

# Alternative Learning System Accreditation and Equivalency (ALS A&E) Program: Quality of Life beyond Poverty

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**Abstract:** The study assessed the implementation of the alternative learning system program along provision of life skills, increased literacy and quality of living. It was revealed that the provision of life skills was attained to a great extent. The program was able to increase literacy as evident in the successful passers of the alternative learning system accreditation and equivalency (ALS A&E) test. After completion of the program, the ALS passers improved their quality of living by engaging in jobs or entrepreneurial activities that increase financial stability, participating actively in community events and social gatherings, cultivating a positive outlook in life and developing the passion for pursuing higher education. The Alternative Learning System A&E program in the Philippines is effective in cultivating the life skills of the recipients. The program has improved the quality of living of the respondents as they continue their pursuit for meaning and significance in life.

**Keywords:** alternative learning system, life skills, literacy, quality of living.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Literacy is fundamental to the achievement of the quality of life of a person. Literacy is more than a basic reading ability, but rather an indication of how adults use written information to function in society (McMullen, 2004). Youth and adults should acquire literacy and lifelong skills necessary in getting a good job, decent earnings, and access to quality learning opportunities. Countries that are successful in endowing their population with literacy and lifelong skills are usually in a better position to meet the economic demands of operating in a globalized information economy. A highly-literate population will be better able to deal with issues of governance in a highly diverse society.

As noted by UNESCO, illiteracy hampers a country's economic growth. The Dakar Framework had a specific target to reduce adult illiteracy by 50 per cent. But it will be missed by a wide margin with 800 million adults worldwide still unable to read or pen their name, especially in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (Narayan, 2012). The said countries have been assailed with economic crisis prompted by poverty which are attributed to illiteracy.

The Philippines is not exempted from economic crisis brought about by poverty. Recent study of Mercene (2012) disclosed that the Philippines was found to have one of the highest poverty incidence rates in Southeast Asia pegged at 15.5%, with poor people living at less than one U.S. dollar a day or at Php 32.00 a day. The Out-of-School Children (OSC), Out-of-School Youth (OSYs), and Out-of-School Adults (OSAs) comprise the huge number of Filipino individuals who are most affected by poverty due to lack of educational opportunities. As revealed in the Country Profile commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, Education for All by 2015, sixteen million two hundred eighty-two thousand three hundred forty-three (16,282,343) out-of-school Filipino citizens comprised 20% of the 82M in 2004.

The 2004 NSO report cited poverty as the primary contributor to the high growth of out of school youth (OSY). However, given the lack of education as the precarious situation that caused poverty, the OSY phenomenon continues to occur among the poor.

Hence, the Philippine government through the Department of Education has implemented the Alternative Learning System (ALS) as a crucial component of Philippine education to provide every individual with access to quality basic education to reduce illiteracy rate as envisioned in the Education for All (EFA) 2015 Philippine Plan of Action. Section 12.1 Rules XII of R.A 9155 stipulates that ALS is a parallel learning system to provide a viable alternative to the existing formal education instruction, encompassing both the non-formal and informal sources of knowledge and skills.

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) Program gives the out-of-school youths and adults a chance to improve their quality of life and increase their literacy level. One of the major programs in ALS is the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Program. The program caters to those who want to acquire literacy skills and continue schooling in both the secondary and tertiary levels. Target beneficiaries include the unemployed/underemployed out-of-school youths and adults, elementary and secondary school dropouts/leavers, industry-based workers, housewives, maids, factory workers, drivers, members of cultural minorities/indigenous people, persons with disabilities/physically challenged, inmates, and rebels, who want to go to the formal education system and eventually finish a career. The Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test is given after completion of the modules to provide learners with a range of alternatives to allow continuity of education in the formal school system. Once the test-takers passed the examination, certification of learning achievements at two learning levels either in the elementary or secondary is given that is comparable to the formal school system. However, results of the last five (5) years revealed that the passing percentage of the ALS A & E test takers fell short of the standard passing set by the Department of Education.

The ALS A&E program has been implemented in Region 7 for fourteen (14) years. An assessment of the program is deemed imperative to guide implementers and policy makers on the outcomes of this program. There is a need to gather information from the A&E implementers and passers vis-à-vis the program's significant contributions to the achievement of its purpose in eradicating poverty as envisioned by the Philippine President Benigno C. Aquino III and spelled out in his Social Contract with the Filipino People, through Executive Order No. 43, s. 2011, Section 2.b Key Result Area, focusing on "poverty reduction and empowerment of the poor and vulnerable".

This study is anchored on the objective-based evaluation model of Ralph Tyler (1949) and Thomas R. Guskey (2000) to determine the extent of the implementation of ALS A&E program in the Region. The objective-based evaluation model centers on the specifications of objectives and the measurement of outcomes. Specifically, it focuses on generating information for accountability and decision-making. The usual purpose of an objectives-based study is to determine whether the program's objectives have been achieved.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study assessed the implementation of the Alternative Learning System Accreditation and Equivalency (ALS A& E) program in Cebu, Philippines along program objectives and outcome. There were various components of the ALS A&E program, but this study was limited to the evaluation of the program objectives on the provision of life skills, literacy and the program outcome of quality of living among the recipients.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study used the qualitative-quantitative research design involving the schools divisions in the province of Cebu implementing the ALS A&E program. The respondents of this study were the mobile teachers (MTs) and district ALS coordinators (DALCs), the successful ALS A&E passers, and the division ALS supervisors (DALSSs). To verify and validate the respondents' answers, the researchers used documentary analysis of the learners' assessment profile, journal, A&E test results, attendance sheets, list of activities participated in, list of entrepreneurial activities, and other evidences of learning. Focused group discussions were conducted and one-on-one interview sessions were done with the successful A&E passers to provide evidences of improved quality of living

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The extent of attainment of ALS A&E program objectives on provision of life skills, increased literacy and the program outcome on improvement of the quality of living of the recipients are presented and discussed.

### A. Provision of Life Skills

The ALS A&E program aimed to equip the learners with life skills to cope successfully with situations in their day-to-day life. The life skills included self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relation skills, decision-making, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, coping with emotions, coping with stress, and entrepreneurial skills. The learners, mobile teachers and the ALS supervisors rated the extent of attainment of the different life skills based on the specific indicators. The mobile teachers and the supervisors considered the portfolio, test results and reflection journals of the learners as they determined the extent of the acquisition of life skills among the learners. The average rating was taken to represent the extent of attainment on the provision of life skills.

It can be gleaned from the table that the learners, mobile teachers and the ALS supervisors differed in their percentage of attainment of the various life skills. The learners rated themselves highly in the acquisition of life skills like self awareness which might not be the case for the mobile teachers and the ALS supervisors since they considered other evidences like learners' performance in class, portfolio and other evidences of learning. On the average, the self-awareness skill was developed and attained to a very great extent.

**TABLE 1: Extent of Attainment on the Provision of Life Skills**

Life Skills	Extent of Attainment (%)			Average	Description
	Learners	Mobile Teachers	Division ALS Supervisors		
Self-awareness	97.1	64.0	74.3	78.5	Very great extent
Problem Solving	91.4	54.2	60.0	68.6	Great extent
Empathy	82.1	67.2	50.0	66.5	
Decision-Making	85.7	43.0	52.4	60.4	Great extent
Effective Communication	59.5	54.3	45.2	53.0	Great extent
Interpersonal Relation Skills	66.7	51.9	31.0	49.8	Some extent
Creative Thinking	71.4	41.1	35.7	49.4	Some extent
Coping with Emotions	42.9	45.2	57.1	48.4	Some extent
Entrepreneurial Skills	54.3	33.8	34.3	40.8	Some extent
Coping with Stress	57.1	44.4	19.1	40.2	Some extent
Critical Thinking	53.6	38.9	26.8	39.7	Some extent
<b>Average Percentage (%) Raters</b>	<b>69.3</b>	<b>48.9</b>	<b>44.2</b>	<b>54.1</b>	<b>Great extent</b>

Legend:

76 above	-	Very great extent
51 -75%	-	To a great extent
26 to 50%	-	To some extent
1 to 24	%	Little extent
0	-	Not evident at all

This means that the ALS A&E program successfully developed the self awareness skill of the learners. Learners were given sufficient activities that dealt mainly on developing understanding of oneself. Developing this skill enabled the learners to recognize his strengths and weaknesses to be able to function effectively in society and become useful member of the community. Other skills which were attained to a great extent were problem solving, empathy, decision making and effective communication. Students in the ALS program developed their problem solving skill. They have developed their

skill in deciding the best option among various choices. They acquired the ability to express one effectively, understand others and respond to different people in different situations.

The critical thinking skill had the lowest extent of attainment with an average of 39.7%. The learners, mobile teachers, and supervisors claimed that the critical thinking skill was attained to some extent. The data showed that the development of the learners' critical thinking skill could still be improved through effective delivery of the program. Based on the interview with the mobile teachers, it took much effort, time, and diligence to provide effective instruction that would facilitate deep thinking among the learners. It could also be deduced that the activities given to the learners were not enough to prepare them to think critically and cope with problems, challenges, and struggles in life.

For the successful implementation of the ALS A&E program, there's a need for both the mobile teachers (MTs) and the division ALS supervisors (DALSS) to exert more efforts to fully cultivate the innate potential of learners, which eventually would develop learners' life skills, especially the critical thinking skills. The use of open-ended tasks, real-world or "authentic" problem contexts, and ill-structured problems that require students to go beyond recalling or restating previously learned information can be used by the mobile teachers to develop the critical thinking of the learners (Lai, 2011).

The over-all percent of attainment of the provision of life skills was to a great extent. It means that the program has facilitated the development of most of the life skills that learners need to survive in this competitive world. When interviewed, one program recipient said, "Daghan kaayo ko nakamaohan sa akong pag attend SA ALS A&E Program (I learned so many things while attending the ALS A&E Program). I learned to face people. Dili na ko mauwaw (I am not ashamed anymore). Daghan na kaayo ang mo hire nako as event organizer (There are lots of people who hired me as an event organizer)". A mobile teacher said, "That's true, our learners, especially those who passed the A&E test have enhanced their life skills necessary for them to live comfortably. They have acquired entrepreneurial skills that allowed them to earn a living."

### B. Increased Adult Literacy

One of the objectives of the program was to increase literacy as evident in the percentage of passing in the A&E equivalency test. Table 2 showed the test takers and passers of the program for the last five years.

**TABLE 2: Test-Takers and Test-Passers of the Alternative Learning System Accreditation and Equivalency of the Schools Divisions of Region VII for the last 5 years**

Division	2008			2009			2010			2011			2012		
	No. of Takers	No. of Passers	%	No. of Takers	No. of Passers	%	No. of Takers	No. of Passers	%	No. of Takers	No. of Passers	%	No. of Takers	No. of Passers	%
Cebu Province (A)	452	76	6.81	744	227	30.5	2,126	509	23.9	3,932	1,446	36.8	6,289	2,416	38.4
Cebu City (B)	2,026	676	33.4	1,140	600	52.6	1,140	600	52.6	2,022	1,152	57	2,072	1,409	64.1
Danao City ©	298	75	5.1	379	69	18.2	383	112	29.2	444	279	62.8	815	479	58.8
Lapu-Lapu City (D)	612	72	11.8	670	72	10.8	845	112	13.3	827	478	57.8	1,290	1,075	83.3
Mandaue City (E)	502	194	38.7	608	213	35	279	232	83.2	538	372	69.1	620	367	59.2
Talisay City (F)	213	42	19.7	482	81	16.8	347	85	24.5	450	130	28.9	493	133	27
Toledo City (G)	255	55	21.6	352	71	20.2	209	61	29.2	392	211	53.8	588	350	59.5

*Source: Division Report on ALS A&E Program based on BALS Record*

In 2008, all the seven schools divisions had very low passing percentage. In 2009, only the division of Cebu City surpassed the 50% literacy increase. This could possibly be attributed to the support provided by the Local Government Unit (LGU) in producing enough copies of modules (1 set of modules per learner). Apart from the reproduction of modules during this year, literacy volunteers and instructional managers were also employed to provide learning activities to the target learners. Cebu City Division also implemented different alternative learning modes like radio-based instruction, e-skwela, and literacy cum livelihood. The Division was active in implementing the Paglaum Program, which provided the jail inmates an opportunity to enhance their literacy skills using the livelihood skills training like basket weaving and parol making, to name a few. Livelihood training was one of the programs of ALS implemented in Region VII since 1990s to cater to the learning needs of the inmates, believing that even if they're inside the jail they could still

improve their quality of living. These delivery modes facilitated the consistent increase of its passing rate in the last five years.

In 2010, the division of Cebu City had 52.63% passing rate, while the division of Mandaue City had 83.15%. This was because the division of Mandaue City was very active in implementing the ALS A&E Program. The presence of one national ALS trainer with the all-out support of the local government unit and other stakeholders facilitated the huge increase of the percentage passing rate. The strong partnership between and among stakeholders resulted to the increase achievement of ALS recipients.

In 2011, five of the schools divisions successfully increased literacy as evident in the passing percentage. The division of Mandaue City got the highest percentage, followed by the divisions of Danao City, Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu City and Toledo City. All these five schools divisions had implemented the program very satisfactorily with stakeholders fully supporting the program.

The five schools divisions sustained their efforts in achieving higher percentage rates of test-passers in 2012. From among the seven schools divisions, it was noted that the divisions of Cebu Province and Talisay City had the lowest passing percentage for the past 5 years. It means that more capability programs, trainings, workshops, and other exposures be provided to ALS implementers to enhance their knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs). As articulated by one teacher, "We need more training and exposures. We hope that there will be a separate In-service Training (INSET) to be conducted at the division level for us, ALS implementers". One Division ALS Supervisor emphasized that he needed more trainings to be effective in the job.

On the average, an increasing passing percentage of ALS A&E test takers was evident in five (5) of the seven (7) divisions. The increasing trend in passing percentage in most of the divisions indicates that the program served its purpose of increasing literacy among program recipients.

The data consolidated from the focussed group discussions of the mobile teachers and the ALS supervisors revealed that the insufficiency of resources like modules and other instructional materials hindered them to increase significantly the passing percentage "Kuwang kaayo ang modules (The modules are insufficient.). We need more. If possible, the government should allocate enough funds for the reproduction, so that each learner could be provided with enough copies", one Division ALS Supervisor said. In an interview with another learner, he candidly stated, "Apart from having insufficient copies of modules, we don't have community learning centers (CLCs) that we can really call our room

These two problems have been existing since the program started. In fact, Verzosa (2006) said that lack of modules and poor facilities of the learning centers were common problems in the implementation of the ALS A&E program.

### ***C. Learner's Quality of Living***

The study looked into the outcome of the program on quality of living of the ALS recipients. Quality of living is operationally referred to as the general well-being of individuals based on the standard indicators of the quality of life. It included not only wealth and employment, but also the environment, physical and mental health, education, recreation and leisure time, and social belonging. The learners responses spelled out from the 15-item questionnaire and focused group discussion proved that the program has improved their quality of living.

Indicators of the improvement of learners' quality of life were evident as shared by the ALS recipients. Though, there were lots of challenges that hindered them to finish the ALS sessions, their drive to change the way things were happening in their lives pushed them to strive hard for a better future. Dexie said, "Nindot kaayo ang kinabuhi kon dunay mahuman. Pasalamat gyud ko Ni Sir Opong (mobile teacher) kay siya gyud ang nag inspire nako (Life is so inspiring if one has finished schooling. I am so thankful to Sir Opong, my mobile teacher, who inspired me to continue my studies despite the hardship)".

The successful passers told different stories. They faced a lot of sacrifices. Most of the people around the corners, where they came from, gave negative statements. Others tried to discourage them. As shared by a mobile teacher, "Sakit kaayo paminawon ang mga negative statements sa mga tawo about ALS everytime moingon sila nga unsay makuha ninyo anang ALS, eskwela-eslwela lang na. Wala nay klaro (It is so painful hearing negative statements from other people about ALS, every time people make comments, like "what would you get from attending ALS". It is just a waste of time"). Fortunately these discouraging statements did not stop the learners from making their dream a reality.

With her drive to be freed from the bondage of poverty, one learner endured all the mockery from the neighbors.. Her life's journey was too rough, however; it did not hinder her to achieve her goal to finish college. Her dream came true when she was hired at the Mactan Waterfront Hotel as a female chef. In no case that this learner declined every time she was requested to speak before a crowd of ALS learners. "Ako gyoy'ng tagaan ug panahon ang mga learners kay maayo na lang mahimo nilang model ang akong life (I really give enough time to talk to the learners. At least they will look up to me as their model)".

Meanwhile, another ALS passer shared his story of extreme poverty as the reason why he stopped school. He expressed his gratitude to the government for providing this ALS A&E program for those who could not complete their basic education from the formal system. "Lahi ra man gyud ug naa tay grado. Mas daghan ta ug matabang dili lang sa atong pamilya but hasta na sa community (It's so different if we completed schooling. There are lots that we can offer not only for our families, but also in the community)".

Another passer expressed joy and said: "Because of the ALS A&E program, I am now supervising roughly 200 workers in a Plastic Manufacturing Company. To be such was beyond my dream. Pero maayo na lang kay gi inspire ko sa akong mobile teacher (But it was good enough that my mobile teacher had inspired me to continue studying)."

Another ALS A& E passer shared that despite the poverty, he was motivated to continue studying in the ALS A&E Program. "Kon wa pa ang ALS A&E ambot asa kaha ko ron. Wala may kwarta ako mga ginikanan (Without ALS A&E Program, I wouldn't be where I am now. My parents don't have the financial capacity)".

Another passer said that it was his sister who supported him and gave him the moral support to continue the program and take the ALS A&E Test.

On the other hand, one passer told his story inside the jail. Truly education didn't hinder one to achieve his/her goal as long as one has the desire to do it. "Lipay kaayo ko nga nakahuman ko ug high school through the ALS A&E Program" (I am so happy that I was able to finish my high school studies through the ALS A&E Program).

Lua, (2012) shared that a number of passers attending the ALS Program are now active in local churches and take the lead in civic activities. The findings confirmed that ALS A&E program has significantly changed the lives of the learners.

Common themes emerged from the learners' stories and experiences. Most of the ALS recipients improved their quality of life by engaging in jobs or entrepreneurial activities that increase financial stability. Attendance to the ALS program developed their sense confidence and civic mindedness by participating actively in community events and social gatherings. They develop a positive outlook in life and they cultivate the passion for education by pursuing further studies.

## V. CONCLUSION

The Alternative Learning System A&E program was effective in cultivating the life skills of the recipients. The program improved the quality of living of the respondents as they continue their pursuit for meaning and significance in life. It proved that students still learn and acquire the life-long competencies even outside the walls of the formal school system. The alternative learning system was an option for those who wanted to improve their quality of living and rise beyond poverty.

As an alternative to the formal school system, the government needs to provide the physical and financial resources for sustainability of the ALS program. Its governance should be strengthened to maximize the participation of stakeholders to bring the out-of-school youths and out-of-school adults to school and let them finish their studies thereby increase literacy. The strong support and collaboration of the stakeholders, the commitment of both the learners and mobile teachers are necessary in the effective implementation of the program.

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