Problems Encountered by Alternative Learning System (ALS) Teachers in Cotabato Division: Basis for a Strategic Plan

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Abstract

Aim: This study discussed the common problems encountered by ALS teachers in Congressional District I in the Province of Cotabato in the implementation of ALS programs.

Methodology: Both Quantitative-Qualitative method of research was employed using the phenomenological tradition. The researcher used the concurrent timing wherein both quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time. A descriptive approach was employed to assess the extent of the problems encountered in the implementation of ALS programs with the use of survey questionnaire as well as Key Informant Interview (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

Results: The results revealed that the ALS teachers have been experiencing problems like lack of learning facilities and materials, difficulty in the integration of learning competencies within and across learning strands, absenteeism of learners, difficulty in the use of differentiated instruction to address the multi-level group of learners, unstable peace and order, and minimal support from Barangay Local Government Unit (BLGU) and Municipal Local Government Unit (MLGU). As to the extent of the problems encountered by ALS teachers, the results indicated that the problems are felt slightly serious in terms of assessment and evaluation as well as in terms of content and instruction. However, ALS teachers are encountering serious problems in terms of resources. This result shows convergence with the qualitative data that "lack of learning facilities and materials" is the topmost problem encountered by ALS teachers in the implementation of ALS programs with twenty-five (25) out of thirty (30) ALS teachers citing the same problem. Moreover, there is no significant differences in the extent of the problems encountered by ALS teachers when they are grouped according to their characteristics which simply means that the ALS teachers have felt at the same extent the problems regardless of their highest educational attainment, years of experience as ALS teachers, and relevant trainings attended. A proposed strategic plan was then developed to address problems encountered in the implementation of ALS programs.

Conclusion: The results showed that the problems encountered by ALS teachers are basically the same regardless of their highest educational attainment, years of experience as ALS teachers, and relevant trainings attended. As such, a unified strategic plan was developed to help them address the problems and improved the implementation of ALS programs.

Keywords: Alternative Learning System, Problems Encountered, Strategic Plan

INTRODUCTION

In a world characterized by the presence of advanced information and communication technologies, literacy is an urgent necessity. It empowers and nurtures societies as well as contributes to human and national development. Through quality education, individuals are able to understand and study real life situations and develop confidence. Education also provides a strong base for rational value-oriented and nation-building progress.

In spite of the invaluable contribution of education in harnessing the potentials of Filipino youth and in providing them the opportunity to participate productively in nation building, numerous youth had not finished basic education or attended school. To address this alarming problem on increasing number of out-of-school youth, the Philippine government through the Department of Education has implemented the Alternative Learning System (ALS) as a crucial component of Philippine education to provide every individual with access to quality basic education in a mode that fits their distinct situation and needs. It provides a practical option to the existing formal instruction and opens more educational opportunities for Filipino citizens of different interests, capabilities of demographic characteristics, socioeconomic origins and status as well as addressing the needs of marginalized groups.

The current incarnation of the ALS includes two core components, the Basic Literacy Program (BLP) and the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Program. The former aims to eradicate illiteracy among out-of-school youth and adults by teaching

basic literacy and numeracy. The latter targets people who are functionally literate but did not complete basic education, and it offers programs at both elementary and secondary levels. The goal of the A&E programs is to equip participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to pass the national A&E exam, which provides an academic credential equivalent to formal school's diplomas in elementary and junior high school education. Obtaining this credential enables ALS participants to apply to higher education and training institutions or to jobs that require a high school education (Philippines Education Note, 2018).

The ALS has made substantial progress toward its objectives, especially in recent years, yet it faces several persistent challenges. The diverse circumstances of participants and potential participants greatly complicate ALS implementation and outreach efforts (Philippines Education Note, 2018). In fact, recent studies have found out that there were many challenges in ALS implementation such as absenteeism of the learners, provision of more learning facilitators, Community Learning Centers, insufficient and irrelevant learning materials, lack of facilities and equipment, lack of integration of livelihood and employment opportunities, and lack of interest (on the part of the out-of-school youth) (Carag, 2013). Overcoming these challenges requires adequate programmatic resources combined with sound technical design. Thus, the researcher investigates on the problems encountered by ALS teachers in the implementation of ALS programs in Cotabato Division in view of designing an action plan on how to address them.

Objective

This study was conducted to determine the problems encountered by ALS teachers in the implementation of ALS in Cotabato Division.

Specifically, it answered the following questions:
1. What are the characteristics of the ALS teachers in terms of:
   a. Highest educational attainment
   b. Years of experience as an ALS teacher
   c. Relevant trainings attended
2. What are the common problems encountered in the implementation of ALS program?
3. What is the extent of the problems encountered by ALS teachers in the implementation of ALS in terms of:
   a. Content and instruction
   b. Resources
   c. Assessment and evaluation
4. Is there a significant difference in the extent of the problems encountered by ALS teachers when they are grouped according to their characteristics?

5. What strategic plan can be proposed based on the result of the study?

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed both Quantitative-Qualitative method of research using the phenomenological tradition. The researcher used the concurrent timing wherein both quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time. A descriptive approach was employed to assess the extent of the problems encountered in the implementation of ALS programs with the use of survey questionnaire. It also employed descriptive qualitative method particularly phenomenology. As cited by Bantulo (2016), phenomenology is concerned with the study of human perception of events or phenomena from the actual happenings in the real world. It is reliving the experiences of the participants involved in the study and going deeper into their thoughts, identifying the essence of the experience as described by the participants, through lengthy discussions (Campbell, 2011; Creswell 2007; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007; Willis, 2007).

Population and Sampling

The research was conducted in the 17 school districts comprising Congressional District I in the Province of Cotabato, Philippines. A total of 30 ALS teachers were chosen as respondents of the study using universal sampling technique. Moreover, in the qualitative data collection, 6 ALS teachers undergone Key Informant Interview (KII) and 10 respondents were included in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

Instrumentation

In this research, the researcher utilized a self-made survey questionnaire which was designed to assess the extent of the problems encountered in the implementation of ALS programs. The item statement measured each indicator with the use of 4-point scale. The instruments were subjected to a face content validity and reliability test. The reliability rating was .968 which means that the instruments were highly reliable. No item was removed or rephrased. In addition, structured questionnaires were also prepared by the researcher for the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interview (KII) to determine the problems met by the respondents in the implementation of ALS programs.

Ethical Consideration

The study used informed consent from the respondents and applied confidentiality of information. There were letters of permission personally handed to superiors/leaders in the

gathering of data. Respondents' consent involved in the research was considered adequate.

Data Collection

In gathering the appropriate data for the study, a self-made survey questionnaire which was designed to assess the extent of the problems encountered in the implementation of ALS programs was distributed to 30 ALS teachers who were chosen as respondents of the study using universal sampling technique. In the qualitative data collection, 6 ALS teachers undergone Key Informant Interview (KII) and 10 respondents were included in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

Data Analysis

Once data collection was completed, the analysis was conducted. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics like frequency and percentage to describe the characteristics of the respondents; weighted mean to describe the extent of the problems encountered by ALS teachers in the implementation of ALS programs; and t-test and analysis of variance to test the significant differences in the extent of the problems encountered by ALS teachers when grouped according to their characteristics. The respondents' responses on the common problems they encountered in the implementation of ALS programs and projects were subjected into analysis, comparison, and categorization.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Highest_Educational_Attainment	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bachelor's Degree	14	46.7
MA Units	9	30.0
MA Graduate	7	23.3
PhD/Ed.D Units	0	0.00
PhD/Ed.D Graduate	0	0.00
Total	30	100.0
Years of experience as ALS teacher	Frequency	Percentage (%)
3yrs & below	10	33.3
4-6 yrs	4	13.3
7-9 yrs	7	23.3
10 & above	9	30.0
Total	30	100.0
Relevant trainings attended (related to ALS)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1 Training	2	6.7
2 Trainings	4	13.3
3 Trainings	9	30.0
4 Trainings	1	3.3
More Trainings	14	46.7
Total	30	100.0

Characteristics of ALS Teachers

Table 1. Characteristics of ALS Teachers

Table 1 presents the characteristics of ALS teachers in Congressional District I in the Province of Cotabato. In terms of highest educational attainment, only 23.3% of them have their masters degree; 30% of them have earned units for masters degree and the majority of them have earned Bachelor's degree which comprise 46.7%. As to their years of experience as ALS teacher, 33.3% of them have rendered their services in ALS for three years and below; 30% have rendered their services in ALS for ten years and above; 23.3% have rendered their services in ALS for seven to nine years; and the remaining 13.3% have rendered their services in ALS for four to six years. Moreover, 80% of the ALS teachers have attended three and even more relevant trainings in ALS.

Common Problems Encountered in the Implementation of ALS

The ALS teachers have also expressed the common problems they have encountered in the implementation of ALS programs and projects. The gathered responses were subjected into analysis, comparison and categorization. It is primarily grouped according to its category on how many times the same idea, notion, or responses is cited as seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Common Problems Encountered by ALS Teachers

Identified Problem	No. of ALS Teachers Citing this Problem	Rank
1. Lack of learning facilities and materials	25	1st
2. Difficulty in the integration of learning competencies within and across learning strands	20	2nd
3. Absenteeism of learners	10	3rd
4. Minimal support from BLGU/MLGU	3	6th
5. Unstable peace and order situation	5	5th
6. Difficulty in the use of differentiated instruction to address the multi-level group	7	4th

of learners

The most common problem encountered by the ALS teachers in the implementation of ALS programs and projects is "lack of learning facilities and materials". Twenty-five ALS teachers cited this problem emphasizing that most of them do not have permanent Community Learning Center (CLC); instead, they are conducting learning sessions at the barangay hall, chapel, purok, nipa hut, and sometimes under the shade of trees with no available blackboards, tables and chairs for the learners. ALS teachers are also citing that they do not have enough learning modules that are aligned to the new ALS curriculum, and other instructional materials like teacher's guide and computers for learning strand six, which is digital citizenship.

Even in the typical general education classrooms materials tend to be limited in scope. Commonly found supplies such as textbooks may be supplemented with student workbooks or worksheets (Peters, 2017). In the case of the ALS teachers, they are further challenged to adopt localized instructional materials to suit to the localized setting of learners. ALS teachers need to be creative and innovative in their approach considering the diverse status and learning styles of the learners (Tindowen et. al., 2017). Also, with the advent of internet that has introduced improvements in technology, communication and online entertainment, it also incredibly useful for education purposes as well. Widespread use of the internet has opened up a substantial amount of knowledge to a much broader range of people than ever before (Wright, 2012). ALS teachers must therefore maximize the use of internet for educational purposes especially in those learning areas, like learning strand six – digital citizenship, wherein learning modules are non-existent. Even prestigious universities have in fact use the internet to supplement their lessons.

Next is the ALS teachers' "difficulty in the integration of learning competencies within and across learning strands". Unlike in the formal school where teachers are task to unpack the competencies that learners may be able to master them, teachers in ALS are advised to integrate learning competencies within and across learning strands so that all competencies are covered within the ten months program. Moreover, seamless integration of learning competencies is a challenge without compromising the mastery of competencies that the learners should attain. In fact, Moralista and Delariente (2014) stated that the increasing learning competencies are among the major problems encountered by ALS teachers as there are advance and slow learners affecting the interference of cognition abilities to task-related factors such as complexity of a task or lesson.
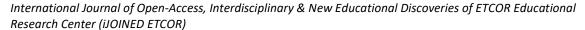
Third is "absenteeism of learners". Instead of attending the learning session, some learners opted to work in order to earn and support the basic needs of the family. In the long run, some learners become disinterested to attend ALS program and focus more on earning for a living.

In the study of Atilano, et al (2016), they asserted that instructional managers should look into the factors contributing to the learning motivation of the ALS learners in involving themselves in school or any instructional program. Alternative Learning System providers should also revisit and review the programs and balance out the relationship of the learners' ability and appropriateness, complexity and demands of the tasks given to them as the relationship of these factors are crucial in bridging the willingness of the learners needed for a successful achievement outcome. They even suggested that a career guidance program be provided to the ALS learners to bridge education with worthwhile employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in order to increase the chances that students will get more encouraged to do their best in achieving the equivalency certificate.

Fourth is the ALS teachers "difficulty in the use of differentiated instruction to address the multi-level group of learners". Most of the ALS teachers are handling in a learning session two or three groups of learners, that is, Basic Literacy; Accreditation & Equivalency Elementary level; and Accreditation and Equivalency Junior High School level. Aside from that, ALS teachers also must have to consider the Individual Learning Agreement of learners addressing what the learners want to learn, how they want to learn and when they want to learn them. Indeed, ALS teachers need to strategize to address the varied learning needs of the learners. Indeed, these realities challenge an educational system that assumes that everyone can learn the same materials in the same way and that a uniform, universal measure suffices to test student learning (Gardner, 2013). The broad spectrum of students, and perhaps the society as a whole, would be better served if disciplines could be presented in a number of ways and learning could be assessed through a variety of means.

Fifth is the "unstable peace and order situation". Due to unstable peace and order situation both teachers and learners could not come together for a learning session. Hence, having a face to face as mode of delivery is disrupted.

Lastly, there are also ALS teachers who experienced "minimal support from Barangay Local Government Unit (BLGU)/Municipal Local Government Unit (MLGU). Support coming from the local

government is very important in the delivery of ALS programs and projects since ALS caters the deprived, depressed and underserved learners and yet it doesn't have enough funds to support all its clienteles' needs. It is through the support coming from LGUs and other stakeholders that ALS programs and projects become successful. Indeed, our educational goals will never be achieved without the support coming from our stakeholders.

The Extent of the Problems Encountered by ALS Teachers

Table 3: The Extent of the Problems Encountered by ALS Teachers

Category	Mean	Description	Interpretation
Assessment and Evaluation	2.28	To a slight extent	Slightly Serious
Resources	2.53	To a great extent	Serious
Content and Instruction	2.41	To a slight extent	Slightly Serious
Grand Mean	**2.41**	**To a slight extent**	**Slightly Serious**

Legend: 1.00 – 1.75 Not a problem; 1.76 – 2.50 Slightly serious; 2.51 – 3.25 Serious; 3.26 – 4.00 Very serious

Table 3 shows the extent of the problems encountered by ALS teachers in the implementation of ALS in terms of assessment and evaluation, resources and content and instruction.

Based on the results, the problems encountered by ALS teachers in the implementation of ALS in terms of assessment and evaluation as well as in terms of content and instruction are slightly serious. However, the results of the study revealed that ALS teachers are encountering serious problems in terms of resources. The overall mean score is 2.41 which fall under slightly serious. This means that among the various problems encountered by ALS teachers, serious consideration must be given to provision of needed teaching-learning resources so as not to compromise the implementation of ALS programs and projects.

Significant Differences on the Extent of the Problems Encountered by ALS Teachers When Grouped in terms of their Characteristics

Table 4 presents the significant differences on the extent of the problems encountered by ALS teachers in the implementation of ALS programs and projects. The results revealed that in terms of assessment and evaluation, resources, content and instruction do not have any significant differences when grouped in terms of their characteristics. This means that the ALS teachers have felt at the same extent the problems regardless of their highest educational attainment, years of experience as ALS teachers, and relevant trainings attended. This is because all of them have to face the challenges brought by the enhancement of ALS curriculum.

Table 4. Significant Differences on the Extent of the Problems Encountered by ALS Teachers When Grouped in terms of Characteristics

Highest Educational Attainment			
Category	***df***	***F* value**	***p* value**
Assessment and Evaluation	2	1.072	0.356
Resources	2	1.747	0.193
Content and Instruction	2	2.193	0.131
Years of Experience as ALS Teacher			
Category	***df***	***F* value**	***p* value**
Assessment and Evaluation	3	2.002	0.138
Resources	3	0.659	0.585
Content and Instruction	3	0.076	0.972
Relevant Trainings Attended			
Category	***df***	***F* value**	***p* value**
Assessment and Evaluation	4	1.364	0.275
Resources	4	1.855	0.150
Content and Instruction	4	0.461	0.763

*$p < .05$

Developed Strategic Plan

Based on the gathered data, the researcher developed a strategic plan for an enriched intervention and enhanced instruction in Alternative Learning System.

Goal: Improvement of the delivery of ALS programs and projects		
Objectives: To be able to design a plan of action that addresses the common problems encountered by ALS teachers in the implementation of ALS programs and projects.		
Strategies	Activities	Responsible Persons
1. Utilization of existing ALS materials and other supplementary learning materials	1.1 Identification of least learned competencies 1.2 Look for topics from the existing ALS materials and other supplementary learning materials dealing with such competencies	ALS Teachers
2. Development of community based learning materials and other supplementary learning materials	2.1 Conduct Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions on the development of lesson exemplars with integration of competencies within or across learning strands as well as the employment of differentiated instruction to address multi-level group of learners	EPSVR/ALS EPSA ALS Teachers
3. Engagement to various need-driven activities to retain and win the learners back to the literacy sessions	3.1 Track learners attendance 3.2 Conduct home visitation to learners with on and off attendance to learning sessions 3.3 Conduct counselling and individual tutorials to learners needing such interventions 3.4 Let the learners who could no longer attend the learning sessions to	ALS Teachers
	have it continued through modular approach	
4. Establish linkaging and networking with LGUs, NGOs and other stakeholders	4.1 Submit proposals to LGUs, NGOs and other stakeholders to gain support 4.2 Provide stakeholders with accomplishment reports to attract more supports	ALS Teachers

Conclusion

This study investigated the common problems encountered by ALS teachers in Congressional District I in the Province of Cotabato. The results revealed that the ALS teachers have been experiencing problems like lack of learning facilities and materials, difficulty in the integration of learning competencies within and across learning strands, absenteeism of learners, difficulty in the use of differentiated instruction to address the multi-level group of learners, unstable peace and order, and minimal support from Barangay Local Government Unit (BLGU) and Municipal Local Government Unit (MLGU). As to the extent of the problems encountered by ALS teachers, the results indicated that the problems are felt as slightly serious in terms of assessment and evaluation as well as in terms of content and instruction. However, the results of the study also revealed that ALS teachers are encountering serious problems in terms of resources. This result shows convergence with the qualitative data that "lack of learning facilities and materials" is the topmost problem encountered by ALS teachers in the implementation of ALS programs with twenty five (25) out of thirty (30) ALS teachers citing the same problem. Moreover, there is no significant differences in the extent of the problems encountered by ALS teachers when they are grouped according to their characteristics which simply means that the ALS teachers have felt at the same extent the problems regardless of their highest educational attainment, years of experience as ALS teachers, and relevant trainings attended.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations were drawn:
1. In the absence of learning modules aligned to the new ALS curriculum, ALS teachers must utilize the existing ALS materials and other supplementary learning materials to ensure mastery of learning competencies among learners.

2. ALS teachers, with the help of Education Program Supervisor for ALS and Education Program Specialist II for ALS, must develop lesson exemplars with integration of competencies within or across learning strands and with the use of differentiated instruction to address multi-level group of learners.

3. ALS teachers must engage in various need-driven activities to retain and win the learners back to the literacy sessions.

4. ALS teachers must strengthen linkage/network with LGUs, NGOs and other stakeholders

5. Strategic plan as proposed in this study shall be implemented in Congressional District I

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