



NAVIGATING PHONOLOGICAL AND SYNTACTICAL HURDLES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF THE ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Senior High School Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners as they navigated phonological and syntactical hurdles in communication. Guided by Hymes' Communicative Competence Theory, Ellis' Native Language Interference Theory, and Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping, as described by Lazarus and Folkman this qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Senior High School ALS learners as they navigated phonological and syntactical hurdles in communication. Fourteen (14) ALS learners from selected public schools in New Corella, Davao del Norte were purposively selected as participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in learners' experiences. Findings revealed significant phonological challenges, including mispronunciation of unfamiliar sounds, improper stress and intonation, and first-language interference. Syntactical hurdles were evident in difficulties with sentence construction, subject-verb agreement, verb tense usage, and word order. These challenges negatively affected learners' confidence, clarity of expression, and participation in academic and social interactions. Despite these difficulties, learners demonstrated resilience by employing coping strategies such as repeated practice, self-monitoring, and seeking support from teachers and peers. The study underscores the importance of context-sensitive and theory-informed instructional interventions that address both phonological and syntactical development to strengthen communicative competence among ALS learners.

KEYWORDS: *Alternative Learning System Learners, Phonological Challenges, Syntactical Hurdles, Qualitative Study, Phenomenology, Thematic Analysis, New Corella, Davao Del Norte, Philippines*

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Most individuals encounter significant phonological and syntactic difficulties when communicating, which hinders their ability to express themselves clearly and understand others effectively. Although it is important to address these challenges, especially for ALS learners, the aim is not to achieve native English pronunciation. In today's language learning context, the focus has shifted from perfection to communicative competence, the ability to use language accurately, appropriately, and fluently in real-life situations. For ALS learners, developing intelligible pronunciation that facilitates understanding is far more valuable than striving for native-like speech. The emphasis should be on enabling students to communicate meaningfully and confidently, rather than conforming to unrealistic standards of phonological precision.

Regarding research, numerous Alternative Learning System (ALS) students do not attain competency, often having difficulties with pronunciation and proper sentence formation (Adosi, 2020). This contributes to a reduced level of competence, which could have an effect on their communication skills as a whole.

Grounded on the observations conducted in the classroom, I observed that the Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners have been encountering ongoing difficulties in communication, which greatly influence their capacity to effectively and accurately communicate their ideas. Without timely and appropriate interventions, they may continue to widen the communication gaps and limit the academic engagement of the ALS learners.

This study will be beneficial in navigating the lived experiences of ALS learners in phonological and syntactic hurdles in communication. Through the results, programs and interventions will be developed to address specific needs, particularly in communication skills, by tackling learners' phonological and syntactic issues. The study's findings will be submitted to the division research committee and will be distributed through school-based activities in order to identify patterns and provide future recommendations for improving learners' communication skills.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences and insights of Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners in New Corella, Davao del Norte, as they faced phonological and syntactic hurdles in communication.



At this stage of research, the ALS learners' experiences with these communication hurdles were defined as the specific difficulties these learners encountered in addressing phonological and syntactical hurdles specifically pronunciation and sentence structure in their learning process.

Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners facing phonological and syntactic hurdles in communication?
2. How do they cope with the challenges they encountered in facing phonological and syntactic hurdles in communication?
3. What are the insights of ALS learners on phonological and syntactic hurdles of communication that can be shared with others?

Theoretical Lens

This study could be seen through the theory of communicative competence as postulated by Dell Hymes in 1966, which in turn captured the use of communication in a much wider realm, going beyond just a correct use of grammar. Hymes emphasized that the rules of language involved not just some structural knowledge but also the knowledge to use such language appropriately in an array of sociocultural contexts.

As stated in Dell Hymes' Communicative Competence theory, the use of language would not be limited to grammar and pronunciation but should also have included the view of the social context, texts, and techniques. This wider view assisted educators in designing courses that deal with the phonological and syntactic challenges faced by the ALS students and developing their actual communicative use in varied real-life situations.

This research was also tied with Ellis's (1994) Native Language Interference Theory, which assigned explanation to the contextual factors in which learners transferred rules and structures of their native language (L1) during second language (L2) learning with both positive and negative impacts. This interference might have been particularly difficult for the learners who had a native language substantially different from the target language.

This research was further anchored on the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping, as described by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which discussed the ways in which people cognitively and behaviorally react to stressful experiences. The theory described that people experience stress not just in the situation but also in the way they appraise the situation and their ability to cope with it.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Alternative Learning System

Education is highly regarded in the Philippines, receiving the largest share of social service expenditures. However, significant national debt servicing continues to limit the education sector's capacity to receive sufficient funding (Manila Bulletin, 2025). As Baccal and Ormilla (2020) observe, many Filipino children, especially those affected by poverty,

gender inequity, displacement, disability, and ethnicity still face barriers to accessing formal education.

Phonology

Phonology, as part of the subsystem of language, plays a fundamental role in effective communication (Fiveable Content Team, 2025). Similarly, Rabiah (2018) and Utami and Lingtansari (2021) define phonology as the study of a language's sound system, including how sounds are produced, structured, and used. It involves understanding the rules that govern how sounds function in a language such as which sounds can occur together, their placement within words, and how they vary in different contexts.

Syntax

Language is a vital tool for communication in any community, and it functions through both spoken and written forms. Carnie (2023) stresses that in written communication, the ability to organize thoughts clearly and cohesively is essential. Syntax, the system governing sentence structure, plays a key role in ensuring clarity and precision in expressing ideas. As Burton-Roberts (2021) explains, syntax allows speakers and writers to convey complex concepts through structured and coherent sentences. Mahayani (2018), as cited in Sulistyarningsih et al. (2023), defines syntax as the study of sentence structure, encompassing how phrases and clauses are organized to form meaningful expressions.

Communication Skills

Communication encompasses every successful and meaningful interaction between individuals. It often involves a series of phases, including purpose definition, composition, encoding, transmission, decoding, and, eventually, interpreting the message by the recipient (Kapur, 2020). Communication has several tasks, some of which are aimed at altering or even changing behavior (Al-alawneh et al., 2020).

Phonological Hurdles

A solid foundation in phonological awareness is critical for reading development, as it helps learners decode, recognize, and understand words, essential skills for fluency and comprehension. Phonological awareness involves progressively developing skills such as rhyme detection, syllable segmentation, and phoneme manipulation (Nkurunziza, 2024).

Syntactical Hurdles

In today's globalized world, English fluency is a vital skill in academic and professional domains (Vibar, 2022). For Senior High School learners, especially those enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS), strong English language proficiency is essential not only for meeting curriculum expectations but also for accessing better employment opportunities. One crucial component of English proficiency is syntax, understanding and applying the structural rules that govern sentence formation.

Pedagogical Approach to Address Phonology and Syntactical Hurdles

Good language skills developed through effective instruction enable learners to communicate their ideas clearly and



comprehend others. These abilities include attentive listening, confident speaking, thorough reading, and accurate writing (Isnaini & Aminatun, 2021). This aligned with earlier studies of Del Rosario (2025) who mentioned that in ALS settings, where many learners are returning to education after interruptions or have minimal prior exposure to formal schooling, the development of these foundational communication skills is critical.

Benefits of learning Phonology and Syntax

Language, therefore as asserted by Chomsky (2020), emerged from the innate human need to communicate and is required for efficient communication. As mentioned by Bora (2023) although expertise in linguistics is not required to possess proficient language skills, having a basic understanding of the language can be extremely beneficial in navigating the challenges of both speaking and writing effectively. Similarly, language acquisition is viewed as a skill, which implies that learning a language necessitates the development of certain linguistic abilities.

Chapter 3

DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presented the conclusions and discussions grounded on the findings in conducting phenomenological inquiry. This section consisted of the discussion of the emergent themes adjacent to the related literature that could be found from the existing body of knowledge and various authors. More so, this also contained the implication for teaching practice and recommendations for further research.

Experiences of Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners facing Phonological and Syntactical Hurdles in communication

Students chosen as participants shared different underlying experiences facing phonological and syntactical challenges in communication. From the responses gathered, the following four (4) themes emerged: (a) language difficulties rooted in interrupted schooling, (b) phonological, grammatical, and expressive communication barriers, (c) psychosocial and emotional impact of communication challenges, and (d) resilience, coping, and positive reframing of challenges.

Language Difficulties Rooted in Interrupted Schooling

Long gaps in formal education were associated with unfamiliarity with sentence structures, academic vocabulary, and classroom discourse, which complicated comprehension and participation. This aligned with research by Hero (2022), who noted that learners returning to education after extended absences often exhibited language attrition, particularly in syntactic and lexical domains.

Phonological, Grammatical, and Expressive Communication Barriers

Learners reported difficulties with pronunciation, silent letters, consonant clusters, vowel variations, and sentence construction, which hindered fluent oral expression and written accuracy. This finding was consistent with studies indicating that phonological awareness and grammar acquisition were closely linked to oral communication proficiency, particularly in adult learners with limited prior exposure (Widiantari et al.,

2023).

Psychosocial and Emotional Impact of Communication Challenges

This prominent theme reflected the interplay between linguistic difficulties and learners' emotional states. ALS learners frequently experienced embarrassment, anxiety, and fear of ridicule, which diminished participation and self-confidence. These experiences resonated with findings by Alfatihah et al. (2022), who observed that adults returning to education often confronted heightened sensitivity to peer evaluation, leading to avoidance behaviors and reluctance to engage in classroom interactions.

Resilience, Coping, and Positive Reframing of Challenges

Despite linguistic and emotional difficulties, ALS learners demonstrated determination, consistent practice, and a proactive approach to self-correction and research, reframing challenges as opportunities for growth. This finding aligned with Liu et al.'s (2022) concept of self-efficacy, emphasizing that learners' belief in their capacity to overcome obstacles significantly predicted academic persistence and skill acquisition.

Coping Strategies in Facing Phonological and Syntactical Hurdles in Communication

Different coping strategies shared by the participants to share their ways on how to address phonological and syntactical hurdles in communication. From the responses gathered, the following seven (7) themes emerged: (a) supportive learning environment and help-seeking from teachers, (b) acceptance, positive mindset, and perseverance as coping attitudes, (c) self-regulated practice and home-based support, (d) participation, consistency, and active classroom engagement, (e) technology-assisted coping and learning resources, (f) communication as a method of improvement, and (g) attitudinal coping and learning disposition.

Supportive Learning Environment and Help-Seeking from Teachers

Learners coped with phonological and syntactical challenges primarily by seeking guidance and support from teachers and school heads (Chen et al., 2022). As highlighted by Davison et al. (2023), students actually asked for help from either their teacher or their classmates during the lesson when they perceived that they did not understand what they were asked to do and needed help, and there was a strong association between learners' perceived need for help and learners' likelihood of teacher-directed and peer-directed help-seeking.

Acceptance, Positive Mindset, and Perseverance as Coping Attitudes

Acceptance, positive mindset, and perseverance were essential coping attitudes that enabled individuals to manage challenges effectively, particularly in academic and professional contexts. Acceptance referred to the willingness to acknowledge difficulties, limitations, or setbacks without denial or excessive self-blame, which was consistent with the concept of psychological acceptance in coping theory (Dilekçi & Karatay, 2023).



Self-Regulated Practice and Home-Based Support

Beyond the classroom, learners engaged in self-regulated practices such as repeated reading, writing exercises, listening to correct pronunciation, self-recording, and receiving feedback from family or peers (Martinez & Luzano, 2023). These strategies helped consolidate language skills and provided additional opportunities for correction and rehearsal (Hero, 2022).

Participation, Consistency, and Active Classroom Engagement

Active engagement in classroom activities, including oral recitations and Q&A sessions, served as a crucial method for coping with language challenges (Alfatihah et al., 2022). In their study on the effects of learner engagement on their academic performance, Saqr et al. (2023) indicated that learners who showed high and constant engagement in learning activities were more likely to achieve constant and high levels of academic performance, thus proving that learners benefit from their constant engagement in learning activities.

Technology-Assisted Coping and Learning Resources

Learners increasingly utilized technological tools to address language challenges. Online tutorials, videos, educational apps, and search engines provided visual and auditory models for correct pronunciation, sentence-making, and grammar application (Mahdi, 2022). Digital resources offered flexible, accessible, and engaging avenues for practice, complementing traditional learning materials such as books and modules.

Communication as a Method of Improvement

Learners actively engaged in conversation with classmates, teachers, and native speakers to reinforce their language skills. Conversational practice served as both a learning tool and a feedback mechanism, providing opportunities to apply knowledge, correct mistakes, and gain fluency (Bensalem et al., 2025). Interaction with proficient speakers enhanced practical understanding of sentence structures, pronunciation, and real-life communication strategies (Radjak, 2025). **Attitudinal Coping and Learning**

Disposition

Positive attitudes, acceptance of mistakes, perseverance, and diligence were central to learners' coping strategies. Students recognized errors as part of the learning process and remained motivated to improve despite challenges (Salendab & Cogo, 2022). Maintaining a hardworking mindset and practicing patience supported continuous skill development, while open-mindedness allowed learners to integrate new knowledge effectively. Further, Jadia et al. (2023) emphasize that the coping strategies of grit, time management, escape-avoidance, religiosity, resilience, problem-solving plan, leisure, and social support, as part of their attitudes and styles for dealing with the demands of both work and school, and where some of these coping strategies have been found to be significantly associated with better academic performance, which suggests that the learners' attitudinal styles for coping with academic demands have an impact on their academic disposition.

Insights of ALS learners on Phonological and Syntactic Hurdles of Communication that can be shared with others

The student-participants expressed different insights with their experiences on phonological and syntactical hurdles in communication that can be shared with others. Four (4) themes emerged from this section: (a) developing acceptance and emotional resilience in communication challenges, (b) practicing self-directed and resource-based learning strategies, (c) improving communication through deliberate practice and comprehension, and (d) gaining confidence, pride, and motivation from progress.

Developing Acceptance and Emotional Resilience in Communication Challenges

ALS learners emphasized the importance of accepting mistakes and negative experiences as part of the learning process. They recognized that being laughed at or corrected by teachers and peers could initially feel discouraging, but embracing these experiences fostered personal growth and enhanced learning. Acceptance allowed learners to view errors not as failures, but as opportunities to improve pronunciation, sentence construction, and overall communication skills.

Practicing Self-Directed and Resource-Based Learning Strategies

Learners reported that self-directed learning through research, digital tools, and study materials helped overcome phonological and syntactic hurdles. Many cited using YouTube tutorials, grammar workbooks, apps, and other resources to practice pronunciation and sentence construction. Consistent study routines, even as brief as 30 minutes daily, were emphasized as essential for gradual improvement (Arifudin et al., 2025). ALS learners highlighted that setting aside focused time to study, applying corrections from teachers, and engaging in independent research allowed for deliberate skill enhancement and retention.

Improving Communication through Deliberate Practice and Comprehension

Another critical insight shared by ALS learners was the value of understanding sentences and pronunciation before responding, combined with deliberate practice in reading, writing, and speaking. Learners reported that oral recitations, paragraph exercises, and role-playing activities strengthened sentence construction and pronunciation skills. Teacher corrections and peer feedback were highlighted as essential for reinforcing accurate usage and fostering continuous improvement (Radjak, 2025).

Gaining Confidence, Pride, and Motivation from Progress

Learners consistently noted that achieving small improvements in communication fostered confidence, pride, and motivation to continue learning. Successes, such as correctly delivering a word, completing an English presentation, or interacting with a foreigner, were recognized as milestones reinforcing self-efficacy and persistence (Jeong, 2022). ALS programs were acknowledged as a supportive framework that enabled learners to overcome previous limitations, reduce feelings of being "stuck," and gain agency in their learning.



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