ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 2| February2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

UNSCRIPTED VOICES: NARRATIVES OF GRADUATE EDUCATION STUDENTS WITHOUT PRIOR EXPERIENCE IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra26098
DOI No: 10.36713/epra26098

ABSTRACT

This study examines the experiences of graduate students enrolled in education programs who pursue a master's degree without prior formal teaching experience in English, a group often overlooked in educational research. Addressing the gap in understanding how non-teaching professionals navigate graduate education, this narratological study aims to explore and capture personal accounts that reveal the strengths, struggles, and insights of students enrolled in graduate education without formal teaching experience in English in schools in Davao del Norte. Using a qualitative research design with a narratological approach, the study gathered and analyzed participants' stories to illuminate their academic and personal journeys. The findings revealed three central narratives: the Courageous Mom, whose journey marked a turning point toward growing confidence and voice and the making of meaning from challenges; the Free-Spirited Woman, who began with hesitation mixed with excitement, faced setbacks that challenged her confidence and expectations, and eventually moved forward with acceptance, persistence, and renewed confidence; and the Resilient Mom, whose aspiration to pursue graduate education led her to confront challenges head-on while cultivating essential virtues needed to survive and succeed in a master's degree program. Overall, the study concludes that the assumption that master's programs in education are suited only for those already teaching is untrue. While many enrollees are practicing teachers, the findings affirm that pursuing and completing graduate education is both possible and achievable for individuals without formal teaching experience.

KEYWORDS: *Graduate Education; No Prior Teaching Experience; English; Narratology; Davao Del Norte*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Pursuing graduate studies offers an intellectually stimulating and enriching experience that will broaden one's knowledge and skill set. While most graduate students find that pursuing graduate studies is a rewarding journey that enhances their knowledge and career prospects, a contrasting view holds that it is also fraught with challenges (Sood, 2021). Graduate students who aren't working in their field face a tricky situation. They have extensive theoretical knowledge but lack practical experience. This difference can lead to feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt. These challenges make their journey through graduate school difficult and stressful (Blood, 2020).

A study revealed that graduate education students without prior work experience face challenges, including financial difficulties, employment issues, family and accommodation problems, workload and time constraints, contact sessions, subject information and assessment, information literacy, supervisory relationships, and supervisory structure and process (Havenga & Sengane, 2023). Furthermore, previous research also confirmed the finding regarding financia0l constraints. The biggest challenge faced by full-time postgraduate students is challenging within themselves, followed by time, finances, and families (Koh & Frechtling, 2021).

Moreover, a study indicated that the lack of formal teaching training can lead to self-doubt and a sense of isolation among these educators, which underscores the necessity of mentorship and collaborative learning environments to enhance their professional journey (Roberts, 2023). In addition, Sweeney et al. (2024) explore the challenges faced by non-education graduates transitioning into teaching positions in higher education institutions which emphasized the emotional and professional adjustments required during this transition. Their findings indicate that these individuals often encounter a steep learning curve and need substantial support from their institutions to develop effective pedagogical skills. Similarly, Martinez et al. (2024) found that non-education majors reported feeling underprepared for classroom management and instructional strategies.

Transitioning into teaching roles without prior experience can be both exciting and overwhelming for graduate education students. Many grapple with feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty as they face the challenges of leading a classroom. Research by Sweeney et al. (2024) reveals that students without formal teaching backgrounds often struggle to develop effective instructional strategies and classroom management skills, leading to a steep

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learning curve. Similarly, Martinez et al. (2024) emphasize that these individuals frequently feel unprepared, highlighting the need for mentorship and structured support to ease their transition.

Graduate education students, especially those who do not have teaching backgrounds, face unique challenges when they enter academia. According to Sweeney et al. (2024), such students most of the time experience inadequacy and uncertainty while entering the classroom because they do not have a teaching background. Their study emphasizes that graduates of other disciplines experience a steep learning curve in instructional strategies and classroom management. Martinez et al. (2024) further support this argument by stating that they often feel unprepared for the tasks of teaching because they are not well-versed in pedagogical theories and applications. Their study concludes that mentorship and structured support systems are critical in helping these novice instructors acclimate to their new roles effectively.

Another dimension is the emotional and psychological significance for these students when they lack an educational background. Roberts, in his work published in 2023, reveals how students with no experience of teaching face a lot of anxiety and self-doubt about their studies. This study reveals that the non-education majors feel isolated and insecure in their classrooms due to their perceived gap in expertise as compared to their peers with teaching backgrounds. In addition to this, Chen et al. (2022) reported that these students tend to develop resilience through their experiences and leverage their diverse backgrounds to foster unique perspectives in their teaching practices. That way, they learn to reflect upon themselves in terms of their learning process, and how that is something that makes their identities as educators: personal growth as a result of the challenges encountered.

A gap exists in the graduate school experience of students without prior teaching experience since they struggle with pedagogical transition, self-doubt, and institutional support deficits. Whereas mentorship and institutionalized learning environments have been termed critical in narrowing this gap, the literature lacks in-depth studies of the personal histories of such students, more so those studying English. This study seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by studying the lived experiences of these students without prior formal teaching in English, in greater detail, to gain a deeper understanding of their difficulties, strategies of coping, and professional development within graduate school.

Understanding and recording the accounts of students enrolled in graduate education without formal teaching experience has significant social relevance. This research will finally be able to present and or deal with the very critical gap within the preparation of teachers in contemporary educational settings. By capturing the stories among the currently registered graduate students concerning challenges and experiences commonly guiding their professional confidence and their respective academic success stories. Besides informing curriculum development as graduate programs absorb practical teaching ingredients to help heighten the pedagogical skills when such students without formal teaching exposure enter teaching or schools, the realization of understanding and noting their viewpoints illuminates and inspires more inclusive discussions in various communities. As such, this paper shall finally bridge theory and practice. In addition, this paper will be able to influence the mainstream discourse of educational equity since it will focus on the needs of graduate education students, who are not able to meet the fast-paced, evolving environment in education.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This research will apply a qualitative research design that has a narratological approach. This approach is concerned with understanding the perspectives of the participants and the context in which the study will be carried out, mainly through open-ended questions, interviews, and observations. Moreover, qualitative research studies social phenomena through emotions, thoughts, and actions in a community.

2.2 Research Participants

Using a narratological approach, through purposive sampling and snowball sampling, there were 3 participants in this study who had no prior experience in teaching English. They are currently pursuing graduate education within any Higher Education Institutions with graduate education programs offered in Tagum City, Davao del Norte.

2.3 Data Gathering Procedure and Analysis

After the approval for the implementation of the study, the endorsement letters were personally handed to the graduate school heads to begin with the data gathering procedure through one-on-one in-depth interviews with each participant. The date and venue of the in-depth interviews were determined according to the choice and convenience of the participants. In addition, interview guide questions were rigorously tested to ensure clarity, relevance, and effectiveness of the questions in collecting meaningful data. In this qualitative study, thematic analysis was used to analyze the responses of the participants. The approach was helpful because it allowed flexibility in the interpretation of analyzing the data.

2.4 Ethical Consideration

At every step of the research, the researcher actively followed ethical guidelines outlined in the National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research (2017). The research closely adhered to the guidelines, which included strictly conducting the study following the submitted proposal, and the submission to an anti-plagiarism checker as well. Graduate school heads received a detailed description of the objective of the study. Each participant received a proper explanation of the study in accordance with the informed consent form and the use of the data privacy notice. To protect the participants' identities, they were given pseudonyms. In addition, this study acknowledged the efforts of several bodies.

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3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 On the Accounts of *Courageous Mom, Free-Spirited Woman*, and *Resilient Mom* Enrolling in Graduate Education Without Prior Experience in Teaching English

When the English Language Became a Turning Point	Courageous Mom
Entering Graduate School with Doubt and Gaps	
Learning Through Challenge and Persistence	
Finding Support from Professors and Peers	
Preparations and Motivations While Pursuing a Master's Degree	
Growing in Confidence and Voice	
Making Meaning of the Journey	
Beginning with Hesitation About Entering Graduate School	Free-Spirited Woman
Finding Her Way Through Learning and Classroom Insights	
Committing to Coursework with the Support of Others	
Continuing Despite Inexperience and Self-Doubt	
Gaining New Perspective and Motivation	
Facing a Setback That Challenged Confidence and Expectation	
Recovering from Failure and Rebuilding Self-Belief	
Moving Forward with Acceptance, Persistence, and Renewed Confidence	
The Aspiring yet in Doubt One	Resilient Mom
Carrying On with Guidance and Care	
Balancing Tasks, Time, and Relationships	
Confronting Challenges Head-On	
Recovering, Reflecting, and Moving Forward	
Virtues to Survive in a Master's Degree	

Graduate education is a tough phase in someone's educational journey, especially if you do not have prior formal experience, since most of the topics to be discussed will be focused on teaching, even more if your collegiate course is not in line with the one you will pursue for your master's degree. With this teaching gap, students who enrolled in graduate education without formal teaching experience in English faced a learning gap and felt lacking in experience. However, even though they started their journey with hesitation and doubt, they pursued it with support from the institution where they enrolled, guidance from their professors, the use of strategies, and the motivation they value deeply to navigate their graduate education.

The graduate level, in particular at the master's in teacher education, has an important role to play in educating teachers who know how to teach and are capable of teaching effectively. According to Sanchez et al. (2023), alumni of a master's program in the Philippines center of excellence reported substantial individual and professional development: enhancement with advanced skills, key qualities, and even promotions in their teaching careers. For students who are already in graduate programs, this underscores the significance of their studies in increasing not only subject knowledge but also in building skills that can prepare them for leadership and higher responsibilities in education. The study also highlights the value of a flexible, integrated, and real-time learning environment that emphasizes ongoing engagement and active learning during the master's journey in determining students' professional trajectory. This is an encouraging note for those of you in the program right now that hard work and sticking with it can pay off in substantial growth and real career opportunities.

The notion above is supported by Casanova-Fernandez et al. (2022), novice teachers frequently find it difficult to adapt to the realities of the classroom for which they were not sufficiently trained. For graduate students who have not been trained to teach, this serves as a reminder of the importance of career values and real-world skills during a student's time in graduate school. Participating in supervised teaching experiences and reflective practice can help them connect theory with practice, thus gaining the confidence and readiness needed to face classroom challenges

Meanwhile, Martinot et al. (2022) stress that the learning of students is to a very great extent dependent on how they feel supported socially by significant people in their life contexts. Teachers and peers constituted the most powerful sources of support, supporting school engagement directly and, on some occasions, indirectly through enhancing students' sense of belonging at school. This highlights the significance for educators to develop and maintain relational, supportive connections, because the quality and perception of social support have a formative influence on how students relate to and engage in their learning setting.

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In addition, De Jesus et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of institutional support in affecting graduate students' experience. Students expressed satisfaction with research mentoring, cooperation of faculty, and rich resources of the library; these significantly affected feelings of support and engagement in their programs. These results underscore the positive effect of strong support systems on graduate student learning and professional development.

Moreover, Lo et al. (2022) assert that student motivation plays a critical role in influencing the engagement and learning efficacy in service-learning classes. Among a sample of more than 2,000 students from various other programs as well, it appeared that motivated students were most likely to be active learners and to profit from their experience, indicating a need to promote motivation to maximize learning gains.

Pursuing graduate education without formal teaching experience in English presents challenges that need to be addressed in order to succeed in the chosen educational advancement. Failures will not be the deciding factor for a successful graduate education journey, but rather, on how you managed to be triumphant in the challenges you encountered along the way. One participant shared that being overly confident and too relaxed can lead to failure in one aspect of one's graduate education journey. Facing the challenges instead of avoiding them will give you a chance to bounce back from the setback you encountered. Moreover, staying committed to the tasks and the coursework keeps you driven, eventually leading you to positive results such as improved communication skills and self-confidence.

Akbari and Sahibzada (2020) find in their study that while self-confidence generally promotes the learning process, overconfidence has negative effects on the student's academic career. Students with high over-confidence may judge their own knowledge higher and so take less action in becoming actively involved in a lesson, inhibiting deeper learning. Although the sample of students in this study was characterized by relatively high levels of self-confidence, its findings suggest that high self-confidence with some level of shyness and a certain openness to seeking help are central features if confidence is to have positive rather than negative effects on participation, goal-setting, and real interaction with teachers and peers.

Meanwhile, Mehmood (2023) emphasizes that resilience is crucial, as it enables a person to bounce back after he or she has faced hard times. The present review highlights that resilience is a dynamic process, indicating an individual´s interaction between person/environment and sociocultural factors to adapt. Resilience gives people the emotional strength that they need to cope with stress; remain mentally healthy; be more productive, resilient, and happier in general – all reasons why it is crucial for both individual and social outcomes.

Moreover, Zhang et al. (2021) establish that staying committed is vital to creating positive results, and the influence of task interdependence on relationships with others and well-being. When translating this finding into a learning-related context, one would assume that if students remain committed and invested in their study effort, they are more likely to shape up their peer environment with positive support from others, which in turn can also be related to motivation, cooperation, and general academic accomplishment. The research finds that commitment to tasks has a dual payoff: It helps keep behavior on task, but it also appears to establish a virtuous cycle where continued engagement and effort form the center of increased achievement, motivation, and stronger connections with others in the learning environment.

Graduate education students without formal teaching experience in English has number of lessons learned as well as reflections that they shared in the course of pursuing their graduate education journey. A strong sense of purpose for why you enrolled in graduate education is vital, for this will keep you driven even in the midst of trouble and chaos. Perseverance, a virtue that the participants practiced, helped them overcome the challenges they encountered. Looking at the positive side, even when the situation is not good. One participant likewise shared to take things seriously in graduate education. Above all, to keep the faith and to believe in one's ability are paramount armor and amulet to any challenges that may come in one's way.

The notion above is supported by Beatty et al. (2025), who highlighted that the sense of purpose can be used to help keep students motivated and on track during their academic pursuits. Students who find meaning in their studies have also been shown to be more likely to use self-management skills, maintain motivation, and stay connected with their course of study, which leads to a higher life satisfaction and a sense of belonging. The results imply that purpose is not only important in assisting the students to overcome obstacles, but it also reinforces their overall well-being and discrimination power at school, showing them how a direction has been formed and personal objectives help them persevere with effort and dedication in an attempt to achieve good academic performance as well as personal success.

In addition, Chue and Lim (2024) emphasize that perseverance enables students' ability to pay attention and being able to persevere despite difficulties; it helps them to reframe the way they think about adversity. Their research demonstrated the significance of grit in academic achievement i.e. students with a refusal to give-up on their goals despite experiencing either setbacks or frustrations are more likely to recover from challenges and move forward. Students who focus on the positive aspects of their learning can mitigate the negative effects of challenges, keep themselves going, and perform better. This emphasizes the need to cultivate and develop perseverance as one of the personal virtues that leads to students' ability to thrive when faced with obstacles in their study journey.

Moreover, Guzmán Murillo et al. (2024) highlight how seriously taking academic tasks is an important factor in maintaining students' fervor in studying. Their results suggest that those

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students who exhibit enthusiastic levels of engagement will be more likely to embody high levels of strength, as evidenced through increased levels of endurance, concentration, and motivation when engaging in learning tasks. As they open their eyes to a whole new world of studying by taking an approach that treats life with sincerity, students can better handle academic pressure and maintain interest even in adversity. This suggests that dedication is not just the effort of it but a mindful recognition or appreciation of one's educational path, and produces more positive and productive learning experiences.

Furthermore, Faith plays an important part of students' resilience and persistence in academic difficulties and studying according to Oliver (2025). The study also suggests that students who regularly attend religious services, as well as those who experience subjective happiness and a clear sense of purpose, have emotional and spiritual resources for weathering stress and setbacks. Faith plays the role of a solid material to lean on for focus, persistence, and coping, helping students to maintain motivation in the face of adversity. These findings indicate that faith in an academic context could potentially foster inner resilience, maintain motivation, and develop positive psychological resources throughout the demands of higher education.

Lastly, Gerbino (2020) highlights that believing in oneself or self-efficacy is a strong determinant for success in various aspects of life. People with self-belief are more motivated, they make better decisions, they manage their emotions, and they persevere under stress. Such a strong sense of self-belief in one's ability to perform academically is associated with better academic performance, emotional health, and positive relationships with others. The basis of this inner foundation, overall, is self-efficacy, which allows people to take control and actively seek to achieve their goals despite setbacks in a confident way.

With these findings and the general themes that emerged from the responses of the participants, the support of the Institution where they are enrolled, as well as their mentors, played an integral part in their graduate education journey and towards achieving it. Institutions that practice capacity-building seminars and activities for their graduate education students enhanced not just the ability of the students who are already in the teaching field, but also those who do not have formal teaching experience yet. With this initiative of the institution, the graduate education students, as well as the study participants, were capacitated, and their knowledge on conducting and conceptualizing a research study has improved. The students were guided throughout the conduct of their research journey.

The findings of this study need additional scrutiny. Meanwhile, the findings of this study are critical for future research into various education program specializations, and it is suggested that a similar study be conducted, but in a broader range of places and with a larger number of participants, in order to obtain more substantial information on the study.

The succeeding research interviews can also be done virtually for the convenience of the future researcher and his or her participants in cases that the future research will cover bigger areas or the future researcher will add another province or, even better, another region. It is also advised to construct and use a different set of questions to cover areas that were not explored by this study.

Subsequently, it is recommended to also cover other areas of specialization of the education program with students who pursue graduate education without prior formal teaching experience in their chosen specialization, to explore, capture, and highlight their experiences as well. In this lead, the future research can also reveal courageous students who took the leap and dared to enroll to prepare, improve, and equip themselves for the future and the profession they are eyeing.

The assumption that master's programs in education are only suited to those who are already teaching is, in reality, quite untrue. While the majority of the enrollees in graduate education are those who are already teaching, it is also entirely possible and achievable for those who have no formal teaching experience yet.

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