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LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM (ALS) SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS IN THE PROVINCE OF ALBAY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the lived experiences of fifty-two (53) Alternative Learning System (ALS) Senior High School (SHS) teachers in the province of Albay, Philippines, to gain insight into their personal and professional realities in delivering non-formal education. Anchored on a qualitative phenomenological approach and supported by quantitative profiling, the research investigated the teachers' demographic and professional profiles, including educational attainment, training attended, position, employment status, and Length of service, as well as their teaching practices, learner engagement, assessment methods, and stakeholder support. The study concludes that ALS SHS teachers serve as critical front liners in advancing inclusive education; yet, they continue to operate within constraints that hinder the full realization of the ALS program's objectives. Their lived experiences reflect both the promise and the struggles of alternative education in bridging gaps for out-of-school youth and adult learners. The study recommends enhanced professional development opportunities, including specialized training in andragogy and the institutionalization of a Bachelor of Science in ALS program, alongside stronger collaboration among stakeholders and increased recruitment of ALS teachers to address growing demand, all of which are vital to improving the quality, sustainability, and impact of ALS Senior High School implementation in Albay and beyond.

KEYWORDS: Alternative Learning System, Senior High School, lived experiences, professional development.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a critical driver of inclusive and sustainable development, serving both as a fundamental human right and a mechanism for socio-economic mobility. Despite

global gains in literacy, approximately 781 million adults worldwide remain unable to read or write, underscoring persistent gaps in adult and alternative education, particularly among marginalized populations (World Bank, 2018). Adult and non-formal learning programs continue to face challenges, including high opportunity costs, limited learner engagement, and uneven program effectiveness.

Aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which focuses on inclusive and equitable quality education, alternative learning pathways play a vital role in addressing educational exclusion. Globally, research highlights that successful alternative education programs adopt flexible, learner-centered, and context-responsive approaches that prioritize engagement and relevance [Karanikola, 2022]. However, barriers such as educational exclusion, the digital divide, and shortages of trained facilitators continue to constrain the reach and quality of these programs, particularly in developing contexts [UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2022; UNICEF, 2023].

In the Philippines, the Alternative Learning System (ALS) serves as a key second-chance mechanism for out-of-school youth and adults who are unable to access formal education due to poverty, work responsibilities, or social barriers. Institutionalized through Republic Act No. 11510, ALS offers flexible, community-based, and learner-centered modalities designed to promote equity, lifelong learning, and social inclusion. Despite its mandate, ALS implementation remains challenged by limited resources, social stigma, and inconsistent institutional support, particularly in geographically isolated and underserved areas.

Within this context, ALS Senior High School (SHS) teachers play a crucial yet demanding role. They work with highly diverse learners and must continuously adapt pedagogical strategies, assessment practices, and engagement approaches while relying on variable stakeholder support. Understanding their lived experiences is essential to strengthening ALS implementation and improving learning outcomes. Hence, this study examines the lived experiences of ALS SHS teachers in the province of Albay, focusing on their challenges, teaching practices, and professional aspirations, to inform policy enhancements and program improvements.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Senior High School teachers in the Province of Albay, focusing on their professional challenges, instructional strategies, and aspirations. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Identify the profile of ALS Senior High School teachers in Albay in terms of:
 - a. Educational attainment;
 - b. Relevant trainings and professional development;
 - c. Position title;
 - d. Employment status; and
 - e. Length of service in ALS.

2. Explore the lived experiences of ALS Senior High School teachers in the following areas:
 - a. Designation and appointment as ALS teachers;

- b. ALS learner recruitment, admission, and retention strategies;
- c. Learner engagement and motivation;
- d. Andragogical Teaching Strategies;
- e. Assessment methods and learner evaluation;
- f. Follow-up interventions for learners; and
- g. Stakeholder and community support.

3. Assess the aspirations and career goals of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Senior High School teachers, including their views on professional growth, job satisfaction, and recommendations for improving ALS implementation.

4. Propose a training program addressing the challenges encountered by ALS Senior High School teachers.

1.2 Literature Review

Rapid globalization and advances in information and communication technology (ICT) have significantly reshaped education systems worldwide, necessitating learners to develop adaptable skills that align with evolving labor market demands [Zulueta et al., 2021]. Beyond technical competencies, education fosters critical thinking, ethical values, and social cohesion, positioning it as a key mechanism for resilience and inclusive development in the face of global challenges such as inequality, poverty, and technological disruption.

Alternative Learning Systems in the Global Context

Alternative and non-formal education systems have emerged globally as essential responses to educational exclusion. Across ASEAN countries, programs such as Indonesia's Paket A–C, Thailand's Non-Formal and Informal Education (NFE), and Malaysia's alternative pathways emphasize flexibility and community-based delivery to accommodate marginalized learners [UNESCO, 2022; Suwannawong et al., 2022]. In Europe and Australia, alternative education addresses school dropout, immigrant integration, and lifelong learning through learner-centered curricula and strong community partnerships [OECD, 2022; Guenther et al., 2022]. In Africa, mobile and complementary education programs respond to poverty and displacement, although underfunding and teacher shortages persist [UNESCO, 2021]. Collectively, global evidence highlights that contextualized instruction, trained educators, and institutional support are critical to program effectiveness.

ALS as a Non-Formal Education Mechanism in the Philippines

In the Philippine context, the Alternative Learning System (ALS) serves as the country's primary non-formal education mechanism for out-of-school youth and adults. Anchored in the ALS K–12 Curriculum and institutionalized through Republic Act No. 11510, ALS aims to ensure educational equity through flexible, modular, and community-based learning modalities [DepEd, 2016; RA 11510, 2020]. Studies consistently report positive outcomes in learner access and engagement, while also identifying persistent challenges related to limited resources, social stigma, and uneven implementation across localities [Lozada, 2022; Bautista & Palisoc, 2022].

Teaching, Learning Strands, and Assessment Practices

Research indicates that ALS learners demonstrate strengths in oral communication and life skills development but continue to struggle in critical writing, numeracy, scientific literacy, and digital competencies (2024–2025 studies). While ALS learning strands promote personal growth and value formation, employment outcomes remain moderate, underscoring the need for strengthened academic support and labor market alignment. Assessment practices under ALS 2.0—portfolio-based, module-based, and performance-based—reflect a multidimensional and learner-centered approach aligned with diverse learner profiles [Labarrete, 2021].

ALS Teachers: Competence, Challenges, and Professional Development

ALS teachers play a pivotal role in program success, requiring adaptability in pedagogy, assessment, and learner engagement. Studies reveal that many ALS teachers are initially trained for formal education and face gaps in andragogy, assessment literacy, and resource availability [Saron, 2023; Loria, 2024]. Continuous professional development, specialized ALS training, and institutional recognition are consistently identified as essential to sustaining teacher motivation and instructional quality (Resurreccion et al., 2021; Francisco & Buri, 2024).

Learner Profiles, Engagement, and Support Systems

ALS learners commonly face financial constraints, competing work and family responsibilities, limited digital access, and social stigma (Reyes et al., 2021; PIDS, 2022). Research emphasizes that supportive learning environments, consistent teacher feedback, flexible scheduling, and Stakeholder involvement significantly influence learner retention and success [Abregoso & Dioso, 2024; UNICEF, 2021]. Community engagement and partnerships with local government units further enhance the delivery and sustainability of the program.

Synthesis and Research Gap

The literature affirms ALS as a vital second-chance education system that promotes inclusion and lifelong learning. However, gaps remain in understanding how ALS Senior High School teachers navigate instructional demands, learner engagement, assessment practices, and professional aspirations within localized contexts. Addressing this gap necessitates examining their lived experiences to inform responsive policies and strengthen ALS implementation at the grassroots level.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three complementary theories: General Systems Theory (Bertalanffy), Phenomenology (Husserl; van Manen), and Andragogy (Knowles). Together, these perspectives provide an integrated lens for examining the lived experiences of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Senior High School teachers in the Province of Albay.

General Systems Theory conceptualizes ALS as an interconnected system composed of teachers, learners, learning centers, instructional materials, and institutional support structures. The theory emphasizes that effective ALS implementation depends on the dynamic interaction of these components, where changes in one element influence overall program outcomes.

Phenomenology informs the study's focus on teachers' lived experiences by exploring how ALS educators perceive, interpret, and assign meaning to their professional roles, challenges, and aspirations. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences beyond observable practices and outcomes.

Andragogy provides the pedagogical foundation of ALS, recognizing adult learners as self-directed individuals whose learning is shaped by prior experiences and practical needs. ALS teachers apply andragogical principles through flexible, learner-centered, and contextualized instructional strategies.

Integrating these theories, the study views ALS teaching as a systemic, experiential, and adult-centered process. Anchored on this integration, the researcher advances the Transformative Systems Theory of ALS Teaching [Nidea, 2025], which posits that effective ALS instruction emerges from the interaction of systemic support, teachers' lived experiences, and transformative adult learning, positioning ALS teachers as key agents of educational inclusion and change.

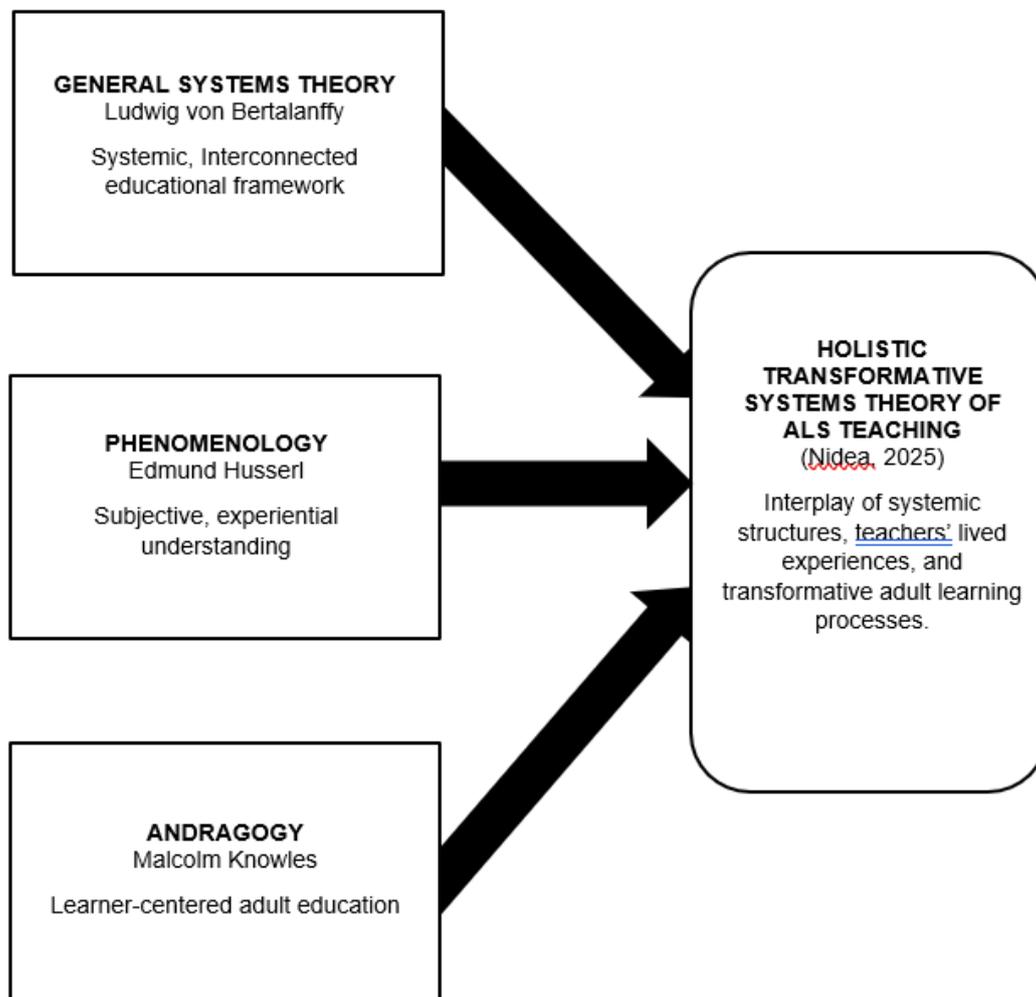


Figure 1|
Theoretical Paradigm

1.4. Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored on the Holistic Transformative Systems Theory of ALS Teaching [Nidea, 2025], which integrates General Systems Theory, Phenomenology, and Andragogy. The framework posits that the interaction of systemic structures, instructional practices, and reflective engagement shapes the lived experiences of ALS Senior High School teachers. Within this context, teachers function as transformative agents who respond to institutional demands while addressing the diverse needs of learners.

The Input includes teachers' demographic and professional profiles, ALS policies and guidelines, and the theoretical foundations guiding ALS instruction. These elements establish the contextual and institutional conditions influencing teachers' roles and professional development.

The Process involves the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis, respectively. This mixed-methods approach allows for the integration of measurable patterns and in-depth narratives to capture teachers' lived experiences comprehensively.

The Output consists of emergent themes describing ALS teachers' professional realities, challenges, practices, and aspirations. These findings generate evidence-based insights into how systemic and personal factors shape ALS teaching.

The Feedback component emphasizes the use of findings to inform policy refinement, teacher development, and program improvement. This cyclical Process supports continuous enhancement of the ALS system, ensuring its responsiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability.

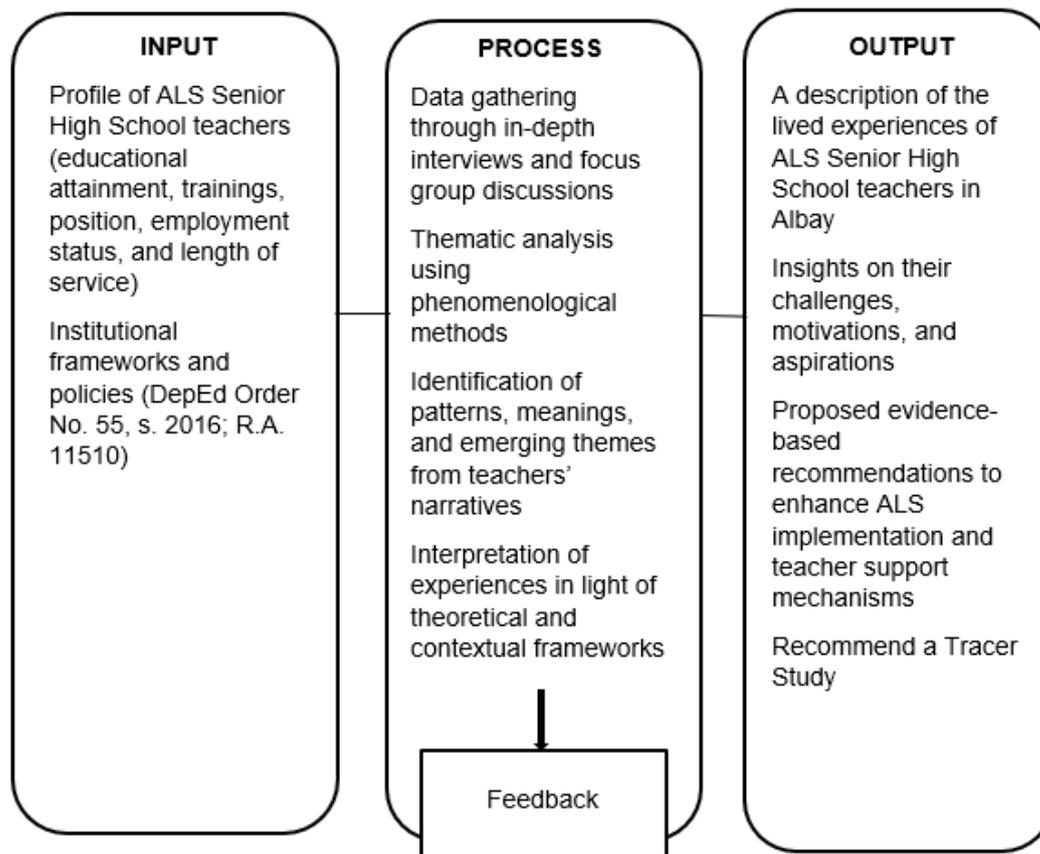


Figure 2.
Conceptual Paradigm

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods design combining descriptive quantitative and phenomenological qualitative approaches to examine the lived experiences of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Senior High School teachers in the Province of Albay. Quantitative data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire to profile teachers' demographic and professional characteristics, and to describe trends in instructional practices and challenges. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews to capture in-depth narratives of teachers' experiences, challenges, and aspirations. The respondents comprised 53 purposively selected ALS Senior High School teachers from the Schools Division Offices of Albay, Legazpi City, Ligao City, and Tabaco City. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. Qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. Findings from both data sets were triangulated to ensure credibility and to provide a comprehensive understanding of systemic, instructional, and experiential dimensions of ALS teaching. Ethical standards were strictly observed through the use of informed consent, confidentiality, and adherence to institutional and DepEd research guidelines.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The data depict a predominantly young, professionally qualified, yet developing ALS Senior High School teaching workforce in the Province of Albay. Of the 53 respondents, nearly half were deployed in SDO Albay, followed by Ligao City, Legazpi City, and Tabaco City, reflecting varying contextual demands and resource distribution across divisions. Most teachers hold a bachelor's degree (86.5%), primarily in education-related fields, while only a small proportion have completed master's studies, indicating adequate baseline qualifications but limited advanced academic attainment. Training participation is heavily concentrated on ALS curriculum implementation, with notable gaps in literacy, numeracy, assessment, innovative strategies, and life skills training. Professionally, the majority occupies mid-level positions (Teacher II) and hold permanent appointments, indicating workforce stability; however, opportunities for promotion and leadership roles remain limited. Length-of-service data reveal a relatively new cohort, with no teacher exceeding three years of service in ALS SHS, underscoring the program's recent expansion and the need for sustained mentoring. Demographically, the workforce is composed mainly of early-career teachers aged 30 and below and is predominantly female, mirroring national education trends. Overall, the findings indicate that while ALS SHS teachers in Albay are institutionally supported and academically prepared, their lived experiences are shaped by early-career challenges, uneven professional development, and the need for stronger systemic support to ensure program sustainability and effectiveness.

3.2. The findings reveal that ALS Senior High School implementation in the Province of Albay is predominantly sustained through DepEd-funded teacher deployment, with 90.3% of teachers formally assigned by DepEd, supplemented by LGU-funded (7.5%) and volunteer teachers (3.2%). This structure reflects institutional stability but also highlights the indispensable contributions of LGUs and volunteers in addressing staffing gaps, particularly in underserved and remote communities. Qualitative accounts indicate that many teachers were reassigned from regular SHS to ALS without prior specialization, resulting in initial adjustment challenges, role ambiguity, and perceived marginalization within school systems. Despite these challenges, teachers gradually developed a strong sense of purpose and professional fulfillment, underscoring ALS teaching as a transformative yet demanding role.

Learner recruitment relies heavily on DepEd and school endorsements (73%), followed by barangay referrals and social media promotion, emphasizing the importance of institutional legitimacy and community partnerships in attracting learners. However, recruitment effectiveness is constrained by stigma, economic pressures, family responsibilities, and learners' psychological hesitation to return to school. Community visits, though resource-intensive, remain crucial in rural and geographically isolated areas, reinforcing the need for sustained school–community collaboration.

In terms of learner engagement, modular learning (98%) serves as the backbone of instruction, complemented by interactive discussions, storytelling, experiential activities, and digital tools. While teachers employ diverse, learner-centered strategies, their effectiveness is limited by irregular attendance, low learner confidence, resource scarcity, and digital inequity. Similar patterns emerged in the use of andragogical strategies, where role-playing, blended learning, and peer

mentoring aligned strongly with adult learning principles. However, they were often constrained by time, attendance, and infrastructural limitations.

Assessment practices demonstrate a balance between traditional methods (quizzes/exams) and authentic assessments such as portfolios and performance-based tasks. Teachers value individualized and competency-based evaluation; however, workload, documentation demands, and learners' varied literacy levels hinder the consistent implementation of this approach. Reflective and peer-based assessments remain underutilized due to limited learner readiness and writing skills.

Follow-up interventions emphasize the holistic role of ALS teachers, with parental collaboration (100%), mentoring, digital monitoring, and differentiated instruction identified as key strategies for learner retention. Teachers frequently function as mentors, counselors, and community liaisons, addressing learners' academic, emotional, and socio-economic needs. Nevertheless, these interventions are challenged by limited time, emotional labor, inconsistent parental engagement, and inadequate resources.

Finally, stakeholder support is primarily anchored in DepEd and LGUs, with NGOs and private partners providing supplementary but inconsistent assistance. While training and community partnerships are evident strengths, teachers report persistent gaps in infrastructure, financial support, and technological resources. Overall, the findings affirm that ALS effectiveness depends on strong institutional backing, responsive community engagement, and sustained multi-sectoral collaboration. Teachers' lived experiences highlight both the resilience required in ALS teaching and the urgent need for systemic enhancements to ensure equitable, sustainable, and learner-centered ALS implementation.

3.3. Findings show that teachers' motivation to remain in ALS is primarily rooted in intrinsic satisfaction and a strong sense of social mission. Teachers consistently described the emotional and moral fulfillment they derived from witnessing learners' transformations, particularly among marginalized groups such as single parents, working students, and school dropouts. They perceived themselves not only as instructors but also as mentors, advocates, and agents of social change. This aligns with Cahapay (2021) and Abregoso and Dioso (2024), who emphasize that ALS teachers' commitment is driven by the visible impact of education on learners' lives and communities.

A second theme highlights personal and professional growth, where teachers reported enhanced patience, creativity, adaptability, and resilience due to the complex demands of ALS teaching. Many expressed aspirations to pursue graduate studies, specialize in inclusive education, or assume leadership roles such as ALS coordinators or training facilitators. These goals reflect a desire not only for career advancement but also for a meaningful contribution to the professionalization and sustainability of ALS. Similar findings were noted by Resurrection et al. (2021) and UNESCO (2020), emphasizing the importance of capacity-building and grassroots leadership in non-formal education.

Teachers also articulated a firm intention to remain in the ALS system long-term, viewing their service as a vocation rather than a temporary assignment. However, they emphasized the need for

more sustained and specialized professional development, citing gaps in ALS-specific pedagogy, assessment, and training on learner engagement. The proposal to institutionalize a Bachelor of Science in ALS emerged as a key recommendation to strengthen teacher preparation and system continuity.

The third theme centers on aspirations for systemic improvement. Teachers called for better facilities, updated and localized learning materials, stable employment conditions, equitable compensation, and stronger multi-sectoral collaboration. Financial insecurity and contractual arrangements were identified as persistent challenges affecting teacher morale. Moreover, respondents emphasized the need for enhanced learner support services, including counseling, psychosocial interventions, and livelihood assistance. Consistent with ASPBAE (2019) and Cagangi (2024), the findings affirm that wrap-around services and community partnerships are essential for learner retention and success in ALS.

Overall, the aspirations of ALS teachers reflect a deep commitment to transformative education. Their goals extend beyond individual advancement toward sustained system improvement, learner empowerment, and educational equity—positioning ALS teachers as central drivers of inclusive and community-responsive education.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

4.1. Teacher Profile and Professional Development: Most ALS Senior High School teachers are young, predominantly female, and hold permanent employment, with the majority having a bachelor's degree. While nearly all have received training on ALS curriculum implementation, participation in other essential areas, such as literacy, numeracy, life skills, and assessment, is limited. Teachers aspire to formal specialization in ALS education, highlighting the need for structured training and degree programs. Limited opportunities exist for career advancement, as most occupy the position of Teacher II.

4.2. ALS Implementation and Learner Engagement: Most teachers were officially designated by DepEd, with a few locally funded or voluntary. Learner recruitment utilizes multiple channels, including DepEd and school endorsements, barangay referrals, and social media. Low attendance, personal conflicts, and limited resources challenge retention and engagement. Teachers implement learner-centered strategies, balanced assessments, and varied interventions; however, emotional and psychological support remains insufficient. Stakeholder support is primarily provided by DepEd and LGUs, with NGOs and private entities contributing to training and materials.

4.3 Teacher Motivation and Aspirations: ALS teachers derive personal fulfillment from facilitating learner growth and view their roles as mentors and agents of community change. Professionally, they aspire to pursue advanced studies and leadership positions, including curriculum development and policy engagement, reflecting alignment between individual aspirations and systemic improvements in ALS.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department of Education is encouraged to strengthen professional development for ALS teachers through continuous training, scholarships, and specialized programs in ALS pedagogy, literacy, numeracy, assessment, flexible learning, digital skills, and psychosocial support. Formal ALS specialization tracks, such as a Bachelor of Science in Alternative Learning System (BS-ALS), should be institutionalized, along with competency standards and mentorship programs to enhance teacher expertise and professional growth. Learner recruitment and retention can be improved through strengthened collaborations with barangays, LGUs, NGOs, and community partners, conditional support for high-risk learners, updated learning modules, and integration of digital, experiential, and flexible teaching strategies. Formal mental health services, counseling, mentoring, and community-based opportunities should also be provided to support the wellbeing of learners. To promote teacher welfare and system sustainability, contractual and volunteer teachers should be regularized with equitable compensation, clear career progression pathways, manageable workloads, ongoing capacity-building and potential access to an ALS Teacher Welfare Fund for professional and instructional support.

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