

The Alternative Learning System – Balik-Paaralan Para sa Out-of-School Adults Program Vis-à-Vis Completers’ Perceptions, Experiences and Achievements

Mark G. Javillonar¹

mgjavillonar@psu.palawan.edu.ph
Palawan State University - Narra College of Community
Resource Development, Philippines

Elna Jay T. Elma²

ejelma@psu.palawan.edu.ph
Palawan State University - Graduate School, Philippines

Abstract This study was undertaken to assess the program implementation of Alternative Learning System – Balik-Paaralan para sa Out-of-School Adults (ALS – BP-OSA) in its one of selected school implementer through identifying the completers’ reasons for enrolling in the program, its effects on their lives, and their personal views toward the program. It utilized a descriptive-phenomenological research design involving 18 participants selected to participate based on their availability and capability. The participants’ reasons to enroll in and views toward ALS-BP-OSA, their experiences, and achievements have manifested the program’s positive effect on their lives as a whole. It is deemed suitable that the program must be implemented in a broader scope to reach out to out to all the out-of-school youths in the locality. Increasing the program’s fund allocation and continuous review and update of the curriculum are likewise suggested.

Keywords: *achievements, alternative learning system, completers, perceptions, experiences*

Introduction

Education is regarded to be the best way to improve one's social and economic status. It is a lifelong process to meet the ever-changing and increasing demands of one's life (Guiner, 2013). People will become literate, skilled, and life-ready through education, making a country a progressive one. Equally, education is a means for achieving a bright future, and people's achievements in life are attributed to their acquired education (Valera, 2015). In the Philippines, education has been deemed as the answer to the socio-economic problems encountered daily by ordinary Filipinos. Thus, education – a quality one, could end and solve the country's poverty, employment, and health issues (Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology [SEAMEO – INNOTECH], 2012). In June 2013, the most extensive education reform dubbed the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum, which encompasses kindergarten, six years of elementary education, four years of junior high school, and two years of senior high school, was implemented. The aforementioned reform manifests the collective efforts of the government, through the Department of Education (DepEd), to adhere to the mandate of its constitution, particularly Article XIV section 1, which says that “The state shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all” (De Leon, 199, p. 1). Then, the study about education – the curriculum, issues, and related topics, is indeed a significant undertaking.

Despite the continuous efforts of the Philippines' Department of Education (DepEd) to make education within reach to its citizen, there are still many Filipinos who are unable to attend and receive education forma and traditional due to various circumstances. For that reason,

the Alternative Learning System (ALS) was established by the government through the Department of Education to provide out-of-school youths a non-conventional and more accessible way to acquire primary education. With the K to 12 basic education curriculum implementation, alongside formal education, ALS, defined as a non-formal and informal system of learning equivalent and an alternative to traditional education, was further improved (Panaligan, 2016; SEAMEO – INNOTECH, 2012). With the implementation of the ALS program, Filipinos who are marginalized and disadvantaged could secure better employment opportunities and be given a chance to pursue higher education as they complete their primary education through ALS (Arzadon & Nato, 2015). This manifested the very reason or motivation of ALS learners enrolling in the program, which is to have the opportunity to secure jobs in the future (Valeza, Choi, & Santillana, 2017). Besides, the program improved the ALS completers' literacy and quality of life. They can now engage in jobs or business activities that may increase their financial stability and eventually develop a desire to pursue higher education (Apao, Dayagbil & Abao, 2014).

Though ALS programs have proved to have positive effects, problems or challenges are likewise present in the course of its implementation. Challenges like teachers' performance, facilities, and learners' materials were encountered on the ALS program implementation. Thus, a program review to improve its implementation is a need (Brania, 2018). Correspondingly, the measly allocation of the program's budget and the various social and economic circumstances and backgrounds of the ALS learners confronted the program implementations (Igarashi, 2018). Furthermore, another compelling problem the program implementation has faced is the dropping out incidences of ALS learners due to some reasons such as (1) the value of education may not be adequately instilled in them; (2)

strategies used in teaching are ineffective; and (3) they are already earning reasonable income from their present work as a consequence learning lessons for future jobs became pointless (Atilano et al., 2016).

The Alternative Learning System – Balik-Paaralan para sa Out-of-School Adults (ALS – BP-OSA) Program is a program under the supervision of the Bureau of Secondary Education (BSE), which was initially implemented in thirty-three (33) participating secondary schools nationwide. The ALS – BP-OSA, the only one of its kind in the Province of Palawan, Philippines, was governed by DepEd No.30, s.2002 and is intended to provide with a viable alternative to the existing formal education non-formal sources of knowledge and skills among the marginalized learners within the locality.

With the above-presented study findings on the implementation of the ALS program, an assessment of the school's Alternative Learning System – Balik-Paaralan para sa Out-of-School Adults (ALS – BP-OSA) Program is deemed necessary as it is one of the few school implementers of the program in MIMAROPA Region.

The assessment of Alternative Learning System – Balik-Paaralan para sa Out-of-School Adults (ALS – BP-OSA) program completer's reasons for availing the program, their lived experiences, achievements, and perceptions toward the program provides the basis for research-backed and factual-based policy and implementation review. With the help of this research's findings, policymakers and implementers will be able to formulate new policies and implementation guidelines that would eventually promote better alternative learning system programs.

The study is also significant to the existing and future students as it will provide them with a concrete example of

the program's effects on one's life. This might inspire the increasing number of out-of-school youths to strive more and complete their primary education despite seemingly unending life's struggles. Parents and students will be more informed of the existing schemes provided to those who cannot attend the traditional form of acquiring primary education, thus achieving the national agenda to educate and make all Filipinos literate. Having literate or educated people, societal and economic conditions amongst Filipino people will be assured of. Lastly, future researchers may be directed on what variables to consider when conducting a similar or related study or examining the current ALS program.

Purpose of the Research

The primary goal of this study was to assess how the school's Alternative Learning System – Balik-Paaralan para sa Out-of-School Adults (ALS – BP-OSA) was implemented through gathering the program completers', who served as participants, lived experiences, especially their perceptions toward the program, their experiences when enrolled in the program, and their achievements and status after enrolling in and completing the program. This assessment is deemed necessary to ensure that this particular program of the Department of Education is correctly implemented by its selected school implementers.

Methodology

Research Design

Since this present study attempted to describe the lived experiences and accomplishments of the ALS – BP-OSA program completers, a descriptive phenomenological research design was utilized. In this particular study, the

authors focused on identifying the program completers' reasons for completing their primary education through the school's ALS – BP-OSA, their experiences, and perceptions toward the program, and their life achievements.

Sampling Procedure and Participants

The researchers opted to involve its ALS – BP-OSA program completers from 2005 to 2017. The convenience sampling technique identified this participants where their availability and capability to participate in this study were considered. Participants' achievements following their program completion from the only school offering the program in the province of Palawan, Philippines were likewise considered.

Instrument

In gathering the data, the researchers interviewed the participants employing a structured interview questionnaire (Appendix A) which consists of guiding and probing questions about the participants' reasons for taking the program, how the program affects their lives, and how they perceive the program itself. The structured interview questionnaire was developed by the researchers and was subject to validation before its use.

Data Collection

After identifying the targeted participants, they were notified that they were selected to participate in the study. The authors explained its purpose, and instructed how they would respond to the interview questionnaire. The participants' responded by writing their responses to the carefully prepared essay-type questions. Their responses were later verified through a face-to-face oral interview where they were asked questions that allowed the authors to understand their written responses clearly.

Data Analysis

After completing the data gathering procedures, the author prepared and organized the gathered data, which was later reviewed and carefully analyzed by the author. The transcribed responses of the participants were systematically categorized according to themes and patterns, after which the core ideas of the participants' responses were extracted, categorized, and classified into fitting themes. Then, the researchers discussed the implications of their analyses. The researchers employed inductive coding as the specific themes of the transcribed data were taken from the participants' responses.

Findings

The following are the data extracted from the participant's responses gathered through an interview. Ten themes stem from the responses of the program completers in three categories specifically their (1) reasons for acquiring primary education thru ALS – BP-OSA, (2) its effects on the completers' lives, and their perceptions toward the program.

Participants' Reasons for Enrolling in the ALS Program

Going to a formal school requires the students to attend classes five days a week, which is impossible for some students; thus, many were forced to stop school. This is where ALS comes in as it provides non-formal and informal means of learning that substitutes the formal education (Panaligan, 2016; SEAMEO – INNOTECH, 2012). The reasons why the participants enrolled in the ALS program were collected to understand the program implementation better.

Table 1.

Summary of Findings of Reasons for Acquiring Basic Education thru ALS – BP-OSA

Themes	Core Ideas and Supporting Quotes
Poverty	<p>Core Idea</p> <p>Participants see education as a means to curve poverty and improve their current economic and social status, and that Alternative Learning System program is deemed a more practical and economical way of getting an education, the participants chose to enroll in it.</p> <p>Supporting quotes</p> <p>“Due to poverty, I enrolled in ALS”.</p> <p>“My parents cannot send me to school which made me work at an early age; upon hearing the program I enrolled on it to finish my basic education”.</p>
Employed	<p>Core Idea</p> <p>Participants were employed or already working before they entered the ALS program, since the program offers an alternative way of obtaining secondary education, they opted to avail said program.</p> <p>Supporting quotes</p> <p>“Because at a young age I needed to work and continue work to support our basic need, I cannot go to formal means of education so I enrolled at Alternative Learning System”.</p> <p>“I need to work as I already have a family to support, so going to school every day is no longer my option, so I enrolled at ALS program”.</p>
Peer/ relatives’ Influence	<p>Core Idea</p> <p>The decision of the participants to enroll in the program was due to their family and friends’ influences, urging, encouragements, and motivation.</p>

Supporting quotes

“With the help of my church mates, they encouraged me to dream anew and continue my studies.”

“I heard the good news from a friend that there is an ALS program intended for people like me who have been passed by a time.”

“One of my neighbors told me that a school in Puerto Princesa offers ALS for people like me who were not able to finish high school.”

“I was encouraged by my cousin who happened to be an ALS completer and told me that it is simple”.

long-time
dream

Core Idea

It has always been the participants’ dream to finish school and gain life successes, ALS – BP-OSA became their means or way in achieving said dreams.

Supporting quotes

“Despite everything that had happened, my dreams of curving poverty and succeeding did not slip out of my mind”

“I enrolled in ALS because I came to a realization that I don’t want to be left out and that I wanted to prove myself despite my transgressions”

The participants have their common reasons for obtaining their primary education through an alternative course of learning. Table 2 presents the four core ideas of participants’ responses categorized thematically as poverty, employment, peer or relatives’ influence, and long-time dream. Participants, on average, mentioned that due to poverty, they were forced to enroll in the program to complete their secondary education. Also, several answers revealed that since they are currently working and conventional class set-up is not possible for them, they opted to enroll in a

non-formal way of education, particularly the ALS. Another reason the participants gave why they opted to enroll in the ALS program was their peers, relatives, and neighbors. A participant claimed that his cousin, who happened to be an ALS completer, told him the simplicity and the advantages of the programs that made it possible for him to finish secondary education in a non-traditional way. Another participant narrates that he decided to enroll in ALS due to his churchmates' constant encouragement and that urged him anew and continue working to obtain a High School diploma. More so, some participants believe that hearing from a friend about the ALS program being offered by one of the schools in Puerto Princesa City intended for people like them who are old enough to go back to a conventional classroom setting immediately interests that made them decide to enroll. A cousin and other close relatives of the other participants made mention that ALS has played important roles in their journey towards engaging in the school's ALS program. The last reason why the participants opt to enroll in ALS is that just like other people, they also dream of graduating and earning a diploma, even at least a High School diploma, to dream bigger. Study findings of Cayabyab, Jacoba, Nalanga, Tamayo, and Sabas (2016) are in cognizance with these findings where ALS learners' decision to enroll in the program due to financial problems and lack of interest in schooling, encountered peer pressure and were encouraged by their teacher and mother.

The ALS – BP-OSA program implementation in one of the schools in the province paved the way for the participants to realize how important education is in fighting poverty and fulfilling their life's dreams. ALS would be their chance to do so. Because of its non-conventional mode of learning, ALS – BP-OSA became a better avenue for out-of-school adults to further their education, leading to improved literacy and betterment of one's quality of life. The reason for the participants of this study is that enrolling at the DepEd's

ALS program cemented the very essence of the program, which is to improve the recipients’ quality of life.

Effects of ALS – BP-OSA program to completers’ lives

Table 2.

The Effects of ALS – BP-OSA on the Completers’ Lives

Themes	Core Ideas and Supporting Quotes
Obtain basic education	<p>Core Idea</p> <p>Participants can finish secondary education.</p> <p>Supporting quotes</p> <p>“It is good that there is this ALS-BPOSA that I was given the chance to finish my secondary education”.</p> <p>“Through ALS, I was able to finish high school”.</p>
Higher education	<p>Core Idea</p> <p>Participants pursued higher education after completing the program and passing the ALS Accreditation and Equivalency Test.</p> <p>Supporting quotes</p> <p>“Having finished my secondary school thru ALS-BPOSA, I can enroll in college and am currently on my 2nd semester”.</p> <p>“Earning my high school diploma allowed me to pursue higher education”.</p> <p>“After completing my basic education through ALS, I enrolled at Palawan Technological College, Inc. where I earned Tour Guiding NCII”.</p> <p>“I am currently studying at Eulogio “Amang” Rodriguez Institute of Technology in Manila taking up BSE major in TLE”.</p>

“August 2012 marked the happiest day of my life as it was the time I graduate from the University of Makati. My ALS completion

Employment **Core Idea**

The employability of the participants has improved as they finish basic education through ALS.

Supporting quotes

“I continued my studies after ALS and was able to finish in 2011 which allowed me to go and work abroad”.

“Currently, I am working at Robinson’s Place Palawan as housekeeping personnel while pursuing technical-vocational course”.

“Here I am now, working as a cleaner at one of the biggest hospitals in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia”.

“After ALS, I was given a chance to work in a yacht to which I am grateful for”.

Undeniably, the success of a program would be measured with the results it yields. The completer’s notable accomplishments would be a great way to validate how the Alternative Learning System – Balik-Paalan para sa Out-of-School Adult (ALS BP-OSA) program affects the lives of its program completers. The participants of this study can realize the very essence of the program: to finish the primary education and go further on achieving their lives, such as getting a higher education and landing a decent job (Panaligan, 2016; SEAMEO – INNOTECH, 2012). All of the participants of this study shared that they can finish or are about to finish college or vocational courses or degrees. Some are even secured lucrative jobs at the Department of Education, Robinson’s Place, Araullo University, and even

abroad. The most notable accomplishment identified would be a participant pursuing and finishing AB Political Science at the University of Makati and later becoming a politician.

The completers' significant life accomplishments, as shown in Table 2, ascertained the findings of Apao, Dayagbil, and Abao (2014), where ALS completers' quality of life has improved after their ALS completion shown in the increase of their socio-economic stability. Indeed, the ALS – BP-OSA implemented by one of the schools in the province has positively affected the lives of its program completers as revealed thru their successes in life (Apao, Dayagbil, & Abao, 2014).

Completers' views toward the school's ALS – BP-OSA

Table 3.

Completer's Perceptions Toward ALS – BP-OSA

Themes	Core Ideas and Supporting Quotes
Source of opportunities	<p>Core Idea</p> <p>Lots of opportunities and life's chances were supposed to arise due to the Alternative Learning System.</p> <p>Supporting quotes</p> <p>“The ALS program is our source of strength and opened new opportunities for us”</p> <p>“I am thankful to ALS as it opened my mind to go back to school and with this, I was able to finish my studies and get employed which helped my family a lot”</p>
Life-changing	<p>Core Idea</p> <p>With the Alternative Learning System, participants believed that the quality of their lives, their social and economic status, and their future was given a different meaning.</p>

Supporting quotes

“Little did I know that by enrolling at ALS, my life would be changed and will have a meaning”

Avenue of
success

Core Idea

Participants deemed that Alternative Learning System is a means in achieving their lifelong dreams and succeeding in it.

Supporting quotes

“With the help of ALS, little by little I was able to reach my dreams”

“The ALS helped me realized that there is no reason for me not to succeed”

Table 3 shows three themes and core ideas of the participants’ perceptions toward the Alternative Learning System – Balik Paaralan para sa Out-of-School Adults program. Participants thought that the program provided them opportunities and second chances. It is life-changing and an avenue of success. Generally, participants believe that the ALS – BP-OSA program helped them realize their dreams to continue their education, get employed, and pursue their careers. Also, participants supposed that the program had opened doors of many opportunities for them as many could land a job, obtain further education, and curve poverty upon finishing secondary education through ALS – BP-OSA.

Generally, the participants view the ALS – BP-OSA as a vehicle for achieving their long-term goals such as pursuing higher education, alleviating poverty, providing a brighter future for their family, and having a stable livelihood source. It conforms with Salandanan (2003), who claims that education is an equalizer and means to escape poverty. Participants developed the necessary life

skills through their ALS education to recognize their full potentials and make them more functional and valuable community members.

Research Implications

The main objective of the conduct of this study is to assess the school's Alternative Learning System – Balik-Paaralan para sa Out-of-School Adults (ALS – BP-OSA) Program implementation through examining the ALS BP-OSA program completers' reasons for enrolling in ALS – BP-OSA program, its effects to their lives, and their perceptions toward the program implementation. This study is useful in conducting curriculum review as it may serve as a basis and guide in formulating research- and factual-based recommendations and improvement of the program.

Despite the different reasons of the completers for obtaining their secondary education through ALS – BP-OSA, it appears that their life experiences, hardships in getting a primary education through the standard and formal way, and their unwavering desire to have a brighter future significantly motivated them to do so. Considering how the Alternative Learning System was conceptualized as a program that caters to the learning needs of marginalized learners who, to some extent, cannot attend the formal way of education, the reasons that emerged from this study are considerably related or connected to its very purpose.

The effects of ALS in the lives of these these participants provided insights on how this program affects those who availed it. Seemingly, the program has positively changed the lives of the program completers as it produced graduates who were able to pass the ALS Accreditation and Equivalency Test and gain individual accomplishments. The participants' current socio-economic status, attributed to their

ALS program completion, manifested the relevance and the positive effects of the said program.

Findings of this study underscore the following: (1) participants almost have the same reason why they enrolled at the ALS – BP-OSA since all of the program completer-participants experienced hardships in getting their primary education in a standard and formal way, and they desire to get their needed education for them to have a brighter future; (2) the completers of Alternative Learning System implemented by the school in the province were able to continue higher education after their ALS completion. Most of them took vocational courses and immediately secured decent and fulfilling jobs locally and even abroad; and (3) the ALS is perceived by the completers as a means or an avenue in getting out of poverty. Their now brighter future-having a stable source of income or livelihood- was attributed to their ALS completion. Before their enrollment in the program, the participants were optimistic and certain about how ALS would change their future.

The program's implementation at one of the schools in the province is considered a success. It produced graduates who were able to pass the ALS Accreditation and Equivalency Test and gain individual accomplishments. The participants' current socio-economic status, which they attributed to their ALS program completion, manifested the relevance and the positive impacts of the said program.

Since the school where this study was conducted is the only school in the province offering the program, with few participants, the school should conduct a more detailed tracer study of their completers and maintain a database of their completers' identification post-ALS data for easier access and linkages.

With the positive reviews from the recipient of the Alternative Learning System, the authors suggest that the

program must be continued. The extent of its implementation must be widened to help the increasing number of out-of-school adults in Puerto Princesa City, the Philippines, obtain their much-needed education. Also, government funding for such a program must be increased so that the program can effectively and efficiently serve its purpose. The Alternative Learning System must be continually reviewed to update the curriculum and make it more suited to the ever-changing needs of the learners.



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Corresponding Author: mjavillonar@psu.palawan.edu.ph

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Mark G. Javillonar, Elna Jay T. Elma, PhD

Guide Questions for the Interview

Preliminary Questions:

- » Hello! How are you?
- » We are currently conducting a study about the Alternative Learning System – Balik-Paaralan Para Sa Out-Of-School Adults Program.
- » You have been identified to be our participant. Will it be all right if we ask you a few questions?
- » To properly document our conversation will it be okay if we record the entire conversation?

Core Questions:

Completers’ perceptions toward the school’s ALS – BP-OSA program

Q1: Can you tell us what you know about the ALS-BPOSA program?

Q2: When you enrolled in the ALS-BPOSA program, what do you have in mind?

Q3: How do you view the ALS – BP-OSA program after you finish high school through the program?

Reasons for enrolling in the ALS-BPOSA program

Q1: Why did you enroll in the ALS-BPOSA program?

Q2: What were your reasons for enrolling in the ALS-BPO-SA program?

Q3: *Don't you have any regrets about enrolling in the ALS-BPOSA program? Why?*

Effects of ALS – BP-OSA program to completers' lives

Q1: Indeed, the ALS – BP-OSA program has its effects, how does the program affect you?

Q2: Can you specify the effect of the ALS – BP-OSA program on your life?

Q3: Please share with us your experiences in connection with your enrollment in the ALS – BP-OSA program?

Q4: After you finished high school through the program, what are the achievements that you consider as notable or noteworthy? Why?

Q5: In general, do you think the ALS – BP-OSA program has positively affected your life? Why?

Parting words:

Thank you for sparing us your time. Rest assured that your responses will be treated confidentially and will be used only for this study. Your identity will also be protected. I hope you do well in your future endeavor. Thank you.