standards regarding informed consent were crucial for ensuring that participants understood the research procedures, potential risks, and

benefits before agreeing to take part. First and foremost, researchers provided clear and comprehensive information about the study's purpose, procedures, and expected outcomes. This information was communicated in a way that was understandable to the participants, taking into account any language or cultural considerations (Bryman, 2016).

Secondly, researchers obtained voluntary and informed consent from each participant. The participants freely agreed to participate without any form of coercion or undue influence. Researchers clearly outlined the voluntary nature of participation, assured confidentiality of information shared during the study, and provided contact information for any questions or concerns that might arise (Willig, 2013).

Lastly, throughout the research process, researchers continuously upheld ethical standards related to confidentiality and anonymity. This involved protecting participants' identities and ensuring that any data collected was stored securely and used only for research purposes. Researchers considered potential risks to participants and took measures to minimize these risks throughout the study (Bryman, 2016).

In the context of researching non-graded assessment in Alternative Learning System (ALS) teacher practices, maintaining confidentiality was critical in protecting the privacy and identity of participants. Confidentiality ensured that any information shared by participants during the research process were handled with the utmost care and respect. This includes safeguarding sensitive data from unauthorized access or disclosure that could potentially harm participants or breach their trust in the research process.

To uphold confidentiality, researchers clung to several key principles. Firstly, they obtained informed consent from participants, clearly explaining how their information will be used and ensuring that participants understand the risks and benefits of participation (Willig, 2013). Secondly, researchers anonymized or pseudonymized participants' identities in any research outputs, such as reports or publications, to prevent individuals from being identified based on their contributions.

Furthermore, it was very essential that data management practices were secured. This involves storing collected data securely, using encryption for digital records, and maintaining physical security for paper documents (Bryman, 2016). Access to sensitive information were restricted to authorized research team members only, and data will be used solely for the purposes outlined in the informed consent process, respecting participants' right to confidentiality throughout the research journey.

In the context of researching non-graded assessment in Alternative Learning System (ALS) teacher practices, a pilot study played a crucial role in refining the research design and methodology before full-scale implementation.

A pilot study was a small-scale preliminary investigation conducted to evaluate the feasibility, reliability, and validity of research methods and procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It allowed researchers to test their data collection instruments, such as interview guides or survey questionnaires, and identify any potential issues or challenges that might arise during the main study.

During a pilot study, researchers typically selected a smaller sample size compared to the main study, but one that represented the characteristics of the intended participant group. This sample allowed researchers to gather initial data and assess how well their research instruments performed in practice.

The primary goal of a pilot study was to enhance the quality and reliability of the main study by addressing any logistical or methodological issues early on. By conducting a pilot study, researchers increased the validity of their findings and improved the overall research process, ultimately leading to more vigorous conclusions regarding non-graded assessment in ALS teacher practices.

In research, validity referred to the degree to which a study accurately measured or reflected the concept or phenomenon it claimed to investigate. It was essential to ensure that the findings and conclusions drawn from the research were credible and meaningful. There were several types of validity that researchers considered to evaluate the quality of their research outcomes.

Firstly, internal validity applied to the extent to which a study's design and methods accurately measured the relationships or effects being studied.

This included controlling for potential confounding variables and ensuring that the research design allowed for causal interpretations of the results (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008).

Secondly, external validity concerned the generalizability of the study findings beyond the specific sample and context used in the research. Researchers aimed to determine whether the results could be applied to other populations, settings, or situations, thereby enhancing the broader applicability and relevance of the study's conclusions (Neuman, 2014).

Lastly, construct validity focused on the extent to which a study's operationalizations accurately represented the theoretical constructs they were intended to measure. This involved ensuring that the methods used to gather data aligned with the conceptual definitions of the variables under study, thereby supporting the theoretical foundations of the research (Bryman, 2016).

Ensuring validity in research involved careful planning, rigorous methodology, and critical evaluation of the study's design and findings. By addressing these validity concerns, researchers enhanced the reliability and trustworthiness of their research outcomes, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in areas such as non-graded assessment in ALS teacher practices.

Top of Form

Qualitative data analysis was a systematic process of interpreting and making sense of qualitative data collected in research studies. It involved several key steps and approaches to derive meaningful insights from the rich, descriptive data gathered from participants. The first step in qualitative data analysis was data preparation.

This involved organizing and preparing the collected data for analysis, which may have included transcribing interviews, organizing field notes, and ensuring that all

data sources were properly documented and managed (Miles et al., 2014).

Next, data coding was performed where the researcher identified and assigned labels (codes) to segments of data that represented meaningful concepts, themes, or patterns. Coding was done manually or using software tools like NVivo or ATLAS.ti, and it helped to categorize and organize the data into manageable units for analysis (Saldaña, 2016).

After coding, researchers engaged in theme development or pattern identification. This involved grouping related codes into broader themes or patterns that captured the essence of the data.

Themes were developed based on the frequency and significance of codes across the data set, allowing researchers to explore and interpret the underlying meanings and implications of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Finally, interpretation and synthesis of findings occurred where researchers analyzed the relationships between themes, interpreted the data concerning the research questions, and drew conclusions.

This process involved reflecting on the data in its entirety, considering alternative explanations, and ensuring that the interpretations were grounded in the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

By following these steps, qualitative researchers rigorously analyzed and interpreted, providing rich insights into phenomena such as non-graded assessment in ALS teacher practices.

This study utilized the Input-Process-Output-Outcome (IPOO) model. The input focused on ALS teachers' perceptions of non-graded assessment practices, exploring themes such as effectiveness, challenges, impact, diversity, and feedback.

The process involved focus group discussions, leading to the output—a non-graded assessment framework and handbook for ALS teachers.

The intended outcome was improved teaching practices, enhanced learning delivery, and better educational results, with feedback serving as a key driver for continuous improvement.

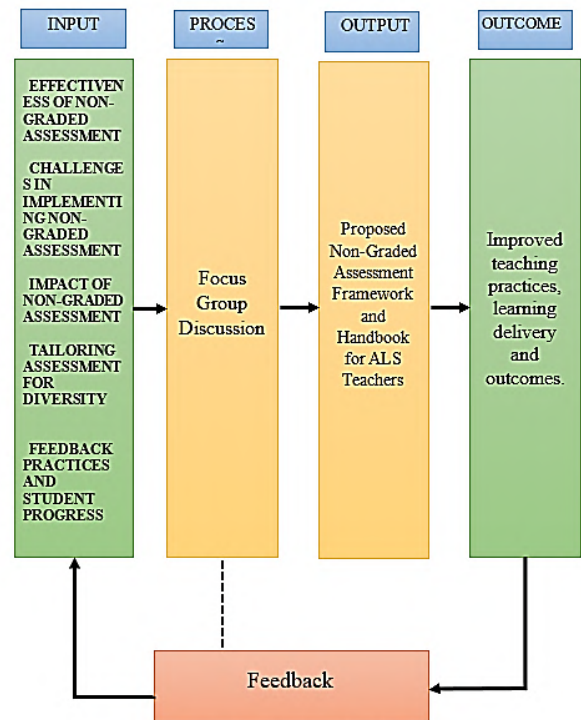


Figure 3. Conceptual Paradigm

III. RESULTS

Based on the analysis and interpretation of data, the salient findings of the study are as follows:

1. The effectiveness of non-graded assessments on learner learning and engagement is that these assessments significantly enhance learners' motivation and ownership of their learning. Participants reported that by eliminating the pressure of traditional grades, non-graded assessments foster a more supportive environment that encourages learners to focus on their personal growth and understanding of the material. This shift not only reduces anxiety but also promotes a growth mindset, enabling learners to engage more deeply with the content and take an active role in their educational journey. As a result, the effectiveness of non-graded assessments on learner learning and engagement contributes to improved learner attendance and participation, highlighting their role in creating a more collaborative and enriching learning experience.
2. ALS teachers face substantial obstacles related to learner engagement and motivation, particularly due to the absence of traditional grading systems. Participants noted that many learners struggle with focus and consistent attendance, which is compounded by their varied educational backgrounds and needs. Despite these challenges,

teachers employ innovative strategies such as differentiated instruction, flexible assessment formats, and constructive feedback to foster a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. This adaptive approach not only helps address individual learner needs but also facilitates a gradual transition from traditional grading to non-graded assessments, highlighting the importance of reflection and clear communication with parents and stakeholders to reinforce the value of this shift in assessment philosophy.

3. Non-graded assessments enhance motivation and self-efficacy among learners in the Alternative Learning System (ALS). However, some consequences are related to accountability and self-regulation. Participants expressed that the lack of traditional grading sometimes led to complacency, with some learners struggling to engage meaningfully with the material or take ownership of their learning. It was also observed that there's no clear structure or expectations associated with traditional grades, and some learners felt less compelled to push themselves academically. The absence of formal evaluation can inadvertently result in a diminished sense of urgency to complete assignments or pursue deeper understanding, particularly among those who may rely on external motivators. On the other hand, the implementation of non-graded assessments within the Alternative Learning System (ALS) significantly enhances learners' motivation and self-efficacy by creating a supportive environment that prioritizes personal growth over traditional grading pressures. This shift fosters intrinsic motivation and self-reflection, leading to improved learning outcomes and a deeper engagement with educational content.
4. ALS Teachers effectively used observation and diagnostic tools to customize assessments and instructional strategies, which increased learner engagement and improved learning outcomes. However, challenges arose as not all teachers were equally skilled in using these tools, leading to frustration with the additional workload of creating individualized learning agreements and adapting assessments.
5. Ongoing training significantly enhanced ALS teachers' skills and confidence in implementing non-graded assessments, focusing on learner outcomes and promoting inclusivity. Participants valued peer collaboration for sharing best practices and addressing challenges, though some faced

difficulties transitioning from traditional grading methods. They highlighted the need for continued support and additional training to effectively adapt to new strategies.

6. ALS teachers had varying interpretations of how to conduct non-graded assessments. Despite this, they appreciated the approach's emphasis on practical skills, enabling learners to apply knowledge in real-life situations and promoting individualized learning paths to address gaps. The Functional Non-Graded Assessment Framework proved valuable in guiding these personalized assessments, focusing on learner-centered approaches and practical applications. Teachers also recognized the importance of ongoing feedback, which aligned with the framework's emphasis on continuous assessment and improvement. However, some teachers expressed concerns about the lack of accessible resources and technology, which limited the framework's full implementation. Additionally, teachers noted the absence of a comprehensive handbook that consolidates all policies, processes, flowcharts, assessment models, and related materials, emphasizing the need for a single resource to streamline their implementation efforts.

IV. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Non-graded assessments are a powerful tool for promoting a growth mindset and creating a collaborative educational atmosphere that enhances learner learning experiences.
2. Addressing the challenges of engagement requires a multifaceted approach that includes clear communication with stakeholders and the implementation of adaptive teaching methods to reinforce the value of non-graded assessments.
3. Establish clear expectations and accountability measures within non-graded assessment frameworks to ensure learners remain actively engaged in their educational journey.
4. The effective use of observation and diagnostic tools is crucial for customizing assessments and instructional strategies; however, disparities in teacher proficiency can hinder the overall effectiveness of these approaches.
5. Sustain professional development and support are essential for effectively implementing non-graded assessments and fostering an inclusive learning atmosphere.

6. Standardized guidelines and accessible resources are essential to ensure consistent and effective implementation of non-graded assessments, ultimately enhancing the educational experience for both teachers and learners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were formulated from the emerging themes and findings:

1. Implement structured training programs for teachers on facilitating non-graded assessments that emphasize fostering a supportive classroom atmosphere, thereby further enhancing learner motivation and ownership of their learning.
2. Develop and share best practices for differentiated instruction and flexible assessment formats among ALS teachers to better engage learners with varied educational backgrounds and needs.
3. Introduce frameworks or guidelines for setting clear expectations and structures within non-graded assessments to help learners maintain motivation and accountability for their learning progress.
4. Organize workshops focused on the effective use of observation and diagnostic tools, ensuring all teachers gain the necessary skills to create individualized learning agreements and assessments.
5. Establish a continuous professional development program that includes mentorship opportunities and regular training sessions to assist teachers in transitioning from traditional grading methods to non-graded assessments.
6. Implement a dedicated handbook that standardizes the approach to non-graded assessments, offering clear guidelines and resources to help teachers in the assessment of learners.

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