

Lived Experiences of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Completers

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Abstract

The ALS (Alternative Learning System) program allows out-of-school youth and adults to continue their education through modular and flexible means. This study aims to determine the lived experiences of ALS completers in the Salay District during the SY 2021-2022. The study utilized the Phenomenology Approach, and a criterion sampling was used in selecting the participants. The data gathered were summarized by coding the common responses, and themes were identified through thematic analysis. This study found that the majority of ALS learners were student mothers who experienced dual roles. They developed effective time management and multitasking skills to overcome the challenges of life. ALS learners' sources of motivation came from their children, family, teachers, and even from those who opposed them. Their common challenges included financial instability, multiple responsibilities, curriculum and learning tools, and the learning environment. In terms of coping mechanisms, four themes were evident: faith in God and confidence in oneself, time management, learning with fellow ALS learners, and the teaching-learning process of ALS. The results provide useful findings for ALS facilitators, teachers, and policymakers. To effectively address the needs and interests of ALS learners, an intervention plan can be implemented to help them cope with their psychological crises and become more resilient and productive despite their multiple roles.

Keywords: ALS completers, coping mechanism, lived experiences, motivation

1. Introduction

The value of education and schooling in the lives of today's youth cannot be questioned. It accomplishes various aims, including knowledge acquisition, goal-setting opportunities, and teaching people about social standards. Additionally, it provides the knowledge and skills they need to achieve their aspirations in life.

Many believe that education is the key to success. In addition to fostering sustained, equitable, and inclusive economic growth, education is crucial for reducing poverty and hunger and promoting sustainable development. At the core of global development efforts lies an increased focus on the accessibility, quality, and affordability of education.

Education has a significant role in the development of skills and talents across all fundamental domains to varying degrees. It goes beyond merely passing along knowledge from one source to another. Enhancing a nation's educational system helps citizens develop their talents so that they can utilize their full potential for the benefit of the country. The goal of education in a nation is to provide citizens with social, economic, and societal benefits by granting them a certain set of credentials. At the national level, education aims to develop individuals who are tolerant, non-violent, and economically capable. As a secondary social purpose, education aims to educate people who will uphold the interests of their nation and the society in which they live (Mammadov, 2018).

However, there are less fortunate and drop out young individuals who are having a hard time continuing their education. The predicament of young Filipino students has led the government to create Republic Act No. 11510 which implements the rules and regulations of the Alternative Learning System or the Alternative Learning System Act (ALS Act). The ALS Act offers a learning system that provides alternatives for every Filipino to complete a basic education in a way that suits their individual circumstances and requirements.

The Alternative Learning System Act (ALS Act) is special program that provides support to ensure the inclusion of dropouts in elementary and secondary schools, out-of-school youths, out-of-school children in special cases, non-readers, working Filipinos, as well as members of senior citizens and indigenous people. It is also guaranteed that individuals living in neglected, unreached, conflict-affected, and emergency-stricken communities can make use of adequate, systematic, and adaptable alternative basic education programs outside the formal school system. Participants in the program must not be enrolled in a formal school.

Furthermore, the ALS program serves as a valuable alternative to the current formal education system, enabling students to complete their basic education in a manner that aligns with their specific circumstances and needs. This flexible program allows learning to take place anytime and anywhere, based on the convenience and availability of the students. Those individuals who have successfully completed the ALS program are classified as secondary level graduates and may proceed to Senior High School. ALS stands as one of DepEd's prominent initiatives in addressing the educational challenges faced by out-of-school Filipinos.

The requirements for an ALS student are being 13 years old and above and having prior learning. The class schedule is from Monday to Friday, 7AM until 5PM. The ALS program focuses on the following learning areas: communication skills (English and Filipino), scientific literacy and critical thinking skills, mathematical and problem-solving skills, life and career skills, understanding the self and society, and digital literacy.

Undeniably, the Philippines has made improvements to its educational system over the past few decades. However, there are still some certain issues that the country's educational system must address. One alarming issue is the high rate of student dropouts. The primary reason for this is the prevailing economic crisis driven by poverty, which is closely linked to illiteracy. Poverty limits one's perspectives on the future, and children from poor backgrounds have limited opportunities. They don't have less time and financial resources to pursue their passions and interests (Philippine Basic Education, 2017)

Considering the adverse circumstances that arise due to a lack of education, poverty, and illiteracy continue to persist among the underprivileged and disadvantaged individuals. In order to achieve the program's goal of providing access to high-quality non-formal education and skills training for everyone, particularly the indigenous and underprivileged communities, the Philippine Department of Education has further expanded the ALS program by forging partnerships with non-government groups.

Certainly, the ALS program is an integral part of education system in the Philippines, providing an alternative to the traditional classroom studies. Numerous young Filipinos aspire to complete their education, but unfortunately, not everyone can transform this dream into a reality. According to (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2018), 17.6 million Filipinos are living in poverty. As a result, many Filipino youths are still unable to exercise their right to education due to poverty.

The latest implementation of the enhanced ALS curriculum is based on the 2019 ALS K-12 curriculum (Department of Education, 2019; Llego, 2019). The development of new ALS modules runs parallel to the K-12 basic formal education (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2019), and includes a mobile learning delivery mode (Department of Budget and Management, 2020; et al., 2017). The ALS program offers out-of-school children and youth the opportunity to continue their

education through modular and flexible means. The pace of learning depends on the student's convenience and availability. ALS supports those who are unable to attend regular school due to various reasons. The modules utilized in the ALS are taught by ALS learning facilitators, mobile teachers, the district ALS coordinator, and instructional managers in various locations, including barangay halls, private homes, community centers, and libraries, as opposed to the formal education system where school instructors teach within the confines of a classroom. Another significant distinction is the flexibility of the sessions, which are scheduled based on the students' availability. Upon completion of the program, learners can obtain primary or secondary education qualifications.

Previously, non-formal education was mostly concentrated on instructions in livelihood skills training, with basic reading and writing incorporated into the module. However, under the current system, skills training and livelihood training have been excluded and established as distinct education systems. Skills training is now a standalone program under the responsibility of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Philippines). The ALS serves as a means for informal and busy students to achieve elementary and high school education without the need to attend daily classroom instructions, as required by the formal education system. Secondary education has now become a prerequisite for vocational technology and college education in the Philippines. It's worth noting that livelihood training does not need necessarily require formal or non-formal education in the Philippines.

Given the broad scope of ALS and its student population, it is important to delve into the multiple factors that have influenced student's completion of the program. In light of these interrelated contributing factors, this study aims to examine the baseline data. Hence, this study will investigate the lived experiences of ALS completers and their preferred motivational approach (based on self-determination theory) in order to overcome challenges and achieve academic success.

This study primarily draws on Self-determination theory to understand how learner motivation contributes to academic excellence. Learners' motivation plays a vital role in their self-efficacy and productivity towards achieving goals. The Alternative learning system is a program that requires learners to be highly motivated in performing and completing the tasks and modules provided by the school. Various approaches exist in assessing the effectiveness of students enrolled in ALS. The Self-determination theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the academic performance of learners within challenging contexts.

The theory explains that setting clear and realistic goals, promoting student interaction, and creating an enjoyable learning process can help motivate students. The Self-determination theory (SDT) recognizes that students may sometimes lack self-motivation, display disaffection, or act irresponsibly. To address this apparent paradox of having inner motivational resources on the one hand but exhibiting disaffection on the other, SDT research identifies the classroom conditions that support and vitalize students' inner motivational resources. SDT explores how students' internal resources interact with classroom conditions to influence their levels of engagement. This study aligns with SDT principles (Cook & Artino, 2016).

The theory suggests that motivators can all lead individuals to act, but they may have different implications for performance and well-being. According to Froiland and Worell (2016), students' intrinsic motivation has a clear impact on their involvement, which in turn determines their level of achievement. Activities like play, exploration, and curiosity-sparked activities serve as excellent examples of intrinsically motivated behaviors because they don't rely on rewards or pressure from others, but instead bring about their own delight and fulfillment. However, individuals may perceive learning as "fun," such innate propensities for engaged learning and the development are also serious existential matters. As a result, intrinsic motivation is probably to blame for the overwhelming amount of learning that occurs in humans throughout their lifetimes, as opposed to learning and instruction that is mandated from outside sources (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Even the act of reading itself can satisfy their curiosity, instill a sense of involvement, and be enjoyable, if not

necessarily easy. Intrinsic motivation plays a major role in a student's academic world. The intrinsic motives in learning lead the students to become engaged not for external rewards but because they find the activity itself interesting and gratifying. They will likely show attachment to the meaning of their work as they explore new topics to survive the challenges in learning.

The most prevalent transactional and relationship rewards are distinguished by extrinsic motivation (Joshi, 2016). The extrinsic motivation demonstrated by students who participate in learning activities solely for the purpose of receiving good grades is thought to be less internalized when compared to students who participate in learning activities because they understand the values (competition) associated with the activities. To be effective, extrinsic motivation must be fully assimilated into an individual's own value and belief systems, rather than being imposed by the surrounding environment, such as a school or society at large.

For extrinsic motivation to manifest itself in the form of integrated regulation, the importance of the activities must be fully assimilated into an individual's own values (recognition) and belief systems, rather than being imposed by the surrounding environment, such as a school or society at large (Komiyama & McMorris, 2017). The term "motivation" can be defined as a driving force that becomes active, with unsatisfactory exam results often linked to a variety of factors. Among the reasons often cited by students and educators is the lack of motivation in students (Ramalingam & Jiar, 2022). Thus, this study examines the lived experiences of the ALS learners through their motivating factors that drive them to achieve good academic performance.

2. Methodology

This study utilized phenomenology design to show the common practices and define the meanings gathered from the participants. The researcher sets up the reality, an interpretive framework exists to guide the procedures in this inquiry would be conducted and the results analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As this is to contextualize data and observations rather than generalize. Phenomenology is used to identify phenomena and explain structures of lived experience to arrive at a better understanding of the meaning of this experience. This approach was designed by Edmund Husserl in the middle of the 20th century. It is also used to describe in depth the common characteristics of the phenomena that have occurred. Thus, this method is compatible with this research paradigm. In-depth interview was conducted to collect the primary data.

The results of the interviews were summarized by coding the common responses. Criterion sampling was employed to collect data using open-ended questions, which were subsequently subjected to content analysis. Themes were then identified through thematic analysis, which is another technique for analyzing qualitative data involving the identification, examination, and recording of recurring patterns within a dataset. This technique not only involves representing data but also requires interpretation during the selection of codes and the creation of themes.

3. Results and Discussion

Problem 1. What factors motivate the ALS completers to finish the program?

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) provided a platform for young Filipino children to be exposed to formal education. Completers and qualifiers of the ALS program are now accepted into colleges and universities and offered opportunities to continue their education.

Table 1*ALS Completers' Motivators to Finish the Program*

Theme	Example Statement	% of similar statements
Motivation from Children and Family	<i>"When I need to balance my time between my children and husband as well as to ALS attend the session, it was very hard to balance yet it is necessary." (Housewife, 27)</i>	85%
Motivation from Teachers	<i>"...the most memorable moment that I cannot forget is the time my teacher gave her advice about finishing the ALS program..." (Housewife, 22)</i>	10%
Motivation from Oppositions	<i>"...when my mother-in-law scolded me because I bring my son just to attend the ALS session..." (Housewife, 23)</i> <i>".....my painful experience with the people who Be little me or bullies me" (student, 21)</i>	5%

Based on the interview conducted, factors that motivate the ALS completers to finish the program emerge. Evidently, themes such as their children and family, teachers, and even opposition are prominent. One respondent shared, "The people that motivate me to enroll in the ALS program are my parents, my children, my husband, and my teacher" (Ron, 33). This implies that positive relationships among ALS learners are important for someone to complete the program despite the challenges they may face along the way. It indicates that the people surrounding the ALS learners encourage them to continue their pursuit of learning.

Theme 1 Motivation from Children and Family

Parents play a vital role as social actors in the development of children's academic achievement by providing motivation. Their active participation in children's learning process is crucial for influencing their children towards better learning outcomes. According to the study of Gamage (2021), parental involvement generally improves both the child's academic performance and social well-being. This involvement encompasses various activities, such as supporting and monitoring homework, attending school activities, and participating in parent-teacher interaction sessions, communicating with teachers, and engaging in volunteer activities. As a result, parents of ALS learners tend to support their children's enrollment in the program because they aspire for them to become productive citizens with strong academic performance.

ALS learners learn to overcome learning challenges through their inspiration to finish their ALS studies. Most of the participants identified their children, husbands, and family as their main sources of inspiration. Some stated that their aspirations of achieving professional dreams ignited their passion to enroll in the ALS program. They believed that education could solve their financial problems and lead them to secure well-paying jobs. A few participants relied on divine guidance as a motivating factor in pursuing their education through the ALS program. Additionally, several ALS completers were student mothers who openly shared how they effectively managed their time by prioritizing activities to ensure they had sufficient time for their studies.

ALS completers possess motivating ideals that drive them to persist in their ALS education despite the difficulties they face. Many of them emphasized the significant influence their children had on their decision to pursue education. Additionally, their families, friends, and even individuals who belittle them due to their lack of education contribute to their determination to enroll in the ALS program. Furthermore, family crises serve as a driving force for them to pursue education and secure stable employment.

Some students reported that parenting while studying is undeniably hard, but it is a source of inspiration. The enthusiasm for their children's success is one of the reasons student mothers reenter the world of education through the ALS program. This enables them to have a worthy starting point in life, obtain study skills, and improve their quality of life (Rita et al., 2021).

Student mothers are facing various challenges as they have dual roles such as parenting and

schooling. They need to balance their time between studying and meeting the family's demands. This indicates that despite their hectic schedules, student mothers were determined to achieve their dreams and goals in life and finish their studies through the ALS program. They look forward to the betterment of their family's welfare and to becoming role models that give light to their children's future. Out of 20, there were 7 participants who revealed that being a student mother is not an easy task. One participant expressed, *"When I need to balance my time between my children and husband as well as to attend the ALS session, it was very hard to balance yet it is necessary."* (Housewife, 27). Another participant revealed that *"...I want to provide the needs of my children as well as a good future for them"* (Housewife, 31).

The motivation of ALS learners is a critical factor in their effectiveness and high productivity towards their individual goals. Therefore, their self-determination presents a wide range of opportunities for their families, as it significantly aids the learners in overcoming challenges and attaining academic success. Undoubtedly, being a student mother is a demanding role that necessitates perseverance and a positive mindset to make progress (Syuraini, 2020).

Theme 2 Motivation from Teachers

Additionally, teachers in the ALS program play a vital role in monitoring the progress of ALS learners as they work towards completing their studies. Educators hold a crucial position in the lives of ALS learners as they are often the first to comprehend the learners' circumstances. Students seek the encouragement of their teachers to feel respected and appreciated for their diligent efforts.

The participants' statements were as follows: *"...the most memorable moment that I cannot forget is the time my teacher gave her advice about finishing the ALS program..."* (Housewife, 22). This illustrates the significance of motivation for teachers.

According to Seven (2019), motivation is a strong desire or passion in a person that drives him to strive or do something with the aim of achieving success. Indeed, motivation that comes from the teacher helps the learners face any obstacles and pass through them to achieve their goals and dreams in life. The teachers' role, such as creating an environment conducive to learning and encouraging the students to finish their studies, determines the extent of the students' active involvement and attitude towards learning (Ramalingam & Jiar, 2022).

In the study of Johnson (2017), he asserted that, even though students were born with natural abilities, they are still dependent on the teacher's involvement. Sometimes students' energy, drive, and enthusiasm for their studies might deteriorate; therefore, it requires continued reinforcement through external support that comes from the teachers. Moreover, students should see the connection between what they do in class and how meaningful it is to their lives. Teachers should connect learning to the personal world of their students to help them become authors of their lives as they take ownership, develop interest in their own work, and increase their drive to learn and complete their studies.

Theme 3 Motivation from Oppositions

A student-mother faces many more challenges than a typical student who is single and parent-dependent. There are many barriers as the student-mother moves along the academic path, including conflicting demands, financial problems, social stigma, and self-neglect (Cabaguino, 2017). As a student-mother, difficulty is inevitable, as in-laws are sometimes a restrictive norm within the family. Restrictive social norms are such that the family's moral and social status depend on women's demeanor, and their movement outside the home is stigmatized (Bernhardt et al., 2018).

One of the participants shared that her mother-in-law opposed her decision to avail herself of the ALS program. Most of the mothers-in-law commonly opposed the student mother for many reasons. These reasons may have to do with the role that older women play in the household by sharing the housework burden and consequently telling the student-mother to work. According to Brann's (2016) study, a typical mother-in-law who bullies believes she has rights and privileges because she is a mother. She also believes

that her position in the family puts her above anyone else. Her sense of entitlement and ability to get her own way make her an extremely difficult woman. Unfortunately, bullying affects a lot of people, adults often bully other adults. When bullying happens within the family, it is as unpleasant as it seems. One of the participants disclosed a disagreement with her mother-in-law regarding her decision to bring her child along to attend the lessons in the ALS program. She expressed, “....my mother-in-law scolded me because I bring my son just to attend the ALS session...” (*Housewife, 23*). This is very common as we follow a gender role, that married women should help the household chores and should stay inside the house while taking care of her children.

ALS completers face challenges like bullying or judgments; however, most of them use these as motivating factors that ignite their passion to enroll in the ALS program and finish their studies. They become strong and very determined to pass all the challenges as students in the ALS program. While some take it seriously, bullying can result in physical injury, emotional distress, and self-harm. One of the participants highlighted those individuals around her underestimated her abilities. She expressed, “My painful experience with the people who belittle me or bullies me” (*student, 21*).

Jones (2018) found out that many high school graduates believed that having their diploma wasn't sufficient to land a job that paid enough to make a living. But those without a high school diploma may discover that positions that don't require the completion of high school are more difficult and a lot less desirable than jobs that require their workers to have their diploma.

The scenario above depicts the extrinsic motivations that have influenced ALS completers. This extrinsic motivation is manifested by students who engage in learning activities solely with the aim of obtaining good grades and securing a promising future. Upon completion of the course, they anticipate a better future, the attainment of well-compensated employment, and the ability to provide for their family's needs.

Problem 2. What are the common challenges faced by ALS completers while taking the program?

When ALS completers were interviewed about the challenges they faced as ALS students, multiple factors emerged. However, four common themes emerged based on their shared experiences. These themes include financial stability, multiple responsibilities, curriculum and learning tools, and the learning environment.

Theme 1 Financial Instability

The primary challenge encountered by ALS learners is financial instability. Witnessing family members undergo severe crises can present a significant obstacle for ALS learners. Financial difficulties stand out as one of the most prominent factors faced by ALS learners, to the extent that some of them even go without breakfast.

These ALS learners confront disproportionate economic insecurity, making it challenging for them to meet basic needs and fulfill caregiving responsibilities towards their family members. Despite these hardships and experiences, they exhibit remarkable resilience. Student parents are driven to pursue higher education to improve their own lives and those of their children. They demonstrate exceptional performance in their academic pursuits, possess excellent time management skills, and are devoted parents and caregivers (Institute for Women's Policy, 2019). Furthermore, Kent (2018) suggests that life experiences can equip individuals with valuable time-management and multitasking abilities to cope with the demanding schedules of student mothers.

Theme 2 Multiple Responsibilities

Some participants revealed that the class schedule and time management posed significant challenges for them. Being married, having domestic responsibilities, and needing to work for a living made it difficult for them to balance their multiple obligations. ALS learners commonly face this challenge, yet they find ways to fulfill their various roles without sacrificing their familial responsibilities.

In the study conducted by Braund et al. (2020), it is mentioned that student mothers often exhibit the characteristic of grit. Student-mothers, through their grit, demonstrate the ability to begin with courage, cultivate resilience, develop endurance, and strive for excellence.

Table 2***ALS Completers Challenges while Taking the Program***

Themes	Example Statement	% of similar statements
Financial Stability	<i>"As a student, I experience financial problem within the family, prioritizing things between schooling and the needs of my grandchildren" (Marife, 45)</i>	70%
Multiple Responsibilities	<i>"...answering modules while taking care of the household chores is very challenging..." (student, 21)</i>	20%
Curriculum and Learning Tools	<i>"When I was working in a Carenderia as well as studying in ALS program. It was very challenging because I need to balance my work and in answering the modules" (Ana, 23)</i> <i>"One of the unforgettable moments I experienced in ALS learning is the struggle in coping with the refresher subjects" (housewife, 25)</i>	5%
Learning Environment	<i>"...the distance between my house and ALS center, were my common reasons why I could skip the sessions. It was very far, when it rained it was very cold and muddy, when it is sunny, it was very hot that it can burn my skin..." (student, 21)</i>	5%

Most of the ALS learners were student-mothers who explicitly indicated that having a child while attending school served as a motivation rather than a difficulty. Married students or student-mothers who juggled the responsibilities of being full-time mothers and wives while pursuing higher education experienced challenges in balancing their lives. According to the study by Walag et al. (2018), one in every 10 young Filipino women aged 15–19 either started childbearing or was pregnant with their first child. Consequently, young women between the ages of 20 and 24 were already mothers, which coincides with the typical college student age range. Education played a significant role in the lives of these young women, as the level of education they attained had a direct impact on their futures.

As the majority of ALS learners were student mothers, they often experienced restlessness and had to skip lectures due to the various demands arising from family and school activities. Some of them expressed difficulties in managing their time due to household chores, tending to their children's needs, and meeting school requirements. At times, they even had to bring their infants along to attend sessions. Furthermore, some participants highlighted that family issues, such as conflicts with their mother-in-law due to financial crises and the struggle of balancing work, study, and completing modules, posed significant challenges. Participants emphasized that taking care of their children while simultaneously addressing their modules was a highly demanding task.

It is indeed a challenging undertaking to fulfill dual roles as a full-time parent and student. In the study conducted by Torres et al. (2020), it was revealed that students who manage to attend classes despite numerous responsibilities at home commonly focus on the core idea of balancing school and family. Furthermore, inspiring others to persevere despite difficulties emerged as a typical core idea.

Theme 3 Curriculum and Learning Tools

Inadequate gadgets and poor internet connections pose common challenges for ALS learners in terms of communicating with their teachers and accessing the online materials required to complete the modules. Insufficient familiarity with the new curriculum and updated lessons also hinders their academic performance. One participant specifically mentioned struggling to grasp the new lessons and adapt to the learning materials

provided by the teacher. Additionally, due to unemployment, the participant's family cannot afford an internet connection that meets the necessary requirements. The participant stated, *"One of the unforgettable moments I experienced in ALS learning is the struggle in coping with the refresher subjects"* (housewife, 25)

In the regular curriculum, a high school student is expected to complete senior high school in order to obtain a diploma. However, in the ALS program, students are required to attend 10 months of schooling, after which their performance is assessed. If they pass the test, they are awarded an elementary or high school diploma. Consequently, ALS learners persist in their education despite the obstacles they face, as they aim to seize the opportunity to pursue higher education.

Theme 4 Learning Environment

In ALS, Community Learning Centers (CLCs) are utilized as versatile facilities for conducting classes. These CLCs can take the form of a Barangay Hall, a covered court, a waiting shed, or any vacant space near the learners' homes, as long as they provide chairs and tables and create a comfortable environment for effective teaching.

While a few of them expressed that their houses were located far from the ALS learning center, leading to feelings of laziness, or falling ill due to the harsh environment, they encountered various challenges. For instance, during heavy rainfall, the road would flood, turning it into a muddy path. On sunny days, the intense heat would cause discomfort, potentially resulting in sunburn, headaches, or nausea.

The ALS center is located near the highway or the Elementary School in Salay district. The majority of the students lived a great distance away; they ride a habal-habal (motorcycle) or they just walk for at least 5 kilometers every time they have classes. The researcher chose the ALS learners in Salay district because of their distinct characteristics, which are very valuable in conducting this study. Their eagerness to finish their studies despite their economic status and the distance of their own houses from the ALS learning center.

As a participant revealed that *"...the distance between my house and ALS center, were my common reasons why I could skip the sessions. It was very far, when it rained it was very cold and muddy, when it is sunny, it was very hot that it can burn my skin..."* (student, 21)

Problem 3. How do ALS learners cope with the challenges they experience while taking the program?

Indeed, based on the interviews, the experience of ALS completers in successfully finishing the program proved to be quite challenging. However, despite these challenges, they were able to overcome them and complete the program. Several factors emerged as coping mechanisms for the respondents, with four themes becoming evident: faith in God and self-confidence, time management, learning with fellow ALS learners, and the teaching and learning process within ALS.

According to the study conducted by Khan et al. (2019), several influential factors affect the home environment, such as the family's nature, the authority figure (head of the family), the educational background of the parents, the parents' attitude towards their children, and the family's financial situation. Some of the ALS learners, who are already mothers, have faced challenging circumstances in life. Nevertheless, they persevere in raising their children while pursuing their studies.

Theme 1 Faith in God and Confidence in Oneself

Some of them expressed their belief that their faith in God guided them, which they demonstrated through prayer, praising the Almighty, reading the Bible, and sharing their experiences. Additionally, believing in oneself and having the determination to pursue their dreams and goals in life, along with maintaining a positive mindset, were crucial factors that contributed to their successful completion of the ALS program.

Table 3*Coping Mechanisms of ALS completers when faced with challenges*

Themes	Example Statement	% of similar statements
Faith in God and Confidence in Oneself	<i>"Perseverance to finish my studies even if I experience hardships, I can finish the ALS program because I believed in myself" (housewife,23) "There are many factors that contributes to complete my ALS program, one is my will, positivity, and prayer in the Almighty God. I want to complete the ALS program to live in reality that lives bestowed after the completion of the program"(housewife,33)</i>	50%
Time Management	<i>"...managing my time between study and work, even if I experience hardships I will move forward together with the guidance of the Almighty God." (Ron, 33)</i> <i>"time management, patience, perseverance, Determination towards achieving my goals in life" (student, 21)</i>	20%
Learning with Fellow ALS Learners	<i>"...I feel great about collaborating with my classmates in accomplishing the task and activities" ... (student, 23)</i> <i>"As an ALS learner, I had the opportunity to learn and interact with other people that helps me to become mature and a better person." (John, 33)</i>	20%
Teaching and Learning process of ALS	<i>"...because ALS program is free to all and have the assurance that I can finish my studies and achieved my dreams in life" (Jeralyn,43)</i>	10%

One of the student mothers, who was religious and faithfully believed in God's blessings, enunciated, *"There are many factors that contribute to completing my ALS program; one is my will, positivity, and prayer in the Almighty God. I want to complete the ALS program to live in reality that lives bestowed after the completion of the program" (housewife,33)*

In the study conducted by Tucker (2021), it is suggested that various factors influence a student's ability to learn and engage with educators. These factors include their personality, family background, mental processes, learning styles, priorities, maturity levels, and academic aspirations (Tucker, 2021). Mental processes, being a significant aspect, greatly motivate students to complete their education. Positivity, as a form of mental process, plays a crucial role, as students believe in themselves and maintain resilience despite facing financial or emotional hardships.

Based on the responses of the student participants, they expressed the need to seek God's help as an instrumental source throughout their schooling journey. They acknowledged that God's divine power could alleviate their burdens both at school and at home. According to Smigelsky et al. (2017), mental health practitioners are encouraged to incorporate spiritual and religious practices into psychological interventions to assist individuals in coping with stress and trauma.

Religious coping mechanisms encompass various aspects of faith and spirituality, which involve finding meaning, purpose, and hope through a connection with God or gods, nature, or a life force. Engaging in faith-based and spiritual practices can serve as effective coping mechanisms by addressing fundamental human needs such as identity, self-care, community, belonging, and connection. The experiences of the aid workers in the study shed light on the persistent presence of stigma surrounding mental health challenges and the importance of this coping mechanism. To recognize the significance and usefulness of this psychological mechanism, there is a need for organizational and social cultural change.

In the study conducted by Ma and Wang (2022), they introduced a novel form of intelligence known

as spiritual intelligence, which has been relatively underexplored in the field of education. Spiritual intelligence assumes a crucial role in shaping and enhancing students' academic engagement within the classroom. With the guidance of God, this intelligence yields significant implications for individuals, as their understanding of intelligence and positive emotions provides valuable insights into their practices. By bridging one's mental and spiritual aspects, spiritual intelligence can uniquely contribute to students' educational journeys, influencing their performance and overall functioning. One student said, *"Perseverance to finish my studies even if I experience hardships, I can finish the ALS program because I believed in myself"* (housewife,23)

Theme 2 Time Management

Focusing on their school requirements to finish on time, effective time management. A participant opined that time management influenced their academic performance. The students in the ALS program have adopted effective strategies to cope with their challenges, such as efficient time management, taking breaks, and seeking support. These coping mechanisms involve the scheduling of module completion and household chores. Based on the students' feedback, it can be inferred that effective time management is instrumental in dealing with the difficulties of modular distance learning. By managing their time effectively, students have experienced a sense of satisfaction in completing their modules within the designated timeframe (Recaña, 2020). As one participant expressed, *"...managing my time between study and work, even if I experience hardships I will move forward together with the guidance of the Almighty God."* (Ron, 33)

A 21-year-old student mother mentioned that managing time is challenging, particularly when faced with parenting struggles and school projects simultaneously. She stated, *"...time management, patience, perseverance, determination towards achieving my goals in life"* (student,21)

Time management between studying and parenting, especially for student mothers, is not an easy task to handle. Their time is divided, and they must prioritize their responsibilities. Unfortunately, they face the challenge of balancing their time between school requirements and taking care of their families. Managing their time becomes difficult as they need to focus on their studies while fulfilling their roles as wives and mothers.

Theme 3 Learning with Fellow Learners

According to the study by Schwaba (2022), having friends has a significant impact on students' academic, socio-emotional, emotional, and health development. The study found that emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement directly influence student learning, which in turn affects their interest and academic performance. Thus, friends play multiple roles in shaping one's life experiences. In their simplest form, friendships provide companionship, while at other times they offer a sense of belongingness to students who navigate the unfamiliar territory of social connections. Friendships also provide various psychosocial benefits and opportunities for engagement. Consequently, friendships have a significant impact on students' experiences in school, fostering increased interest and enthusiasm. They encourage students to develop their learning behaviors and participate in study groups, thereby enhancing their cognitive understanding. One student said, *"... I feel great about collaborating with my classmates in accomplishing the task and activities"* ... (student, 23) Another stated, *"As an ALS learner, I had the opportunity to learn and interact with other people that helps me to become mature and a better person."* (John, 33)

Theme 4 Teaching and Learning Process

The majority of the participants believed that the flexibility of the ALS program offers conducive learning for student mothers, enabling them to successfully graduate. Another significant factor is that the ALS program provides free education, allowing underprivileged individuals to avail themselves of this opportunity. A participant revealed, *"...because ALS program is free to all and have the assurance that I can finish my studies and achieved my dreams in life"* (Jeralyn,43)

A few participants mentioned that, upon completing the ALS program, they would receive an official diploma as graduates. They perceived graduation as validation for all the hardships they endured. The ALS program caters to individuals who face challenges in physically attending daily school due to various reasons,

such as family, work, or distance to the ALS learning center. ALS learners firmly believe that education is the key to success and that numerous opportunities await them after completing the program. ALS serves as a practical alternative to traditional formal instruction, allowing students to attain basic education in a manner that suits their unique situations and needs. Furthermore, education plays a vital role in poverty reduction, hunger alleviation, and sustainable development. Under this flexible program, learning can occur anytime and anywhere, based on the learners' convenience and availability.

The ALS provides an opportunity for students who have informal or busy schedules to attain elementary and high school education without the requirement of daily classroom instruction, similar to the formal education system. When individuals embrace their ideals, often influenced by their environment, they have the potential to create a positive impact not only for themselves but also for others (Danish et al., 2020).

The increasing number of students from diverse backgrounds who take advantage of the ALS program offers more stable job opportunities and improved literacy rates after graduation. The ALS program is incredibly flexible, enabling students and student mothers to meet coursework deadlines and project completion requirements despite their hectic schedules.

In the study conducted by Enriquez (2020), it was discovered that emotional regulation and healthy emotional development are essential factors to explore in order to determine which emotions individuals benefit from. A lack of emotional regulation can lead to the emergence and persistence of various emotional problems, which in turn can impact cognitive, physical, and behavioral aspects of daily life (Alsancak, 2018). Additionally, individuals can develop positive or negative attitudes towards events and people based on their prolonged experiences with specific emotions (Yıldırım & Tabak, 2019).

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study these are the conclusions:

The majority of ALS learners were student mothers who encountered various challenges. However, their motivation enabled them to overcome these obstacles successfully. ALS learners are influenced by both positive and negative factors that drive their decision to complete the program. Positive factors include encouragement from family, spouses, and children, while negative factors include opposition from in-laws. Despite these factors, ALS learners choose to persevere and complete the program. It is worth noting that they exhibit a higher level of extrinsic motivation compared to intrinsic motivation.

ALS completers face common challenges related to financial stability, multiple responsibilities, curriculum and learning tools, and the learning environment. Despite these challenges, they demonstrate remarkable resilience and develop strategies to manage their time effectively and multitask due to their busy schedules as student mothers. ALS completers exhibit endurance and enthusiasm in overcoming the obstacles they encounter in life.

Faith in God and self-confidence, effective time management, learning with fellow ALS learners, and the teaching and learning process of ALS play significant roles in helping completers achieve their academic goals. Additionally, friendships formed at school have a direct impact on students' emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement, fostering increased interest in learning and facilitating good academic performance. Therefore, the ALS program's flexibility and provision of free education motivate ALS completers to remain determined to complete the program.

Recommendations

The findings of the study about the lived experience of the ALS completers reveal that:

The findings indicate that ALS completers were predominantly driven by extrinsic motivation.

However, they also faced challenges related to stressors and time management, which affected their ability to balance their responsibilities. To address this, an intervention plan could be implemented, such as conducting a one-day seminar on time management. This seminar would provide guidance to help them effectively manage their time and avoid conflicts between class schedules and work hours. The researcher recommends organizing workshops that specifically address the needs of student mothers, offering sessions on how to develop resilience and maintain productivity despite their demanding schedules. Additionally, the government should enhance support for ALS learners by ensuring access to affordable or free internet connections, computers, and online educational resources. These resources are crucial for their academic activities, particularly for those residing in rural areas who need to transition effectively to remote instruction.

An intervention plan should be implemented, integrating healthy living practices with spiritual guidance once a month. Administrators should conduct sessions addressing stressors related to both studying and parenting roles. ALS learners should receive support for coping with psychological crises, such as being bullied, through counseling services that offer both face-to-face and virtual support sessions. Group chats with other students can facilitate peer support and create a safe and compassionate space. These initiatives will help students feel acknowledged and supported by their teachers and peers, ultimately fostering their commitment to pursue further education.

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