

# Stories of Struggle and Strength Among On-Field Alternative Learning System (ALS) Teachers: A Phenomenological Exploration

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## ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of on-field Alternative Learning System (ALS) teachers in delivering education to diverse groups of out-of-school youth and adult learners. Guided by Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the study examines the challenges teachers face in implementing flexible and non-traditional instruction. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six ALS teachers. Findings revealed three main themes: managing learners with different needs and inconsistent participation, dealing with limited and outdated teaching materials, and addressing gaps in

students' basic skills. Teachers also reported low confidence in teaching due to a lack of proper training, often relying on trial- and-error methods and self-directed learning to improve their practice. Despite these challenges, ALS teachers showed resilience by using flexible teaching strategies and building strong relationships with their students to support motivation and learning. The study highlights the need for better training programs focused on ALS, as well as continuous institutional support to improve teaching quality and student outcomes. The findings provide a clearer understanding of the realities faced by ALS teachers and serve as a basis for improving teacher preparation, resource allocation, and support systems. Overall, the study promotes more inclusive and responsive education for learners who are often left behind.

**Keywords** *Alternative Learning System, teacher training, non-traditional learners, differentiated instruction, phenomenological study*

## INTRODUCTION

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) plays an essential role in the Philippines' efforts to provide flexible education opportunities to out-of-school youth and adults. By offering alternative pathways to education, ALS targets individuals who, for various reasons, are unable to participate in the formal schooling system. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), approximately 3.6 million Filipinos are out-of-school youth and adults, many of whom are seeking alternative educational solutions to improve their lives (PSA, 2020). The Department of Education's (DepEd) ALS program aims to address these gaps by offering educational opportunities that can accommodate learners who face barriers such as distance, family responsibilities, or work schedules. However, the

success of the ALS program is contingent upon the ability of its teachers to meet the diverse needs of these learners. establishment of the ALS program within the Department of Education (DepEd).

Additionally, Republic Act No. 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, further strengthens the system by ensuring that ALS learners have the same opportunities for quality education and recognition of their achievements (Congress of the Philippines, 2001; Republic of the Philippines, 2013). Complementing these laws, Republic Act No. 11510, or the Alternative Learning System Act of 2020, institutionalizes the ALS as a permanent program within the basic education system. It mandates the creation of a flexible learning system that addresses the needs of out-of-school youth and adult learners, ensures funding and development support, and defines the roles of ALS implementers (Republic of the Philippines, 2020). The legal framework also supports the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Program, which allows ALS graduates to take assessments equivalent to formal education levels. These legal provisions ensure that ALS remains a legitimate and vital alternative to formal schooling, helping provide educational access to those who need it the most.

In Tacloban City, Sto. Niño Senior High School stands as the only school offering the ALS program at the Senior High School level. This makes Sto. Niño Senior High School a unique educational institution in the city, as it is the only stand-alone Senior High School dedicated to providing the ALS program to students in grades 11 and 12. Currently, there are 64 students enrolled in Grade 11 and 31 students in Grade 12 under the ALS program at Sto. Niño Senior High School in the School Year 2024-2025 (DepEd, 2024). These students, who often face significant life challenges such as being working adults, parents, or older learners, rely on the ALS program to complete their secondary education.

The school's ALS program, however, faces challenges in its implementation, particularly due to the lack of formal training for the teachers who are tasked with meeting the unique needs of these learners. Many teachers in the ALS program do not possess formal training in the methodologies and pedagogies necessary to effectively teach a non-traditional student population. This lack of formal preparation and ongoing professional development contributes to the challenges they encounter in meeting the needs of their diverse students (Lora, 2021). Related literatures highlight the difficulties faced by ALS teachers, particularly in addressing the varied needs of their learners. According to Manalo and Mirasol (2019), ALS teachers often lack adequate training in pedagogical approaches for adult learners, which can lead to ineffective teaching and poor learning outcomes. Bautista (2018) also found that teachers struggle with the complexity of using the Alternative Delivery Modality (ADM), which typically involves independent study through modules and limited face-to-face interactions. This modality poses challenges for both teachers and students, especially when teachers are unprepared to guide students who may have varying levels of literacy, learning abilities, and educational backgrounds.

A major concern, especially in light of the K to 12 curriculum and its competency-based requirements, is that teachers are not sufficiently trained to implement these standards effectively in the ALS setting. The K to 12 curriculum aims to improve the quality of education across all learning areas, yet teachers without proper preparation are often unable to address the specific needs of ALS students. Studies by Agustin (2020) and Dela Cruz (2022) note that this lack of training leads to a mismatch between the needs of students and the capabilities of teachers, ultimately hindering student achievement and the success of the program. In the context of effective teaching and learning, the Social Constructivist Theory by Lev Vygotsky emphasizes that learning is most effective when teachers possess not only content knowledge but also pedagogical strategies that are responsive to the learner's developmental stage and context (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's theory highlights the importance of teachers' scaffolding techniques—providing support that allows learners to advance beyond their current abilities. However, without proper training, ALS teachers in Tacloban City may struggle to provide the necessary support for students, particularly those who face challenges like

limited prior schooling, literacy issues, or language barriers.

Furthermore, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) underscores the critical role of teacher self-efficacy in influencing teaching effectiveness. Teachers who feel inadequately prepared may lack confidence in their ability to manage classrooms and engage students effectively. This perception of low self-efficacy can lead to lower instructional quality and diminished student engagement, resulting in poor learning outcomes. In light of these theoretical frameworks, the need for adequate teacher training in ALS becomes even more apparent. Research on teacher training consistently shows that effective teacher preparation is integral to achieving educational success, particularly in non-traditional learning environments like ALS. According to Melnick and Meister (2008), teachers who undergo comprehensive training and professional development programs are more likely to be successful in the classroom and achieve better student outcomes.

In contrast, teachers without adequate training may struggle to implement best practices and respond to the diverse learning needs of their students, leading to disengagement and higher dropout rates. This aligns with findings by Lora (2021), who suggested that ongoing professional development is crucial for ALS teachers to effectively handle the unique demands of their students. In Tacloban City, where ALS enrollment continues to rise, and the diversity of the student population becomes more complex, the lack of formal teacher preparation poses a significant barrier to the success of the program. As the DepEd (2020) ALS progress report indicates, only 30% of ALS learners consistently meet the K to 12 competency standards, with teacher training gaps being one of the primary contributors to this low success rate.

Thus, improving teacher preparation through structured professional development and training programs is essential to enhance the quality of the ALS program and better serve the needs of its learners. This study unveiled the struggles of on-field ALS teachers in Tacloban City, specifically focusing on how their lack of formal training affected their teaching effectiveness and the outcomes of the program. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the primary challenges encountered by on-field ALS teachers in Tacloban City in their day-to-day teaching practices?
2. How do ALS teachers in Tacloban City perceive the impact of their lack of proper training on their teaching effectiveness and ability to engage students?
3. What strategies do teachers employ to address the diverse needs of students in the ALS program in Tacloban City?

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study used a qualitative research approach employing a transcendental phenomenological design under the descriptivist paradigm. The descriptivist paradigm viewed reality as socially constructed and understood through the meanings individuals attached to their lived experiences. Transcendental phenomenology, grounded in the works of Edmund Husserl and further developed by Moustakas (1994), focused on describing the essence of a phenomenon through the participants lived experiences while setting aside the researcher's preconceptions through epoche or bracketing. Unlike hermeneutic phenomenology, which involved interpretation, this design emphasized descriptive clarity and reduction of bias to capture the pure experiences of the participants. Guided by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2013), this approach was appropriate for exploring and describing the lived experiences of ALS teachers in depth and with fidelity to their perspectives.

### **Research Locale**

This study was conducted at Sto. Niño Senior High School in Tacloban City, Eastern Visayas, Philippines. The school is a stand-alone senior high school and the only institution in the city that offered the Alternative Learning System (ALS) program at the senior high school level (DepEd, 2024). It served a diverse group of learners, including working adults, parents, and older students who required flexible learning arrangements. The ALS program was implemented through the Alternative Delivery Modality (ADM), which involved weekly sessions and the use of modules as the primary instructional material (DepEd, 2020). This setting provided a relevant context for examining the lived experiences of on-field ALS teachers, particularly in relation to their teaching roles, limited resources, and lack of formal training in ALS instruction (Lora, 2021).

### **Participants of the Study**

The participants of this study consisted of six (6) on-field teachers assigned to the Alternative Learning System (ALS) program at Sto. Niño Senior High School in Tacloban City (Creswell, 2013). These teachers were directly involved in delivering instruction to ALS learners under the Alternative Delivery Modality (ADM) using modular learning materials. They handled both Grade 11 and Grade 12 ALS learners and came from various senior high school subject areas, including Core, Applied, and Specialized subjects. The participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that only individuals with direct and relevant experience in ALS teaching were included (Patton, 2015). The inclusion criteria required that participants were actively teaching in the ALS program, had experience handling ALS learners in either Grade 11 or Grade 12, and were directly involved in module-based or alternative delivery instruction. Teachers who were not assigned to ALS or had no direct teaching responsibilities in the program were excluded from the study. The selection of participants with varying years of teaching experience and different subject specializations provided a range of perspectives on the challenges and strategies involved in ALS implementation. This ensured that the study gathered rich and relevant data on the lived experiences of ALS teachers in the program.

### **Research Instrument**

This study used semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection instrument to explore the lived experiences of on-field ALS teachers at Sto. Niño Senior High School in Tacloban City. The instrument was guided by an interview protocol with open-ended questions, allowing participants to freely share their experiences, perceptions, and strategies. The interview guide underwent content and language validation following the Interview Protocol Refinement (IPR) framework of Castillo-Montoya (2016) to ensure clarity, appropriateness, and alignment with the research objectives.

### **Data Gathering**

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure that only ALS teachers with direct experience in the program at Sto. Niño Senior High School were included (Patton, 2015). The researcher coordinated with the school administration in identifying qualified participants who met the inclusion criteria, including varying years of teaching experience in ALS. An informed consent process was conducted prior to data collection, in which participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time, following ethical research standards (Creswell, 2013). Consent forms were secured before the interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted based on an interview guide with open-ended questions, allowing participants to freely express their experiences, challenges, and coping strategies. Interviews were scheduled according to the availability of the teachers and were conducted during non-teaching hours in a private and quiet setting within the school to ensure comfort and openness (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with permission, then

transcribed verbatim for analysis. To strengthen the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied by cross-checking interview data with relevant school documents related to ALS implementation, such as program guidelines and available records, consistent with qualitative research practices (Denzin, 1978). The entire data gathering process followed systematic qualitative procedures to ensure rich, credible, and reliable data aligned with the research objectives.

### **Data Analysis**

The data in this study were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework of Clarke and Braun (2006). This method was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews with on-field ALS teachers. The analysis began with transcription of the recorded interviews, followed by repeated reading of the data to ensure familiarity. Initial codes were then generated by identifying meaningful segments of the participants' responses. These codes were organized and examined to search for emerging themes related to the research questions. The potential themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure consistency and relevance to the data set. After refinement, the themes were clearly defined and named to accurately represent the lived experiences of the participants. Finally, the findings were written up in a coherent narrative that reflected the identified themes. This process followed the systematic steps of thematic analysis, allowing for a clear and detailed interpretation of ALS teachers' experiences within their educational context (Clarke & Braun, 2006).

### **Ethical Consideration**

In this study, ethical considerations were strictly observed to ensure the rights, dignity, and welfare of the participants were protected throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, ensuring that they voluntarily agreed to participate with full understanding of the study (Creswell, 2013). Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by protecting participants' identities and securely handling all data gathered (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The researcher also practiced reflexivity and bracketing to minimize personal bias and ensure that findings were based on participants' actual experiences (Moustakas, 1994). An audit trail was maintained to document all research decisions and procedures for transparency and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These ethical measures ensured that the study was conducted with integrity and that the participants felt safe, respected, and valued throughout the process.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Primary Challenges Encountered by On-Field ALS Teachers in Tacloban City in Their Day- To-Day Teaching Practices**

Through the analysis of the participants' responses, three major themes emerged: (1) Managing diverse learners with inconsistent engagement, (2) Teaching with limited and outdated resources, and (3) Adapting instruction to foundational learning gaps. These themes were supported by the voices of ALS teachers who have experienced firsthand the complex realities of implementing the ALS program on the ground.

#### ***Theme 1: Managing Diverse Learners with Inconsistent Engagement***

The first theme captures the reality of handling a highly heterogeneous group of learners with varied educational backgrounds, life experiences, and learning capacities. The ALS program, designed to serve out-of-school youth and adults, naturally brings together individuals with a wide range of competencies and motivations. As Participant A (P1, L29-36) expressed "They come from different backgrounds, some haven't been in school for years, and others have responsibilities at home or work. It's hard to keep them all engaged and progressing at the same pace." Participant D (P4, L32-39) added "Some of them have been

out of school for years, so their skills vary a lot... It really pushes me to go back to basics.” This theme aligns with the assertion of Bautista (2018) that ALS learners are non-traditional and present various learning needs that require differentiated instruction. It also echoes Vygotsky’s Social Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes the need for scaffolding to support learners at varying levels of development. Without a homogeneous baseline, ALS teachers must constantly assess and adjust to the individual pace of each student, a task made even more challenging by inconsistent attendance.

### ***Theme 2: Teaching with Limited and Outdated Resources***

Another pressing concern expressed by the respondents was the inadequacy of learning materials. Participants reported a heavy reliance on outdated modules, insufficient instructional tools, and even personal financial expenditures to fill the gaps. Participant B (P2, L21-27) noted “The support is there, but it’s not always enough. The school tries to help, but materials are limited... sometimes I use my own money.” Participant D (P4, L45-51) reinforced this by saying “There’s also the lack of materials—many modules are not updated or suited for the learners’ context.” These findings are consistent with the literature by Manalo and Mirasol (2019) and Lora (2021), who emphasized the lack of proper support and resources for ALS teachers. The Alternative Learning System Act of 2020 (RA 11510) aims to institutionalize and fund ALS, but the realities in Tacloban show that implementation gaps still exist. Without current and contextualized materials, teachers are hindered in delivering quality and relevant instruction.

### ***Theme 3: Adapting Instruction to Foundational Learning Gaps***

Participants also expressed that the academic starting point of many ALS learners is significantly behind grade-level standards. Teachers often have to abandon planned lessons to reteach basic skills in literacy and comprehension. Participant F (P6, L40-45) shared “I had to stop the lesson and go back to basic comprehension, which wasn’t in the plan but was clearly needed.” Meanwhile, participant E (P5, L32-38) emphasized “You can’t expect them to grasp Grade 11 concepts right away. You have to start from the basics and move slowly.” According to Agustin (2020), the lack of ALS teacher training results in a gap between curriculum expectations and teaching capacity. The challenge of foundational gaps among learners highlights the disconnect between K to 12 competencies and the reality of ALS classrooms. Furthermore, as Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory outlines, teacher self-efficacy greatly influences teaching quality. Without sufficient training to address these academic gaps, teacher confidence—and subsequently, learner success—is compromised. Overall, the themes presented underscore the urgent need for targeted professional development, contextualized learning resources, and institutional support. The findings support the literature that ALS teachers must possess not only content knowledge but also adaptive strategies to navigate diverse learner needs (Liu & Lin, 2020). Additionally, these challenges illustrate why structured, ongoing training tailored to ALS is vital, as emphasized by Santiago and Cruz (2020), who found that specialized training significantly improved teacher performance and student retention. The voices of the teachers in this study serve as a powerful reminder that while the ALS program offers opportunity and hope, its success depends largely on the competence and capacity of its implementers. Addressing the challenges identified here is key to strengthening the system and fulfilling its promise of inclusive education.

## **ALS Teachers’ Perceptions on the Impact of Inadequate Training on Their Teaching Effectiveness and Student Engagement**

The results of this study reveal critical insights into how ALS teachers in Tacloban City perceive the impact of their lack of formal training on their teaching effectiveness and student engagement. The findings illustrate that while ALS teachers are committed and resourceful, they face significant barriers in instructional confidence, professional preparedness, and learner support due to insufficient training. This section discusses three key themes that emerged from the participants’ responses: (1) Teaching through

trial-and-error due to limited training, (2) Reduced confidence and uncertainty in instructional delivery, and (3) Compensating through independent professional development. These findings are examined in light of relevant theoretical and empirical literature to better understand their implications for ALS implementation.

### ***Theme 1: Teaching through Trial-and-Error due to Limited Training***

The first theme reflects the reality that many ALS teachers are navigating their teaching responsibilities through experiential learning rather than structured training. Participants noted that while they had attended general seminars, these were not tailored to the unique needs of ALS learners. As a result, most of their teaching practices were developed through personal experience, informal collaboration, and self-exploration. Participant B (P2, L61-67) shared, “I had a few seminars and trainings, but they were general... many things I learned through experience—by trial and error,” while Participant E (P5, L78-83) stated, “There was no formal training. Everything I know, I learned through experience.” This approach, while adaptive, suggests a significant gap in professional preparation. The findings resonate with those of Manalo and Mirasol (2019), who pointed out that ALS teachers often lack specialized training in adult pedagogy, making them ill-equipped to address learners' diverse educational backgrounds. Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory (1978) also underscores the necessity of scaffolding in learning—something that requires a foundational understanding of both pedagogy and student development, which teachers are unable to consistently apply without adequate training

### ***Theme 2: Reduced Confidence and Uncertainty in Instructional Delivery***

Another major theme is the diminished confidence and persistent uncertainty experienced by teachers due to their insufficient training. Several participants conveyed feelings of doubt about whether their instructional strategies were effective and appropriate for their learners. Participant F (P6, L82-88) admitted, “It really affects my confidence. I sometimes wonder if I'm doing it right or if I'm missing important strategies,” while Participant A echoed this uncertainty: “Sometimes I worry that I'm not doing enough or doing it right.” These sentiments reflect low self-efficacy, which according to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), directly impacts teaching performance and student outcomes. Teachers who lack confidence are less likely to engage students effectively or respond flexibly to instructional challenges. This is further supported by Liu and Lin (2020), who found that teacher training enhances self-efficacy, classroom management, and instructional quality. Without structured preparation, ALS teachers may become overwhelmed and hesitant, ultimately affecting their ability to motivate and support learners.

### ***Theme 3: Compensating through Independent Professional Development***

In response to training deficiencies, many ALS teachers have taken the initiative to develop themselves professionally through independent means. Teachers shared that they engage in self-study, create their own learning materials, consult with peers, and attend webinars when possible. Participant A (P1, L86-94) remarked, “I do a lot of self-study. I read online, I talk to co-teachers... and I try to be creative in how I approach lessons,” while Participant E noted, “It's really more of self-help at this point.” These efforts demonstrate the teachers' resilience and commitment, but they also highlight a systemic issue: the burden of professional growth is placed solely on the educators. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), teachers in alternative settings often innovate out of necessity, compensating for the lack of formal training through community-based strategies. Dela Cruz (2022) similarly emphasized that ALS teachers often use creative and collaborative approaches to close instructional gaps. However, as Lora (2021) and Agustin (2020) argue, sustained teacher effectiveness requires institutional support through formal training programs, mentorship opportunities, and access to resources that align with the realities of ALS classrooms. Overall, these findings collectively emphasize the urgent need for structured, context-specific professional development for ALS teachers in Tacloban City. While the teachers demonstrate resilience and dedication, their reliance on trial-and-error teaching, reduced instructional

confidence, and the need for self-driven learning indicate that systemic support is lacking. Addressing these issues through policy implementation, resource allocation, and targeted training will be crucial to improving the quality and equity of ALS education and ensuring that educators are fully equipped to meet the diverse needs of their learners.

### **Strategies Employed by the ALS Teachers to Address the Diverse Needs of Students in the ALS Program in Tacloban City**

The findings of this study offer a comprehensive understanding of the strategies that ALS teachers in Tacloban City employ to respond to the diverse and often complex needs of their learners. In a non-traditional educational setting such as ALS—where learners vary widely in age, educational background, and life circumstances—teachers are challenged to go beyond conventional methods and creatively adapt their approaches. From the analysis of their responses, three major themes emerged: (1) Using flexible, differentiated approaches to reach all learners, (2) Creating context-based learning experiences, and (3) Building learner motivation through relationships. These themes are discussed below in relation to both teacher voices and relevant literature.

#### ***Theme 1: Using Flexible, Differentiated Approaches to Reach All Learners***

ALS teachers consistently emphasized the importance of differentiated instruction as a core strategy in accommodating students' various learning needs and paces. Participant B (P2, L97-105) shared, “I use differentiated instruction. Sometimes, I divide the class into groups based on their ability. I also give individual tasks to match their pace.” This was echoed by Participant C (P3, L89-97), who stated, “I try to break down lessons into smaller chunks so that even students with less prior knowledge can follow along. I also use group activities so that students can learn from each other.” Participant F (P6, L105-112) added, “I do a lot of differentiated instruction—simplify for those who need it, and extend for those who are advanced. Sometimes I do peer tutoring within the class, where stronger learners help others.” Finally, Participant A affirmed, “I use differentiated instruction... sometimes I give different tasks.” These responses highlight the teachers' commitment to equity in learning, where instruction is intentionally modified to suit individual learning needs and capacities. This practice reflects Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes the value of scaffolding in promoting meaningful learning, especially when learners are working within their zones of proximal development. The literature also supports this theme; as Dela Cruz (2022) and Bautista (2018) pointed out, ALS classrooms demand adaptable instructional strategies to manage learner diversity effectively, particularly when teachers are not equipped with standardized methods.

#### ***Theme 2: Creating Context-Based Learning Experiences***

To engage learners and ensure relevance, ALS teachers reported using context-based strategies that anchor lessons in real-life experiences. Participant A (P1, L87-93) shared, “I mostly use printed handouts, visual aids, and sometimes digital materials when there's access to gadgets. I also use storytelling and role-playing, which they enjoy.” Similarly, Participant D (P4, L101-107) explained, “Visual aids, printed materials, community-based scenarios, and sometimes videos. Many of my materials are homemade or self-sourced,” and added, “I use storytelling for reflection... helped them express themselves better.” Participant E (P5, L122-128) also stated, “Mostly printed modules, visual aids, and sometimes real-life scenarios or news articles. I try to keep things relatable and practical.” These methods reflect a resourceful and learner-centered approach, wherein teachers tailor learning materials to the everyday lives and contexts of their students. Bautista (2018) emphasized that contextualization is especially crucial in ALS settings to bridge abstract academic content with the real-world experiences of learners. Likewise, Manalo and Mirasol (2019) advocate for the use of locally relevant materials to increase learner engagement, particularly in resource-limited environments. These findings also connect to Creswell and Poth (2017), who noted that in

non-traditional education programs, teachers often rely on locally sourced and experience-based content to make learning more accessible and engaging.

### ***Theme 3: Building Learner Motivation through Relationships***

A strong relational approach to teaching was evident in the way ALS teachers engage their students. Many described personal interactions as key to motivating learners to persist in the program. Participant A (P1, L128-137) shared, “I talk to them individually. I ask about their lives and struggles. Sometimes just showing that you care motivates them to come back and try harder,” and later reiterated, “Sometimes just showing that you care motivates them to come back.” Participant D (P4, L112-125) stated, “I talk to them personally. I remind them of their goals, why they came back. I also involve their families when possible.” Participant E (P5, L98-103) supported this, saying, “I talk to them one-on-one and ask about their goals. I also try to give positive feedback when they improve—even in small ways. Building a personal connection works best.” These statements illustrate the importance of emotional support and individualized attention in motivating students who often face life circumstances that hinder their consistent participation. Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (1986) underscores the role of interpersonal relationships in enhancing learners’ belief in their capabilities—self-efficacy—which in turn promotes engagement and persistence. As Dela Cruz (2022) also observed, teacher-student rapport in ALS plays a foundational role in fostering a safe and motivating learning environment, often compensating for the lack of formal institutional support. Overall, these findings demonstrate that despite limited formal training, ALS teachers in Tacloban City employ a range of strategic, learner-centered approaches to address the complex needs of their students. Their practices are rooted in flexibility, contextualization, and personal engagement, aligning with the pedagogical recommendations in existing literature. These strategies highlight the teachers’ resourcefulness and resilience and underscore the urgent need for formalized training programs that reinforce and systematize these effective practices. As Santiago and Cruz (2020) assert, targeted training not only enhances teacher capacity but also improves student outcomes—an essential goal for the long-term success of ALS programs.

### **Summary**

This study investigated the lived experiences of on-field Alternative Learning System (ALS) teachers at Sto. Niño Senior High School in Tacloban City. It aimed to address three main objectives: (1) to identify the primary challenges encountered by ALS teachers in their daily teaching practices, (2) to understand how ALS teachers perceive the impact of their lack of formal training on their teaching effectiveness and student engagement, and (3) to explore the strategies they employ to respond to the diverse needs of their learners. The participants of the study represent a diverse group of Senior High School ALS teachers, with varying levels of experience, subject expertise, and roles, including both teaching and leadership responsibilities. Their broad range of backgrounds provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and dynamics of teaching within the Alternative Learning System in Tacloban City. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews with six ALS teachers, the study revealed several key findings. Teachers face significant challenges in managing a heterogeneous group of learners with inconsistent attendance and varied academic backgrounds. They struggle with inadequate and outdated teaching resources, often resorting to personal funds to provide supplemental materials. Additionally, many learners begin the program with foundational learning gaps, prompting teachers to frequently adjust or simplify lessons. In terms of professional preparation, the participants shared that their lack of formal training forces them to rely on trial-and-error teaching, resulting in reduced confidence and instructional uncertainty.

Despite these limitations, teachers compensate through independent professional development, including self-study, peer consultation, and resource creation. To address student needs, ALS teachers implement flexible and differentiated instruction, contextualize lessons using real-life scenarios, and foster strong personal relationships to maintain learner motivation. These practices reflect a deep commitment to inclusive and adaptive teaching, despite systemic limitations.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight that ALS teachers in Tacloban City operate under challenging conditions that demand a high level of adaptability and initiative. Their experiences reflect a pressing need for structured professional development, access to updated teaching materials, and sustained institutional support. The lack of formal training not only affects their instructional delivery but also undermines their confidence and ability to consistently engage learners. Despite these challenges, the teachers display remarkable resilience and creativity in meeting the needs of their students. They have developed context-specific strategies that align with best practices in non-traditional education, such as differentiated instruction, localized content, and relational teaching. These findings underscore the importance of equipping ALS teachers with the tools and training necessary to fulfill their roles effectively. For the ALS program to truly deliver on its promise of inclusive education, systemic changes are required. These include policy reforms, improved teacher training programs, and increased investment in ALS-specific resources. Strengthening the support structures for ALS teachers is essential not only for enhancing teacher efficacy but also for improving student outcomes and ensuring the long-term success of the program.

## Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for the various stakeholders involved in the implementation and development of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in Tacloban City:

*ALS Teachers.* It is recommended that ALS teachers continuously pursue professional development through both formal and informal means. While institutional support remains limited, teachers can enhance their teaching capacity by attending relevant webinars, forming peer-learning groups, and participating in community-based teaching workshops.

Additionally, *teachers* should advocate for their training needs and collaborate in creating a unified voice for improved support systems. *ALS Students.* ALS learners are encouraged to actively engage in their education by maintaining consistent attendance, participating in peer tutoring, and seeking clarification from their teachers when needed. Teachers and administrators should guide students in setting clear learning goals and foster learner autonomy to improve retention and learning outcomes.

*Department of Education (DepEd) and Policymakers.* DepEd and policymakers must prioritize the development and institutionalization of structured training programs specifically designed for ALS educators. These programs should focus on differentiated instruction, adult learning principles, inclusive education, and classroom management.

*Furthermore, national and local DepEd offices* should allocate sufficient funding for updated teaching materials, contextualized modules, and ALS-specific learning resources. Regular program evaluations and feedback mechanisms should also be implemented to ensure continuous improvement. *School Administrators.*

*School heads and administrators* should assess the needs of their ALS teachers and provide targeted support in terms of instructional materials, teaching aids, and scheduling flexibility. Administrators should also facilitate professional development opportunities by inviting experts, organizing in-service training sessions, and encouraging teachers to pursue graduate studies or short-term certification in ALS education.

*Future ALS Teachers and Educators.* Teacher education institutions and training providers should incorporate ALS-specific methodologies into their curriculum. Pre-service teachers aspiring to join ALS must be equipped with knowledge in adult education, flexible delivery modalities, and inclusive pedagogies. Practicum opportunities in ALS contexts should also be considered to give aspiring teachers real-world exposure.

*Researchers and Academicians.* Researchers in education are encouraged to further examine the long-term effects of teacher training and support on ALS learner outcomes. Future studies may explore the efficacy of various teaching strategies in ALS settings or assess the impact of localized, community-based

interventions. Academics should also consider publishing guides and case studies that serve as resources for ALS implementers.

*Local Government Units (LGUs).* LGUs should strengthen their support for ALS by providing budget allocations for training programs, instructional materials, and transportation allowances for teachers and learners. They can also collaborate with DepEd to establish local training centers and initiate community-based ALS programs that complement existing school-based efforts. Parents and Families of

*ALS Learners.* Parents and guardians should be encouraged to play an active role in the educational journey of their students. Schools can conduct regular orientation and consultation sessions to help parents understand the ALS curriculum, the unique needs of their students, and how they can provide support at home. Emotional and moral support from family members is crucial for sustaining learner motivation.

*Community Organizations and NGOs.* Non-governmental organizations and civic groups can partner with schools and local governments to deliver training, mentoring, and psychosocial support for ALS learners and teachers. These groups are also in a strong position to conduct resource mobilization campaigns, sponsor digital tools, or provide venues for community-based learning sessions.

*The Philippine Education System.* To build a more inclusive and effective ALS program nationwide, systemic reforms must be introduced at the policy level. The Department of Education, in coordination with other relevant agencies, should create a comprehensive national framework for ALS teacher training and resource development. Equitable access to quality education, especially for marginalized and non-traditional learners, must remain a core pillar of national education policy. These recommendations aim to support all stakeholders in enhancing the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of the ALS program. By working collaboratively, each group can contribute to a more inclusive and empowering educational environment for both teachers and learners in Tacloban City and beyond.

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