

Towards Inclusion and Equity: Exploring the Implementation of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Provisions for Learners with Disabilities

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Abstract: Education is fundamental to the development and progress of mankind. It has been instrumental in honing the brilliant minds of the people who became the pillars of society's never-ending journey to victory over ignorance. This paper explored the implementation of DepEd provisions for Learners with Disabilities (LWDs) in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the perspective of stakeholders. Employing a convergent parallel design of the mixed method research approach, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously from 141 stakeholders (102 for quantitative and 39 for qualitative) who voluntarily participated in the survey and interview. A researcher-made instruments were prepared that underwent validity and reliability process to ascertain credibility and accuracy of the data to be collected. Data analysis for both quantitative and qualitative phase were done using mean and standard deviation as well as thematic analysis. The study found that for the implementation status of the ALS for LWDs, the stakeholders rated it with "to a great extent" in all of the four components. Also, supporting ALS and SPED programs is vital for diverse learners' development and academic success. Additionally, internal stakeholders are instrumental in delivering personalized support and specialized training for students with disabilities in the ALS program, while external stakeholders aid by raising awareness, providing financial backing, and advocating for accessible resources and learning centers. Lastly, stakeholders acknowledge the ALS program as a valuable chance for Learners with Disabilities (LWDs), providing advantages like broader access, personal development, improved academic abilities, alternative routes to achievement, life skill development, personalized assistance, inclusive approaches, efficient teaching techniques, and enhanced educational experiences and results for disabled learners. The study concluded with a proposed management intervention program directed towards ALS program which aligns to the needs of LWDs.

Keywords— Inclusivity, Equity, Alternative Learning System (ALS), Learners with Disabilities (LWDs)

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is fundamental to human progress and a mandated right for all Filipinos under the Philippine Education for All (EFA) 2015 program, which aims to enhance access to quality basic education (Department of Education, 2013). Despite this mandate, certain individuals, particularly learners with disabilities, still experience a lack of access to this fundamental entitlement, making inclusivity and equitable educational opportunities crucial. The government and educators bear the responsibility of addressing the unique challenges faced by these learners. One key initiative is the Alternative Learning System (ALS), an innovative and adaptable approach designed to reach out-of-school learners (Republic Act 11510, 2018). However, the successful integration of students with disabilities into the ALS framework remains a complex challenge, and the compatibility of ALS with their distinct requirements demands thorough investigation (Romulo & Selle, 2023).

The Alternative Learning System is a parallel learning system that covers non-formal and informal education through modular, community-based, or school-based programs (Mercado, 2015). Republic Act 11510 (2018) aims to reduce

social, economic, and political inequalities by making education accessible to marginalized sectors, including learners with special needs, Indigenous peoples, and children in conflict with the law. The ALS curriculum integrates 21st-century skills alongside academic subjects (Romulo & Selle, 2023) and aligns with UNESCO's Education for All initiative (Department of Education, 2013). Personalized instruction is ideally delivered through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), which sets reasonable learning goals and specifies support services. Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether IEPs are consistently applied to learners with disabilities within ALS, exposing a gap between policy and classroom practice.

Despite legal provisions under the Implementing Rules and Regulations of RA 11510 (2021) requiring the Department of Education to hire competent ALS teachers and provide accessible learning resources, significant implementation challenges persist. Romulo and Selle (2023) found that community learning centers are often non-permanent, dilapidated, poorly ventilated, and multipurpose, with teachers reporting dissatisfaction over teaching materials, allowances, and facility conduciveness. These issues are even more critical for learners with disabilities, whose needs exceed those of regular ALS students. Meanwhile, the Philippine Health

Insurance Corp. estimates 5.1 million Filipino children live with disabilities, yet Department of Education (2022) data shows only 126,598 learners with special needs enrolled in School Year 2021-2022—a 65% drop from 360,879 in 2019-2020, highlighting a high but poorly understood dropout rate.

While existing studies have evaluated ALS across various populations—such as the Badjaos (Dayon et al., 2016), Indigenous peoples (Cucio et al., 2020), and ALS implementation in Isabela (Baccal & Ormilla, 2021)—no research has specifically focused on learners with disabilities within ALS programs in Bulacan and Pampanga public schools. Moreover, RA 11510 (2018) mandates a mandatory review and impact assessment (Section 19), yet a clear research gap persists in Bulacan (Romulo, 2023). This study therefore aims to conduct a phenomenological inquiry into the lived experiences of learners with disabilities within the ALS framework in Bulacan's public schools. By examining the practical implications, challenges, and opportunities, this research endeavors to inform inclusive education policies and guide educators and advocates toward a more equitable educational environment where every learner, regardless of unique needs, can flourish.

2. RELATED WORKS

The provisions for learners with disabilities (LWDs) within the Alternative Learning System (ALS) are anchored on key policies and funding mechanisms. According to the Policy Guidelines on the Provision of Educational Programs and Services for Learners with Disabilities in the K to 12 Basic Education Program (Department of Education [DepEd], 2021), LWDs are entitled to appropriate interventions through the ALS Basic Literacy Program (BLP) and the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Program. Complementing this policy, the 2024 General Appropriations Act (Republic Act No. 11975) allocated at least ₱632.48 million for ALS implementation, covering transportation, teaching aid allowances, and learning resources (Senate of the Philippines, 2023). Furthermore, ₱56 million was designated for constructing community learning centers (CLCs) as mandated by Republic Act No. 11510 (Alternative Learning System Act, 2018), while ₱100 million was set aside for instructional materials, including those for LWDs. Senator Gatchalian emphasized that these provisions align with Republic Act No. 11650 (Inclusive Education Act), which mandates equitable access to quality education for every learner with a disability (Senate of the Philippines, 2023). Collectively, these legal and fiscal measures underscore the government's commitment to inclusive education.

The inclusivity of the ALS program is further supported by its alignment with global and local frameworks. Specifically, ALS responds to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms education as a right for all (United Nations, 1948), and the Education for All (EFA) 2015 Philippine Plan of Action, which aims to reduce illiteracy (DepEd, 2019). In practice, ALS serves diverse learners, including single mothers, youthful offenders, and persons with

disabilities (Romulo, 2023). For instance, Dayon et al. (2016) found that Badjao ALS completers gained self-confidence and improved socio-economic conditions. Similarly, Mangompit (2023) reported that ALS enhanced his self-image and made him a productive citizen. However, despite these successes, challenges persist. Gamboa (2023) noted that ALS enrollment remains below 10% of out-of-school youth, and the World Bank (2018) reported that only 30% of enrollees pass the A&E exam. In addition, UNICEF (2020) identified financial issues, lack of parental guidance, and weak motivation as key barriers to completion. Consequently, researchers such as Pascual et al. (2020) emphasized that ALS graduates overcome these obstacles through resilience, time management, and support systems, ultimately viewing education as a path to personal growth. On the other hand, Jimenez, (2021) revealed the mental health impact and stress level of teachers in developing learning resource materials.

The adaptability of the ALS curriculum and the creation of a supportive environment are critical for LWDs. April (2020) highlighted deficiencies in stakeholder support, including shortages of instructional materials and facilities. Nevertheless, ALS allows for curriculum modifications such as converting text to braille or using captioned multimedia for learners with hearing impairments (Lai, 2020). Moreover, Begawan (2020) stressed the importance of developing life skills alongside academics to improve learners' quality of life. Complementing this, Apao et al. (2014) found that ALS effectively delivers life skills training, leading to increased literacy and employment outcomes. In terms of environment, Chidindi (as cited in Joseph, n.d.) argued that enabling environments must be created in schools with well-prepared teachers. Similarly, Hoppe (2018) underscored the significance of a supportive home environment during the transition from school to community. Thompson (n.d.) added that student life should integrate educational, recreational, and social experiences. Together, these studies suggest that both curricular adaptability and environmental support are essential for LWDs to thrive in ALS.

Finally, ALS challenges discriminatory practices and promotes social justice, yet research gaps remain. The World Bank (2018) described ALS as a "second chance" program that builds human capital for out-of-school youth and adults. However, Pincay (2020) reported challenges such as shortages of community-based materials and delayed reimbursements for mobile teachers. Despite these difficulties, Anwar (2020) noted that dedicated teachers enabled high pass rates even under resource constraints. In terms of collaborative efforts, DepEd and UNICEF (2020) highlighted six key areas: quality enhancement, second-chance education, equity, innovation, and positive outcomes. Nevertheless, existing studies—such as those by Pascual et al. (2020), Caingkoy et al. (2021), and Valeza et al. (2017)—have largely focused on general ALS learners, not specifically on LWDs. Similarly, international research by Pirani et al. (2008) examined accessibility issues in learning management systems for disabled learners, but Philippine-specific studies remain scarce. Notably, no study

has focused on LWDs in ALS programs in Bulacan and Pampanga. Therefore, this research aims to fill that gap by exploring the lived experiences of LWDs within ALS, guided by insights from stakeholder engagement (Fraser, 2024; Rochovská et al., 2024) and intervention program effectiveness (Baloloy et al., 2023; Graham, 2021; Padeliaadu et al., 2021).

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aimed to explore implementation of DepEd provisions for learners with disabilities (LWDs) in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) from the perspective of the stakeholders.

Specifically, it aimed to seek answers to the following questions.

1. How may the implementation status of ALS for LWDs be explored in terms of teacher readiness, educational qualification, and training, school facilities and equipment, instructional supplies and materials, and program support fund?

2. What are the perceptions of teachers and parents of learners with disabilities on the challenges they encountered in the ALS Program?

3. How do internal and external stakeholders provide support to Learners with disabilities under the ALS program?

4. What opportunities and benefits of the ALS program for LWDs may be identified by different stakeholders?

5. What management intervention program may be proposed for the Alternative Learning System program to be aligned with the needs of learners with disabilities?

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Design

The study used a convergent parallel design which is a mixed methods research approach where both qualitative and quantitative data are collected simultaneously (Asio, 2021). These two types of data are analyzed separately, and then their findings are compared or merged during the interpretation phase. In other words, the researcher took both qualitative and quantitative data, analyzed them independently, and then integrated the results to draw comprehensive conclusions. This design ensured that both types of data received equal weight in the overall analysis. An example of a concurrent mixed method design is the study by Rosenkranz, Wang, and Hu (2015), which aimed to explore, identify, and explain what motivates and demotivates medical students to do research. The study used a convergent parallel mixed methods study where quantitative data were collected via a survey, and qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed separately, and the results were compared and merged.

This design involved two types of Data Collection, Quantitative and Qualitative data collection. For the

Quantitative Data, the researcher collected numerical data through a survey method related to the implementation of provisions for LWDs in ALS. This could include statistics on enrollment, participation rates, and outcomes for LWDs.

For Qualitative Data, the researcher conducted interviews, focus groups, or surveys with stakeholders (such as LWDs, teachers, administrators, and parents) to explore their experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding inclusivity and equity in ALS.

Moreover, the convergent parallel design allowed the researcher to leverage the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, enhancing the depth and breadth of the research.

This study aimed to evaluate the implementation of the provisions of the ALS Program and make them aligned with the needs of LWDs by examining the ALS implementation in the selected locales of the study. In this light, the researcher deemed the convergent parallel research design as the most appropriate for this study. It surveyed to quantify and describe the current state of ALS provisions for LWDs and conduct interviews to further understand the trends and state of the ALS implementation.

4.2. Participants

In this mixed-methods research design, two distinct sampling methods were employed sequentially to address the research questions. For the quantitative phase, total population sampling was applied since the number of participants is less than a hundred, the total population will be sampled. In this case, a total of 102 respondents (30 teachers, 6 school administrators, 6 district supervisors) were included in the study. Consequently, all individuals within each stratum were invited to answer survey questionnaires as the first phase of data collection. Building upon these quantitative findings, the qualitative phase employed purposeful sampling to elicit deeper explanations of participants' experiences, perceptions, and insights. Using the criteria of: the informant nominated himself/herself to participate in phase two at the end of the survey questionnaire in phase 1; the informant should at least has/have a child/children studying in public school, have at least 1-year teaching experience, have managed a school for at least 3 years, and a PSDS for at least 3 years; the informant identified the challenges of teaching LWDs under ALS that he/she faces in the profession as "critical challenges;". Also, determined the importance of support to provide opportunities and benefits by the different stakeholders for LWDs under ALS; and the informant must have highly evident support for LWDs under ALS program.

The participants for the present study were chosen by the researcher with the help of the dissertation adviser to ensure that the participants fit the selection criteria. Furthermore, the researcher clarified to the respondents that they have the right to withdraw from the research procedure at any time. The participants who are PWDs were given the necessary intervention following the Research Ethics Committee

recommendation to ensure inclusivity in the present study. The participants of the study were also treated with the utmost confidentiality in adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act 10173) by using pseudo-names.

4.3. Instrument

Two researcher-made instruments were used in this study. For Phase 1, the quantitative stage, a 40-item, five-point Likert scale was used. The survey questionnaire was divided into two parts. The demographic profile and the items on the ALS implementation consist of 40 statements. For the demographic profile, the role of the respondents was elicited, the years of experience, educational qualification, and the level of ALS being engaged in. The second part consists of four dimensions such as teacher readiness, educational qualifications, and training; availability and adequacy of school facilities; sufficiency and appropriateness of instructional materials; and allocation and utilization of program support funds. Each dimension is composed of 10 statements, for a total of 40 items.

The first instrument was validated by experts, such as a Policy Maker from the DepEd, a Research Expert, and an ALS Education Supervisor (EPS-A). Several changes were made to improve the validity and reliability of the instrument. After revision, results show that the value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.991. This is extremely high value, suggesting that the 40 items have excellent internal consistency.

The second research instrument was the researcher-made semi-structured interview schedule. The questions centered on the ALS program in their respective locales. Open-ended questions were clustered under four major points. The instrument was also validated by experts. The challenges faced by participants in accessing and participating in the ALS program; the support provided by EPS in charge of ALS and SPED; perceived opportunities and benefits of the ALS program for LWDs; and suggestions for enhancing ALS provisions aligned with LWDs' needs.

4.4. Data Analysis

There were three types of data processing and analysis for this study as this used a convergent parallel mixed-methods design: the data analysis, the integration phase, and the interpretation phase.

4.5. Data Gathering

For the quantitative phase, data was analyzed using statistical analysis such as mean and standard deviation, while for the interview phase, thematic analysis was used. The model used for qualitative analysis is by Braun and Clark (2006).

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It is a foundational method for qualitative analysis that can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches.

In this 2nd phase of data gathering, data from both quantitative and qualitative strands were analyzed separately and then integrated during the interpretation phase to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ALS Program for LWDs. Triangulation of findings was used to validate and corroborate results across different data sources and methods.

In this 3rd and final phase, the researcher synthesized the results to provide a holistic understanding of the data collected. Discussion was done on the implications for policy, practice, and future research. Areas to be highlighted were areas where the implementations of provisions for LWDs are effective and where improvements are needed. The researcher also emphasized the importance of inclusivity and equity in ALS and proposed recommendations based on the combined evidence.

5. RESULTS

The results were presented based on sequence and order of the questions raised:

Problem 1: How may the implementation status of ALS for LWDs be explored in terms of teacher readiness, educational qualification, and training, school facilities and equipment, instructional supplies and materials, and program support fund?

Based on the respondents, the implementation status of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) for Learners with Disabilities (LWDs) was assessed by the respondents as being evident to a great extent across all four examined dimensions. Specifically, in terms of teacher readiness, educational qualification, and training, the majority of items received very high mean responses, yielding an overall remark of "to a great extent." Similarly, school facilities and equipment were also rated consistently high scores, resulting in the same positive assessment. In parallel, instructional supplies and materials garnered nearly identical responses from most participants, again reflecting a "to a great extent" evaluation. Finally, regarding program support funds, the majority of respondents likewise assigned high scores, leading to an overall rating of "to a great extent" for this aspect as well. Taken together, these findings indicate that respondents perceive ALS implementation for LWDs as being substantially present across teacher-related, infrastructural, material, and financial dimensions.

Problem 2: What are the perceptions of teachers and parents of learners with disabilities on the challenges they encountered in the ALS Program?

Supporting the Alternative Learning System (ALS) and Special Education (SPED) programs is crucial for the overall development and academic achievement of diverse learners. Tailored support systems encompassing personalized guidance, resource provision, program effectiveness, and infrastructure readiness are vital for fostering an inclusive

learning environment. Continuous training and professional development are essential for educators to effectively address the unique needs of ALS and SPED students. The ALS program has shown a positive impact by offering alternative educational paths to individuals struggling in traditional settings. Still, the lack of ALS opportunities in mainstream schools underscores the necessity for more adaptive educational strategies. To improve ALS accessibility, efforts should concentrate on raising awareness, expanding program availability, allocating resources, and building community partnerships. Tailoring teaching methods to suit the varied learning styles and requirements of ALS learners is essential for optimizing educational outcomes and ensuring student success in the ALS program.

Problem 3: How do internal and external stakeholders provide support to Learners with disabilities under the ALS program?

Internal stakeholders play a key role in providing tailored support and specialized training for learners with disabilities under the ALS program. External stakeholders contribute by increasing awareness, offering financial support, and advocating for accessible resources and learning centers. Together, these stakeholders work to enhance access, overcome barriers, and create inclusive opportunities for diverse learners within the ALS program.

Problem 4: What opportunities and benefits of the ALS program for LWDs may be identified by different stakeholders?

Stakeholders recognize the ALS program as a valuable opportunity for LWDs, offering benefits such as increased access, personal growth, enhanced academic skills, alternative pathways to success, development of life skills, tailored support, inclusive strategies, effective teaching methods, and improved educational experiences and outcomes for learners with disabilities.

Problem 5: What management intervention program may be proposed for the Alternative Learning System program to be aligned with the needs of learners with disabilities?

A Management Intervention Program (MIP) for Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners with disabilities (LWDs) is designed to provide tailored support that addresses both academic and non-academic needs, ensuring equal opportunities for success. Such a program typically focuses on several key areas: individualized learning plans, resource allocation, staff training, and collaboration among stakeholders.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings collectively indicate that the Alternative Learning System (ALS) program is generally well-

implemented, particularly in terms of teacher readiness, instructional materials, and fund utilization. Quantitative results show that stakeholders rated these areas “to a great extent.” Teachers are perceived as competent, well-trained, and supported through professional development and mentoring. Instructional materials are sufficient, culturally inclusive, and learner-centered. This is supported by the past paper of Jimenez (2020a) where teachers revealed their motivation in developing supplementary learning materials. Program support funds are viewed as transparent, efficiently utilized, and aligned with program priorities.

However, moderate ratings in certain areas—such as the sufficiency of facilities to accommodate all learners, availability of educational technology, stakeholder involvement in fund decisions, and accessibility for learners with disabilities (LWDs)—point to persistent gaps. Qualitative findings enrich these results by revealing barriers faced by ALS learners, including financial constraints, work-life balance struggles (Asio & Jimenez, 2021), lack of childcare, limited access to resources, and emotional stress (Jimenez, 2020b). Learners also reported challenges with understanding lessons, completing modules, and receiving adequate teacher explanation which needs remediation activities later on (Asio & Jimenez, 2020).

Despite these barriers, the qualitative data highlight transformative impacts of ALS: empowerment, confidence building, re-engagement in education, and acquisition of life and entrepreneurial skills. The support from the Public Schools District Supervisor (PSDS) is largely seen as effective, though facility deficiencies and the absence of dedicated SPED classes remain concerns. This finding coincides with the previous paper of De Castro and Jimenez (2022) where the influence of school heads’ attributes and leadership skills is an essential factor.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings underscores four emerging themes: Educational Leadership (teacher readiness + PSDS support); Inclusive Infrastructure (facilities + accessibility for LWDs); Optimized Educational Resources (instructional materials + adapted teaching methods); and Strategic Resource Management (fund allocation + SPED/ALS interventions)

Thus, while ALS is functional and impactful, systematic improvements in infrastructure, specialized training, and stakeholder collaboration are necessary to make it truly inclusive and equitable.

7. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the ALS program for Learners with Disabilities (LWDs) is largely implemented, with strong performance in teacher readiness, educational qualifications, training, instructional materials, and program fund management. However, the program still faces significant challenges related to facility adequacy, technological resources, stakeholder involvement in financial decisions, and accessibility for learners with disabilities. These challenges create barriers that disproportionately affect LWDs, older

learners, and those balancing work and family responsibilities.

Inclusive education theory and constructivism support the finding that disabilities are often a function of environmental and systemic gaps, not learner deficits. Behavioral learning theory further explains how LWDs learn through interaction with their environment. The ALS program serves as a vital second-chance pathway, but without targeted management interventions—such as specialized teacher training, inclusive facilities, adapted materials, and strategic resource allocation, the program risks perpetuating inequities. Therefore, a management intervention program aligned with the specific needs of LWDs is both justified and urgently needed.

8. RECOMMENDATION

Given the variability in teachers' understanding of the foundational policy document, the DepEd may increase funding allocation for ALS, especially for facilities, educational technology, and specialized SPED support; institutionalize periodic curriculum enhancement and review to ensure learning experiences increase learner knowledge and 21st-century skills; develop a functional staff development program for ALS implementers to improve competence and productivity; and ensure equitable distribution of resources between urban and rural ALS programs, addressing gaps in infrastructure and technology. Meanwhile, the district offices should continue mentoring and supporting school leaders and teachers in the ALS program, focusing on recent policies and pedagogical approaches for diverse learners, including LWDs. School heads or principals should continuously coordinate with Local Government Units (LGUs) and stakeholders, and submit infrastructure requests to DepEd to accommodate the increasing number of ALS learners., arrange ALS and Community Learning Center (CLC) facilities for proper and appropriate utilization as teaching-learning hubs with sufficient materials and resources, and report ALS program accomplishments to stakeholders to disseminate critical information and garner support for school programs, projects, and activities.

Further, stakeholders and local government units may provide supplementary funding and support for ALS, particularly for LWDs, including childcare, transportation, and financial assistance to reduce barriers; and participate actively in decision-making processes regarding ALS fund utilization to enhance transparency and responsiveness.

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