



EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM (ALS) ON EDUCATIONAL ACCESS AND EMPOWERMENT TO ALS LEARNERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY IN TANGUB CITY

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ABSTRACT

The Philippines has observed an overwhelming dropout of learners annually, leaving them behind and resort to an initiative program such as the alternative learning system (ALS). This study aimed to assess the impacts of ALS program to the learners' self – esteem, confidence, community engagement, and literacy development. The study made use of a descriptive - qualitative design of research. The study utilized purposive sampling in which 16 ALS learners in Tanguib City division were chosen as the participants and data were gathered through an in-depth interview. Results revealed that in the context of self – esteem, learners developed an improved self – image and sense of achievement. In terms of confidence, learners were able to acquire enhancement of interpersonal skills as well as better understanding of one's self. In terms of community engagement, learners become active community participants and have learned leadership skills. In the context of literacy development, learners have improved their reading and writing skills and developed self – independence. However, factors such as financial support, intrinsic motivation, and time management were seen to confront the academic pursuit of ALS learners. Studying the impacts of these factors to the academic performance of ALS learners can significantly uncover potential solutions to better understand the ever-changing dynamics of education. Moreover, acknowledging the important role that stakeholders play in the context of ALS learning is also one of the most important areas that needs to be explored to come up with realistic feedback, thus, helps improve the framework of ALS education in the future.

Keywords: *Alternative learning system, Academic success, Learning, Pedagogy*

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Introduction

It is a well-known fact that education serves as a vital component in the country's development both in human and economics. Education serves as a fundamental framework in shaping human superiority, social stability, and economic power (Patrinos, 2016). However, access to education has been a long-standing issue and concern for developing countries such as the Philippines (Maligalig et. al., 2010). Despite the remarkable progress in expanding access to basic education, the education data in 2016 shows that about half of Filipino students are struggling to complete basic education on time (Worldbank, 2018). The Philippines has a complex systems of basic education in Asia and was tagged as one of the low performing nations when it comes to reading comprehension and mathematics (PISA, 2022). Because of these underlying challenges, the country has observed an overwhelming dropout of learners annually, leaving them behind and resort to an initiative program of the department of education (DepEd) known as alternative learning system (ALS).

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) was first initiated in the Philippines in 2004 with the aim of providing school drop outs with access to free basic education. The ALS has two components: (1) the Basic Literacy Program (BLP) which teaches basic literacy skills for reading, writing and numeracy; and (2) the Continuing Education Program – Accreditation and Equivalency (CEP A&E) which is a paper pencil test that assesses learner's competences; successful candidates will receive a certificate from DepEd which is equivalent to that received by pupils graduating from the formal education system (UNESCO, 2023). ALS is accountable for meeting demand-driven learning, which has evolved into a global concern since the Declaration of Education for All (EFA) was adopted in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand. Though it was not officially authorized until 2006, the DepEd began using it as its general planning and policy framework in 2003 (Philippines EFA-MDA). A comprehensive study conducted by the Worldbank (2018) found that the number of ALS learners being reached by the program has

increased. From 537,666 in 2016, the learners enrolled in the program increased to 641,584 in 2017.

Since the implementation of ALS in the Philippines, several studies have been conducted to investigate its dynamic effects in terms of the academic equity and efficiency (Terisita, 2003). For instance, the UNICEF (2017) found that the ALS program in the Philippines has provided better learning opportunities for those who left formal education. Results in the study made by Abad and Galleto (2020) with regards to the implementation of ALS program in DepEd Division of Dapitan City, Philippines revealed that ALS instruction's high support mechanism was small and positively low but significantly related to the teachers' highly positive attitudes towards work and the teachers' best practices in implementing the program. In Tangub City division, ALS program has started since 2004 and has continued to enrich learners both from elementary and secondary levels respectively. However, the impacts of ALS program in terms of access and empowerment to the learners in Tangub City has not yet been explored at par. Hence, there is a need to study the impact of ALS program in Tangub City division to augment the policies and systems, to boost access to learning quality and equity.

This study aims to assess the impact of ALS program and its implementation in Tangub City division to determine its efficiency throughout achieving better access and empowerment to the learners.

Literature Review

On Alternative Learning System

Individuals can now experience an everchanging work conditions due to the growing acceptance of the workplace as a crucial venue for learning new skills and knowledge. Workers in today's complex market are expected to review their knowledge, skills, and habits frequently to preserve a competitive advantage and employability (Le Clus, 2011).

Learning is viewed as something that happens as a result of work-related opportunities that allow workers to gain knowledge through apprenticeship and increased participation in a community of practice. According to Billett (2001), workplaces and educational institutions are essentially various manifestations of social activities in which involvement facilitates learning." Learning on the job, particularly in the workplace, is critical to the workers' everyday activities.

Four out of every five school dropouts, according to Doronila (2001), occur between Grades three and five, with Grade four having the highest prevalence. A literacy test found that roughly 16% of these dropouts increased their literacy level by two to five grades, while the rest (84%) saw their knowledge and abilities degrade by 2nd-grade levels. Retrogression is more likely if a student drops out of school in third grade or lower. Doronila's (2001) study stressed that literacy is interwoven in the daily lives of individuals and communities rather than being a separate concept. The concept of informal learning inspired the practice of Recognition of Prior Learning as it shows itself in the workplace, community, and daily life (RPL). PLAR stands for a cluster of approaches and methodologies for identifying, defining, and showing the entire range of accomplishments and capacities. Prior experience and informal learning (whether accredited or not) can be used to meet the official standards of vocational colleges and institutions of higher education using these processes.

Research Questions

This study aims to Explore the Impact of Alternative Learning System (ALS) On Educational Access and Empowerment. The program is based on a contextualized version of the K to 12 basic education curriculum designed specifically to meet the learning needs and situations of the students (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2017).

It specifically aims to respond to the following questions:

1. What are the observable impacts among ALS learners with regards to the program of Alternative Learning System in terms of:
 - a. self-esteem;
 - b. confidence;
 - c. community engagement; and
 - d. literacy development?
2. What are the factors that affect the ALS learners' in terms of their self- esteem, confidence, community engagement and literacy development?

Scope and Limitation

This study focuses on Exploring the Impact of Alternative Learning System (ALS) On Educational Access and Empowerment. The data collection will be conducted on randomly selected ALS learners both A & E Elementary and Junior High School of School Year 2023-2024. Each of the participant will be interviewed to gather the data and information.

The results of this study will be applicable only to the participant of this study and will not be used as a measure of the effects of depression on the academic performance of the learners who do not belong to the population of this study. The main source of data will be the response of participants during the interview, which is prepared by the researcher.

Research Methodology

This study utilized the descriptive qualitative design of research. The main purpose is to know Impact of Alternative Learning System (ALS) On Educational Access and Empowerment. Qualitative research is used to describe the narratives/ sentiments of individual participants based on their experiences in a particular phenomenon. In the case of this study, 16 learners of ALS in Tangub City from eight districts will be purposely selected, both high school and elementary levels respectively to participate in the conduct of this study.

a. Sampling

The study was conducted in Tangub City, Misamis Occidental through purposive sampling technique. Participants were asked to participate in an in-depth interview to record their responses in each question floated. Participants were asked to sign a waiver/free-prior informed consent to conform with ethical considerations in the study.

b. Data Collection

The researcher made a letter of permission to conduct the study. The study interview was conducted during the available hour of the target participants or upon the approval of the education program specialist for ALS in Tangub City. With this, a free-prior informed consent will be secured from the target participants to ensure that the current undertaking follows legality and ethical procedures.

c. Ethical Issues

The researcher has not revealed any gathered information to anybody. The researcher presented a formal written consent beforehand to the participants. The researcher has assured the participants of the utmost respect for confidentiality. The researcher has protected the privacy of the participant's contributing responses to the study. Moreover, the information that were gathered in this study were used for academic purposes only.

d. Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data derived from the interviews. To systematically organize the thematic analysis, the researcher followed the analysis process given by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is “a data reduction and analysis strategy by which qualitative data are segmented, categorized, summarized, and reconstructed in a way that captures the important concepts within the data set” (Ayress, 2008). Thematic Analysis (TA) can take either the form of theoretical thematic analysis, inductive thematic analysis, or a hybrid of both. Theoretical TA follows a top-down process where a theoretical framework is used as a filter to search for the themes from the data (Mahapatra & Chandola, 2018).

Results and Discussion

The exploration of the impacts of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in Tangub City Division has yielded significant insights into its effectiveness and areas for improvement. The ALS program, designed to provide education to out-of-school youth and adults, has shown both positive outcomes and challenges that need to be addressed for its optimal implementation. The following results have been generated:

A. Self- esteem

Self-esteem is one of the most important factors that influences academic engagement among learners (Bailey et al., 2016). Building one’s character in the phases of learning process is highly important for learners to create a holistic and objective scale of attaining systematic learning. Moreover, the following themes were derived based on the interview from the participants on the impacts of ALS program to the self-esteem of the ALS learners:

Theme 1: Improved Self-image

ALS learners are notably persons that are not highly sociable due to stigma from their communities (Gonzaga, 2024). Giving important knowledge through ALS is greatly helpful especially that self-image is closely tied to self-esteem. When ALS learners develop a more positive self-image, they often experience an increase in self-esteem. This connection is largely due to the way individuals perceive their own worth and capabilities. Positive self-image helps learners feel more confident and valued, which in turn boosts their self-esteem. such theme was derived based on the following statements of the participants.

“I don’t really talk to people a lot before, but when I have been schooling in ALS, I learned many things like interaction with other people. This habit made me build up my self – image more and saw myself as positively impacted by the lessons that I took in ALS program of DEPED” (P1, P4, P5,P12, P16)

This positive impact that the ALS program has embedded in the learners in Tanguib city is imminent based on their acquired self-value. Improving one’s self-image is critical in developing minds, especially those lifelong learners (Martin et al., 2017). According to Shaddad and Jember (2024), constant feedback can also be used as determinant in checking learners’ self-image. In educational settings, particularly for ALS learners, structured feedback and collaborative tasks help students recognize their strengths and areas for improvement in a constructive manner. This targeted feedback supports the development of a positive self-image, thereby enhancing self-esteem (Pintrich, 1990).

Theme 2: Sense of Achievement

The ALS program of DEPED is a free – remote learning experience among learners who have been out of school youth for quite some time. Through this program, learners are given a chance to be equipped with knowledge and skills that are the same of that formal education (Johnson, 2022). This has then allowed learners to establish a sense of achievement within themselves as champions of learning which makes them understand more about their environment. The sense of achievement is a subjective experience of success, accomplishment, and mastery. For learners, it is an essential motivational factor that drives persistence, resilience, and the pursuit of further educational and personal goals. In the context of ALS, a sense of achievement can be seen as a culmination of overcoming educational barriers, acquiring new skills, and gaining recognition for their efforts (Cagang, 2024). This theme has emerged based on the responses of the participants:

“I feel like I have achieved a milestone in my life because I thought I could not have the opportunity to learn again” (P3, P6, P8).

“It is a well-deserved achievement because getting access to education again through ALS is very meaningful and such an opportunity to behold” (P10, P7.)

The sense of achievement is a critical factor in boosting self-esteem, particularly in the context of learners in the Alternative Learning System (ALS). The ALS caters to individuals who, for various reasons, have not been able to complete formal education (UNICEF, 2022). These learners often face significant socio-economic challenges, and their experiences in the ALS can have profound impacts on their self-esteem and overall well-being.

B. Confidence

Theme 1. Enhancement of Interpersonal Skills

The development of ALS learners' confidence is always highlighted as one of the major outcomes of the program. Out of school learners often lose their chance of confidently expressing themselves due to the presence of invalidated stigma among peers. The role of interactive teaching methods is very crucial in developing ALS learners' confidence to enable them to understand and collaborate more with other people in their respective communities (Zins et al., 2019). Through this, enhancement of the learners' interpersonal skills is very evident as interactive learning experience provided by the ALS teachers can uncover the potentials of learners through, brainstorming activities, debates, role playing, among others.

"I am not shy anymore because we were taught to collaborate and interact with our classmates during our class sessions". "This enhances my capabilities interpersonally and made me a better person in our community" (P3, P5, P6, P7).

"Our role plays, and debate sessions are very helpful, because they enhanced my speaking skills". (P1, P14, P15, P16).

Effective interactive teaching is crucial in ALS settings where learners may have varying levels of prior education and differing needs. Developing interpersonal skills helps students articulate their thoughts, ask questions, and engage in meaningful discussions, fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment (Elias, 2019). Given that

students come from different backgrounds, the attainment of these skill sets is highly transformative.

Theme 2. Better Understanding of One's Self

The ultimate goal of education is to liberate the learners from ignorance and make them better citizens in their communities. ALS learners are students whom have skipped education for quite some time, and their concept of the world is vague (David et al., 2018). This halted individuals' perspective of the true essence of having access to education and that also affected individuals' understanding about themselves. The interventions made by ALS program of DEPED is truly transformative as it brings out students' ability to understand better of themselves. This is evident based on the observations of students' interactive behavior, good attitude, and self-bearing.

“I have better understanding of myself now”. I have learned that through education, I have the power to rewrite my future” (P2, P4, 11, P13)

“I am happy that I am able to connect myself now with other people and behave accordingly” (P, 8, P9, P10, 12)

Better understanding of one's self is attributed to high self-efficacy (SabzehAra et al., 2014). This characteristic was acquired by ALS learners upon enrolling in the LAS program of DEPED. Learning is non-negotiable in the context of education, and acquiring better understanding of one's self is relatively important among students in ALS in order for them to effectively interact in their respective communities (Tait, 2016).

C. Community Engagement

Theme 1. Active *Community* Participation

As ALS learning progresses in the network among out of school youth, the opportunity to extend civic services is carried out to empower students to become more engaged in the grassroots of the community (Llego, 2019). Civic engagement helps ALS students develop more self – reliance and interactive socialization among people in the community which in turn helps students cope up with fear, and anxieties.

“As ALS learners, we are happy that we get to immerse in our community, especially with particular programs like tree planting, clean up drive, and seminars” (P2, P5, P6, P11, P15)

“The learnings I got from studying in ALS is the spirit of volunteerism in my community. I volunteer whenever there are particular events such as clean up drive”. Helping other people in times of need is also emphasized as one of the core values in our classes” (P1, P7, P12, P13)

ALS learner’s active participation in their respective communities through civic volunteering greatly influences their capabilities in becoming fully aware of their role as citizens in their society (Pascual et al., 2022). Taking active roles in the community is essential for students to learn real life values that would help in shaping their future better. These values

are paramount in building up students' future perspectives in life which could probably affect their well-being in general (Gabule and Oco, 2023).

Theme 2. Learning About Leadership Values

Being a leader requires first-hand experience of the things that are happening at the grassroots level. As ALS program is grounded by the principle of educating students who have dropped out from school, the idea of learning model is highly transformative (Guiamalon et al., 2022). This is due to the fact that ALS learners are students who come from different backgrounds and with various stories in life. Leading them to the right path through education is an opportune time to reconsidering taking up space and acquire leadership values (Yousa, 2018).

“I have learned to take up space and help other people in times of need” (P3, P8, P10)

“Being an ALS learner is also a being a leader for my own self, especially that this education program is new to us and we cannot fully make it unless we stand for ourselves” (P4, P9, P12, P14, P16)

D. Literacy Development

Theme 1. Improvements of Reading and Writing Skills

One of the ultimate goals of ALS program is to cultivate a culture of literacy among students. Reading and writing are two basic skills that students should learn as basic

foundations in education (Smith, 2023). These skill sets are necessary to enable students to learn the basic knowledge and empower among themselves to become highly literate individuals. Improving the reading and writing abilities of students through ALS learning enhances their potentials of better expressing themselves, better understanding of their surroundings, and improved interactions among people in their communities (Holgado, 2019).

“I can read and write better now compared before. And aside from that, I also understand what I am reading and writing” (P3, P6, P7, P9, P11, P14, P15, P16).

Reading and writing skills are crucial for the academic success of Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners. Studies have shown that these skills are fundamental to better prepare students for college degree and even for employment. Reading is a vital cognitive process that helps learners comprehend and construct meanings from texts, leading to personal growth and success in various fields. It enhances cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal development, which is essential for academic achievement (Abid et al., 2019). For ALS learners, reading and writing skills are particularly important for college readiness. These skills help bridge the gap between the different pedagogical approaches of ALS programs and higher education, facilitating a smoother transition and better academic performance in higher education settings (Lim et al., 2017).

Theme 2. Development of Self-Independence

Being literate is crucial for every individual in understanding various concepts in the world. Literacy undermines the academic success of learners and is vital in shaping their mind (Malamon, 2020). In the context of ALS education, literacy plays a pivotal role in bringing out

the fullest potential of learners, enabling to them to learn higher order thinking skills that are useful in their day to day life. Literacy builds learners self – independence in a way that it makes them more active by participating in community activities, and offers them an autonomy to make life decisions (Brandt, 2020).

“I have learned to be independent, especially with regards to making decisions about myself when I enrolled in ALS program”. This is really helpful and vital in giving me directions to better my future” (P1, P2, P4, P5, P8, P10, P12, P13)

Self – independence is highly noted as useful element in the academic success of the learners. This trait is very useful in cultivating a productive landscape of learning among learners of ALS. The individual nature of self-independent learner emphasizes autonomy, choice, and self-actualization. Learners are viewed as autonomous and capable of smart decision-making, have a sense of responsibility to themselves and others, are inherently good-natured, have a desire to reach self-actualization, and have a unique and unlimited potential for growth (Elias & Merriam 1995; Morris, 2019).

Factors Affecting Students ALS Learning

Theme 1. Financial Support

Educational access through ALS program is truly essential and helpful in the development of students who cannot afford to attend formal education system. Financial support plays a critical role in the success and completion rates of learners in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Philippines. Many ALS learners come from disadvantaged

backgrounds, including unemployed or underemployed individuals, school dropouts, and domestic workers. These individuals often face significant financial barriers that can impede their ability to complete their education.

“Money is still very important even though attending ALS classes is free because we need to support the needs of our family. I have kids that needs to feed too. (P4, P9, P11)

“I need to do further research to the internet on some of our lessons that’s why I need money for internet connectivity” (P7, P10)

Although, the ALS education is offered as free for dropped out students, support for monetary allowance is still one of the most non-negotiable factors that could push forward the students to finish the program. Education is indeed an investment for life and acquiring such would still cost everyone a sufficient amount of money to finance projects, research activities, and other important academic tasks (Lusardi, 2019).

Theme 2. Students’ Intrinsic Motivation

Motivation is a qualitative aspect that is innate and unique from each learner. Engagement on activities that would stimulate the inherent satisfaction among ALS learners is very important component of developing intrinsic motivation which encompasses individuals’ stimulating interests, curiosity, and desire for mastery (Idulsa and Luzano, 2024). When learners are intrinsically motivated, they develop a passion for inquiry towards a more interactive learning (Bontemp, 2023).

“My internal desire to learn is sometimes halted because of complex things that are going on in my day to day life” (P1, P8)

“I really need motivation to pursue such ALS education because this drives me to really finish my studies” (P3, P5)

The role of intrinsic motivation in the development of students' learning is truly non-negotiable. In fact, the integration of motivation as part of teaching pedagogy is duly highlighted in the delivery of instruction (Arthur-Kelly et al., 2007). Brodin L. et al. (2019) found that intrinsic motivation was a significant predictor of academic engagement among non-traditional learners. The study highlighted that learners who pursued education for personal fulfillment rather than external rewards exhibited higher levels of engagement across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive domains.

Theme 3. Time Management

It is a known fact that ALS learners have multiple tasks in their respective community, and attending classes seemed uneasy. The concept of time management is very important in this case since it underscores the relative values of how ALS students handle themselves in this type of learning (Kumar and Aithal, 2019). Time management skills have been shown to have a positive impact on student learning and student outcomes (Kearns & Gardiner, 2007; Kelly, 2002; McKenzie, Gow, & Schweitzer, 2004) and Krause & Coates (2008) indicated that the ability for successfully managing their time is the benchmark of students in developing better study habits as well as strategies for success.

“I have lots of work to do and managing my time is crucial in finishing my studies”.
Aside from attending classes, I am also a working person. I do this to help my family so that I
can still continue my studies in ALS without compromising the financial needs of our family”
(P2, P6, P13, P14)

Time management is a critical factor in the academic success of learners in the Alternative Learning System (ALS). This is because ALS learners often face unique challenges that require effective time management to overcome. ALS learners often juggle various responsibilities, including work, family obligations, and education. According to Pacheco (2018), managing time efficiently is crucial for adult learners who must balance educational goals with personal and professional responsibilities. Moreover, Adam et al. (2017) found that students who practiced good time management skills had higher academic performance and greater satisfaction with their learning experience.

Conclusion

The role of alternative learning system in the face of Philippine educational landscape is very important and its implementation plays a pivotal role in the academic success of students who have dropped out of school before. In Tangub City division, the ALS program was seen as an effective measure to address education gap among out of school individuals. The implementation of the ALS program was seen to have impacted the students self- esteem, confidence, community engagement, and literacy and development positively as reflected in the generated themes of each variable. This further highlights that the educational quality that is taught through ALS is highly transformative and valuable in the academic pursuit of out of school learners. Despite its value and important effects, learners are still confronted with

challenges such as financial support, intrinsic motivation, and time management. These factors are critical points that may hinder the learning capacity of ALS learners. Moreover, studying the impacts of these factors to the academic performance of ALS learners can significantly uncover potential solutions to better understand the ever-changing dynamics of education. Acknowledging the important role that stakeholders play in the context of ALS learning is also one of the most important areas that needs to be explored to come up with realistic feedback, thus, improving the framework of ALS education in the future.

Plans for Dissemination and Advocacy

To support this study, we will start by setting clear goals and establish collaborations with the Tanguib City division, the local government unit, NGOs, and formal schools. Through this initiative, the significant results of this study will be packaged to the community of ALS learners through community extension programs and activities aims at promoting and/or supplementing the needs of the learners. This knowledge transfer initiative will be done through radio broadcasting programs, face-to-face remedial classes which will be advocated per Barangay to augment learning gaps and involve stakeholders such as the parents to also mediate and advocate the initiatives of the department of education. Finally, the results of the study will also be presented to a forum or research conference to benchmark other related studies and create network from other researchers. It is also an end goal of the proponents to publish the results of this study to contribute to the growing body of science.

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VII. Financial Report

Research Requirements	Materials/Description	Unit Cost/Price
Transportation	Going to the residence of the participants of the 8 districts of Tangub city	3,750.00
Representation	Snacks for each participant	2,400.00
TOTAL		6,150.00

