



COVID-19 and its impact on Adult Education and Learning: A scoping research in the UK, Afghanistan and the Philippines

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1. The Alternative Learning System (ALS)

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) was established to address one of the concerns in the Philippine education system. The ALS, with its non-formal and informal sources of knowledge and skills, is considered a parallel learning system that allows Out-of-School Youths and Adult (OSYA) learners to complete basic education other than the formal education offered in schools.

The Republic Act 9155, as its legislative framework, centres in prioritising Non-Formal Education (NFE) and Informal Education (INFED). Based on the two concepts and as its term suggests, ALS serves as a substitute for formal learning. It provides basic and functional literacy skills in a more practical option that suits the circumstances and needs of OSYA Learners. Both the NFE and INFED, being sub-components of the Alternative Learning System, occupy a strategic place in the development of the Philippine national development since they have the potential to develop a more context-appropriate and socially inclusive Filipino basic education system (Pauso, 2010).

1.1 Out of School Youths and Adults (OSYA)

Based on the figures reported by the Learner Information System (LIS) of the Department of Education (DepEd), it takes on a challenging task to reach out to over 20.7 million Filipinos who have not completed Basic Education. In particular, there are 19 million adults, and over 3.5 million out-of-school children and youths in this representation. Majority of this overall segment constitutes the out-of-school children ages 6 to 14 years old who are not attending school. In percentage, this represents a total of 9.1% of the 39 million population ages 6 to 24 years old (APIS, 2017). This segment also includes the out-of-school youth ages 15 to 24 years old who have not finished any college or post-secondary course, and are not working.

According to the survey conducted by APIS (2017), the main reasons these OSYA are out of school have less to do with the accessibility of schools, constituting only a 0.9% distribution. To be precise, the majority of the distribution goes with marriage/family matters as the main reason why they are out of school, represented by a 37% overall percentage. This is followed by lack of personal interest (24.7%), high cost of education/financial concern (17.9%), employment/looking for work (8.4%), and illness/disability (7.8%) respectively.

It is vital to point out that even as gains in access to education have been achieved, DepEd has yet to reach a significant portion of universal enrollment from OSYA (Pauso, 2010).



1.2 Legislative and Policy Framework of ALS

The 1978 Constitution of the Philippines stipulates that it is among the duties of the State to “protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education for all and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all.” To be more specific, Article XIV, Section 2, Paragraph (1) declares that the State shall establish, maintain and support a complete, adequate and integrated system of education relevant to the needs of the people and society; and paragraph (4) concisely encourages non-formal, informal and indigenous learning systems as well as self-learning, independent and out-of school study programs particularly those that respond to community needs.

1.2.1 Republic Act 9155 (Governance Act for Basic Education of 2001)

To uphold this Constitutional provision, and to address the various situations of OSYA, the Philippine Government, drafted Republic Act 9155 or *An Act Instituting a Framework of Governance for Basic Education, Establishing Authority and Accountability, Renaming the Department of Education, Culture and Sports as the Department of Education (DepEd) and For Other Purposes*.

R.A. 9155, as a framework of governance, declares that the State must ensure to make education accessible to all Filipinos. In particular, the State must render a free and compulsory education in the elementary and high school levels. Moreover, the education shall include the Alternative Learning Systems for Out-of-School Youths and Adult Learners. According to RA 9155, it shall be the goal of basic education to provide them with adequate skills, knowledge, and values to become self-reliant, productive, and patriotic citizens.

To expound, R.A. 9155 states that the school, as the heart of the formal education system, shall have “*a single aim of providing the best possible basic education for all learners.*” The Act stipulates that basic education shall begin at the national level, where regions, divisions, schools, and learning centers under the Department of Education (DepEd) as the field offices, were given a task to translate the policy and principle into programs, projects, and services fit for the needs of the learners. Alongside, the State must encourage local initiatives and ensure the values, needs, and aspirations of a school community for the children, and out-of-school-youth and adult learners (OSYA).

The purposes and objectives of this Act are as follows:

- a) To provide the framework for the governance of basic education which shall set the general directions for educational policies and standards, and establish authority, accountability, and responsibility for achieving higher learning outcomes;
- b) To define the roles and responsibilities of, and provide resources to, the field offices which shall implement educational programs, projects and services in communities they serve;



- c) To make schools and learning centers the most important vehicle for the teaching and learning of national values and for developing the Filipino learners love of country and pride in its rich heritage;
- d) To ensure that schools and learning centers receive the kind of focused attention they deserve and that educational programs, projects and services take into account the interests of all members of the community;
- e) To enable the schools and learning centers to reflect the values of the community by allowing teachers/learning facilitators and other staff to have the flexibility to serve the needs of all learners
- f) To encourage local initiatives for the improvement of schools and learning centers and to provide the means by which these improvements may be achieved and sustained; and
- g) To establish schools and learning centers as facilities where schoolchildren are able to learn a range of core competencies prescribed for elementary and high school education programs or where the out-of-school youth and adult learners are provided alternative learning programs and receive accreditation for at least the equivalent of a high school education.

RA 9155 also defined several critical features of ALS such as:

- a) **Informal Education (INFED)** is a lifelong process of learning by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences at home, at work, at play, and from life itself.
- b) **Non-Formal Education (NFE)** is an organized, systematic, educational activity carried outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to a segment of the population.
- c) **Learner** is an individual seeking basic literacy skills and functional life skills or support services for the improvement of the quality of his/her life.
- d) **Learning Facilitator** is the key learning support person who is responsible for supervising and facilitating the learning process and activities of the learner.
- e) **Learning Center** is a physical space to house learning resources and facilities of a learning program for out-of-school youth and adults. It is a venue for face-to-face and multimedia learning and activities and other learning opportunities for community development and improvement of the people's quality of life.

The first four sections of RA 9155 recognize the role of ALS as complement to the formal education system in order to achieve the stated Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 of inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. On the other hand, Section 5 of RA 9155 set forth the principle of shared governance within the regions, divisions, schools, and learning centers, *i.e.* a principle which recognizes that every unit in the education bureaucracy has a particular role, task, and responsibility inherent in the office and for which it is principally accountable for outcomes. Section 5 states the intent to effectively operationalize ALS. In adherence to RA 9155, the process of democratic consultation must be observed in the decision-making process appropriate at all levels. As such, feedback mechanisms must be executed to ensure the coordination and open communication among the field offices. Additionally, the principles of accountability and transparency shall be operationalised, and the communication channels of field offices shall be strengthened to corroborate the flow of information and linkages within the field offices.



1.2.2 Executive Order No. 356 (The Bureau of Alternative Learning System: BALS)

The Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS) of the Department of Education (DepED), in its present form, was created in September 2004 under Executive Order No. 356 – *Renaming the Bureau of Non-Formal Education to Bureau of Alternative Learning System*. The Bureau of Alternative Learning System has been mandated to cover both non-formal education (NFE) and informal education (INFED).

E.O. 356 emphasized that the BALS must “provide a systematic and flexible approach to reach all types of learners outside of the formal school system.” Significantly, the first part of the Omnibus Policy Guidelines of BALS declares that R.A. 9155 recognizes the role of ALS as a parallel education system that serves as an alternative to learners outside the formal school system. Its policy initiative is to address the gap in R.A. 9155 – the operationalisation of ALS. It specifies the target beneficiaries of BALS namely, the ‘marginalized’ sector, *i.e.* those who are not reached by the formal education system, regardless of age, gender, economic status, ethnicity, and religion.

Particularly, E.O. 365 states the mandate for the renamed Bureau, as follows:

- a) Address the learning needs of the marginalized groups of the population including the deprived, depressed, and underserved citizens;
- b) Coordinate with various agencies for skills development to enhance and ensure the learners’ employability, efficiency, productivity, and competitiveness in the labor market;
- c) Ensure the expansion of access to educational opportunities for learners of different interests, capabilities, demographic characteristics, and socio-economic origins and status; and
- d) Promote certification and accreditation through alternative learning programs – both non-formal and informal in nature.

E.O. 365 formalized this role by expanding the mandate from vocational and equivalency testing to include informal education; thus, led to the establishment of BALS. As a Bureau, it is still in the process of institutionalising its scope (ALS), as well as identifying and segmenting its target beneficiaries (OSYA learners). Currently, the organizational structure of BALS includes the Central Office *plantilla* items, where most of the ALS field implementers were designated from formal schools.

1.3 ALS Learning Facilitators

ALS enlists the service of Learning Facilitators to deliver integrated Basic Education and Skills Training, and enhance the overall interactive teaching-learning experience. They can be grouped into three main categories: 1) DepEd-delivered or directly carried out by DepEd ALS implementers, such as Mobile Teachers and District ALS Coordinators who are both employed by DepEd and hold regular teacher items;; 2) DepEd-procured or carried out by service providers contracted by DepEd through the Schools Division Superintendent, such as NGOs, literacy volunteers, faith-based organizations, and civil society organizations; and 3) Non-DepEd-financed or the implementation of ALS programs by non-DepEd organizations, such as local



government units (LGUs), NGOs, and other government organizations, international donor agencies, faith-based organizations, and individuals on a voluntary basis using their own resources.

ALS Major Learning Facilitators are 1) ALS Mobile Teachers (MT) and 2) District ALS Coordinators (DALSC). Most of them are regular public school teachers assigned by DepEd Schools Divisions to teach in ALS-EST. They either have experience or are currently working as ALS Mobile Teachers (MT). It is as well vital to point that they undergo the process of hiring as stipulated in D.O. 7, s. 2015 (Hiring Guidelines for Teachers).

The Learning Facilitators, together with Tech-Voc Teachers, are expected to work together to deliver the two major components of ALS, namely, NFE and INFED. To address the needs of the learners, they are expected to:

- a) Contextualize the instruction
- b) Integrate compatible learning competencies
- c) Co-develop teaching and assessment materials
- d) Foster a holistic developmental environment for the learners

Moreover, they were given a task to stimulate the learning engagement, as the main partners of the learners in the process. They co-direct and co-manage the learning path of the learners. The Learning Facilitators are in charge of instruction, coordination, and administration.

1.3.1 District ALS Coordinator (DALSCs)

To be more specific, the District ALS Coordinator (DALSC) serves as the resource person, facilitator, and moderator during orientations, seminars, and training. They are expected 1) to coordinate and participate in the planning for development and implementation of ALS projects; 2) prepare action plan in coordination with the ALS ES I and Public Schools District Supervisors (PSDS); 3) prepare performance targets; 4) prepare project proposals to source out funds in coordination with the ALS ES I and Public Schools District Supervisors (PSDS);. They must also 5) provide technical assistance and 6) establish linkages and networks with LGUs, NGOs, and other stakeholders vis-a-vis 7) use various strategies in raising awareness on the ALS programs/projects.

In terms of instructional materials development, the DALSCs are expected to 1) prepare and develop community based-learning materials and other supplementary learning materials; 2) adapt existing ALS materials and other supplementary learning materials by localizing them; 3) adopt existing ALS materials and other supplementary learning materials; and lastly, 4) translate ALS learning materials and other learning materials into the local language of the learners or communities where he/she conducts learning sessions as the need arises.

Equally important, in relation to learning sessions, the DALSCs are tasked to 1) determine learning needs of learners using the Individual Learning Agreement (ILA) and then conducts evaluation to determine the entry and exit level of learners using the Functional Literacy Test



(FLT) and other ALS assessment tools; 2) conduct learning sessions using ALS core modules and other materials for at least 10 months in a year; 3) devise plans and implements them in order to sustain gains of learners from the ALS programs; 4) conduct home visits, individual tutorials, counseling and other need-driven activities in an effort to retain and win the learners back to the literacy sessions; 5) assist in the preparation of learning portfolio; 6) benchmark best practices of ALS Mobile Teachers in other divisions/other regions; 7) monitor and evaluate the learners' learning progress and the ALS programs/projects within the district; and lastly, 8) coordinate and conduct action research and development activities.

1.3.2 ALS Mobile Teachers (MTs)

ALS Mobile Teachers (MT), as the main maneuvers of learning, are expected to 1) coordinate with community leaders to identify potential learners and organize learning groups for ALS Basic Literacy Program, Accreditation and Equivalency System and other ALS projects; 2) conduct literacy mapping; 3) advocate ALS programs and networks with other government organizations, non-government organizations and other peoples organizations for potential support and/or partnerships; e.g. establishing a CLC; and 4) establish functional networking and reporting system.

In terms of the learning sessions, the MTs are tasked to 1) conduct learning needs of learners using the Individual Learning Agreement (ILA); 2) conduct evaluation to determine the entry and exit level of learners using Functional Literacy Test (FLT) and other ALS assessment tool; 3) conduct learning sessions using ALS learning modules and supplementary materials for at least 10 months in a year; 4) devise plans and implements them in order to sustain gains of learners from the ALS programs; 5) conduct home visits, individual tutorials, counseling and other need- driven activities in an effort to retain and win the learners back to the literacy sessions; 6) assist in the preparation of learning portfolio; 7) benchmark best practices of ALS Mobile Teachers in other divisions/other regions.

Significant as well, in terms of instructional materials development, the MTs were given the responsibility to 1) prepare and develop community-based learning materials and other supplementary learning materials; 2) adapt existing ALS learning materials and other supplementary learning materials by localizing them; 3) adopt existing ALS learning materials and other supplementary learning materials; and lastly, 4) translate ALS learning materials and other learning materials into the local language of the learners or communities where they conduct learning sessions as the need arises.

It is important that Learning Facilitators are flexible, and open to diversity and varied circumstances of ALS Learners. The Learning Facilitators are expected to employ the life-skills approach to teaching, and recognize and build upon the prior learning of Learners. Additionally, they conduct learning sessions in communities where the Learners are located. The lessons are either conducted one-on-one or in groups.

1.4 ALS Classroom-Setting: Community Learning Centres (CLCs)

Contrary to the Formal Education system which is classroom-based, ALS NFE and INFED happens outside the classroom, particularly, a community-based one. The learning sessions,



facilitated by District ALS Coordinators and Mobile Teachers are conducted at a Community Learning Center (CLC). CLC is a term used to any place where ALS classes or learning sessions are held and is categorized into five types: 1) makeshift meeting place that is temporarily borrowed from the barangay or a private property to hold classes, such as a chapel or a multi-purpose hall with tables and chalkboard; 2) semi-concrete structure made of light materials (nipa, soft wood) that is solely intended for ALS learning sessions with basic learning equipment and appliances; 3) barangay learning center made of concrete materials that is solely intended for ALS learning sessions with basic furniture and appliances; 4) two or three-story building that is fully equipped with basic furniture and advanced ICT technologies that is solely dedicated for ALS learning sessions; and 5) a community set-up where supplementary materials are transported from house to house or borrowed from the CLC.

The Community Learning Centers (CLC), also known as *“Punlaan ng Karunungan sa Pamayanan,”* plays a vital role in providing functional literacy, vocational skills, and work-related skills to OSYA learners. CLCs are considered a focal place of *lifelong learning opportunities*. UNESCO defines CLC as a “local educational institution outside the formal education system, for villages or urban areas, usually set up and managed by local people to provide various learning opportunities for community development and improvement of people's quality of life“. It is built on the premise that community participation is the key to empower communities and address local development challenges.

The CLC is envisioned as the main place where the community can gather for literacy classes, community meetings, seminars and training on non-formal and informal programmes, public information and dissemination, and community development. It is the centre that physically connects the other government agencies and NGOs to execute projects that will further benefit the community. CLCs objectives are as follows:

- a) To help in the development of the livelihood of citizens through the programmes and projects of the Alternative Learning System (ALS);
- b) To strengthen and broaden community links for mutual support;
- c) To develop the capability of those who lead the community or barangay.

1.5 ALS Instructional Materials

The ALS utilises learning modules as the core instructional materials. Each module contains a set of objectives, learning activities, and pre- and post- tests. It is noteworthy that for the basic and lower elementary learners, the modules come with a Facilitator's Guide. On the other hand, the modules for advanced elementary and secondary were designed for independent learning.

ALS learning sessions employ supplementary learning materials developed mainly by ALS Learning Facilitators. Learning Facilitators were given the task to design the instructional materials — for they know which IMs will suit best for the local need and context of their respective CLCs. In collaboration with various organizations, both local and international, the DepEd-BALS was able to adapt and produce print and non-print learning materials to supplement the existing modules in the conduct of ALS learning sessions. The supplementary materials are vital in the conduct of ALS learning sessions. Additional materials make learning sessions more



effective by reinforcing newly acquired literacy skills. IMs also serve as springboards to new lessons; thus, making learning more fun and interesting. The use of multimedia also gives both Facilitators and Learners a chance to access new information and technology (IT), and activate multisensory learning. Notably, all ALS learning resources are available in the DepEd Learning Resources portal.

1.6 ALS Curriculum

In 2019, the DepEd has implemented the Enhanced Alternative Learning System 2.0. Based on DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2019, this shall be an enhanced ALS curriculum harmonizing the policies of ALS to K-12 Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) to ensure a strategic, efficient, and effective implementation.

1.6.1 ALS Six Learning Strands

Although the ALS curriculum is aligned with the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum (BEC), it uses a contextualized non-formal curriculum that focuses on **six learning strands** or learning areas, namely, communication skills (both in English and Filipino); scientific literacy and critical thinking; mathematical and problem solving skills; life and career skills; understanding the self and society; and digital citizenship. These strands are equivalent to the “subjects” in the formal school system.

The six learning strands are as follows:

- **Learning Strand 1: Communication Skills (English)/Communication Skills (Filipino)** - includes the five macro skills namely, 1) listening purposively and critically; 2) speaking clearly and appropriately; 3) reading to process and critically use information from a wide range of written materials and other forms of media; 4) expressing one’s ideas and feelings clearly and effectively in writing; and 5) viewing to demonstrate critical understanding and interpretation of visual media. The core of LS1 draws themes based on grammar and oral communication.
- **Learning Strand 2: Scientific Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills** - includes scientific and critical thinking skills arranged in hierarchy, patterned to the key stages of learning, such as observation, identification, classification, differentiation, investigation, and analysis of Science-related categories. These categories are Biology, Geology, Chemistry, Physics, Personal and Community Health, Agriculture and Industry, Environmental Management.
- **Learning Strand 3: Mathematical and Problem Solving Skills** - includes the core competency of scientific literacy and numeracy, particularly, openness to change, awareness of options, ability to make critical and informed decisions, curiosity, inventiveness and creativity, scientific thinking, logical reasoning, spatial intelligence, and future orientation. This strand also includes competencies, such as the ability to: 1) organize new knowledge, 2) gather and analyze information, 3) categorize things and ideas, 4) make comparisons, 5) infer principles from evidence, 6) critique one’s own thinking, 7) evaluate options as a basis of decision-making, 8) apply the scientific process, 9) seek explanations for applying the scientific process, 10) support assertions with evidence overcome obstacles and find a better way of doing things, and lastly, 11) apply



principles to draw conclusions. Specifically, this strand draws themes based on Basic Mathematics, Elementary Algebra, Geometry, and Statistics.

- **Learning Strand 4: Life and Career Skills** - covers ability to 1) earn a living through employment/self-employment or entrepreneurship; 2) sustainable consumption (reduction of wasteful expenditure and wise consumption/utilization of resources); 3) conserving resources for future generations; and 4) productivity and using work related skills, knowledge, values and technology to maximize one's efficiency and performance as a productive citizen. In particular, this strand draws themes based on Employment, Entrepreneurship, Productivity, Understanding the market system, Sustainable Consumption.
- **Learning Strand 5: Understanding the Self and Society** - intends to help ALS learners acquire a positive sense of self and social responsibility that will lead them to the development of their potentials. This strand will enable them to live together harmoniously in the contexts of their family, local community, and country, as well as be able to participate as a member of the Southeast Asian region in an increasingly global community. This strand draws themes based on Intrapersonal Relationship (Positive Sense of Self) and Development of One's Potential, Interpersonal Relationships (Family Solidarity and *Pakikipagkapwa*), National Identity, Knowledge, Acceptance, Respect and Appreciation of Diversity, Knowing and Caring for our Environment, Local Governance, Civil and Political Rights and Corresponding Responsibilities, Nonviolent Resolution/Management of Conflict and Peace, and Global Awareness, Interdependence and Solidarity.
- **Learning Strand 6: Digital Literacy** - involves a new range of ICT-related skills to increase the learners basic skills in ICT use and digital literacy. This strand seeks to equip ALS Learners with critical knowledge, skills, and values to be able to use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) related-tools. This strand draws themes based on Digital Concepts, Digital Operations and Management, Digital Applications, Digital System Network, Digital Devices, and Digital Ethics.

1.6.2 ALS K to 12 Key Stages of Learning

The Department of Education (DepEd) developed the Enhanced ALS 2.0 which includes offerings in Basic Literacy (BL), Lower Elementary (LE), Advanced Elementary (AE) Level, Junior High School (JHS), and Senior High School (SHS). ALS K to 12 Key Stages of Learning was divided into four categories: 1) Basic Literacy Level which refers to the first ALS key stage for learners who cannot read or write; 2) Non-Literate Learners refer to learners with little or no exposure to literacy in their first or second language; 3) Neo-Literate Learners refer to learners with minimal exposure to literacy in their first language. They often lack confidence in their literacy skills; and lastly, 4) Post-Literate Learners refer to learners who are able to read with comprehension, to compute and solve simple numeracy problems and ability to express ideas in writing and speaking in one's language.

Particularly, the Basic Literacy (BL), equivalent to Kinder to Grade 1 of the BEC, develops the basic literacy skills of reading, writing, viewing, speaking, listening, and numeracy. Meanwhile, in the Lower Elementary (LE) level, equivalent Grade 2 to 3, learners are encouraged



to begin learning independently. The Advance Elementary (AE) level, on the other hand, parallel to Grades 4 to 6, requires the development of learning competencies of the formal basic education. The Junior High School (JHS) level, advances to gaining learning competencies which have a higher degree of complexity parallel to Grades 7 to 10. Finally, the Senior High (SHS) level ensures that the learners will be equipped with competencies needed for employment, entrepreneurship, middle level skills, and tertiary education.

1.7 ALS Learning Assessment

The six learning strands of the new ALS K to 12 BEC stipulates a development on ALS learning assessment. With this, the ALS Task Force has developed a new Functional Literacy Test (FLT). The revised and new FLT has five components based on the six interrelated learning strands of the K to 12 BEC: the Demographic Information Sheet (DIS), Listening and Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Numeracy. Once their current level has been identified, the ALS learning facilitator will guide each learner in designing the Individual Learning Agreement (ILA) that specifies one's learning goals, activities and strategies, and their timeline.

Through this, the learning process is believed to be more individualised with students becoming active agents of their own learning. The competencies they acquire will then be evaluated through various teacher and learning assessments, as well as their own portfolio that is based on their ILA. Once their learning goals and competencies have been met, they can already take the A&E Test for certification.

In the implementation of ALS 2.0, all learners shall be assessed using the revised FLT and existing Assessment for Basic Literacy (ABL) (for BL learners only) adjacent to an assessment and documentation of their prior learning. Documentation of the learner's progress is a must for this will be the basis for remediation and future lesson planning.

However, it is vital to point that under enhanced ALS, there have been significant changes in the summative assessment. These changes declare that the A&E certification process will be expanded to include Portfolio assessment and Project-based learning and assessment, as previously mentioned. Therefore, learners interested in seeking an A&E elementary or secondary equivalency certification will be required to submit a presentation portfolio containing selected learning outputs as evidence of mastery of competencies from the six (6) learning strands of the new ALS K to 12 BEC and a learning project, in addition to taking the A&E test. It is proposed that the percentage weights between the A&E test and portfolio will be 80% for the A&E test, and 20% for the portfolio. The contents of the portfolio may include:

- Written samples (journal entries, poems, and essays)
- Quiz and test results
- Completed module activities
- Self-assessment tests and assignments
- Personal reflections



Equally important, the A&E exam will be based on the competencies set forth by the Enhanced ALS K to 12 curriculum. The exams will be administered by the Bureau of Education Assessment (BEA). Additionally, there will be micro-certification for basic education and tech-voc skills and competencies. The Certificate of Rating (COR), side by side with the EL certificate/JHS certificate of completion, will be issued by BEA, duly signed by the Schools Division Superintendents (SDSs).

With the skills included in their curriculum, ALS graduates can go back to formal school, enrol as first year students in a college or university, take middle or higher-level skills training, apply for a job, or become an entrepreneur.

1.8 ALS Programs

DepEd, through the Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS), is currently implementing two major non-formal education programs: Basic Literacy Program (BLP) and the Accreditation and Equivalency Program (A&E), alongside the Life Skills for Work Readiness and Civic Engagement Program as part of the informal education opportunity.

1.8.1 Basic Literacy Program (BLP)

The Basic Literacy Program (BLP) aimed at boosting the literacy skills of out-of-school youths and adults, particularly through developing their basic literacy skills of reading, writing, and numeracy. It is an intensive community based-training that will enhance their ability to read with comprehension, solve problems using basic arithmetic skills, and creatively think and process logical reasoning. To be more specific, the target learners of BLP are the following:

- Non-literates
- Functional literates
- Out-of-School Youths and Adults (OSYA)
- Elementary and high school dropouts
- Qualifiers of the Philippine Educational Placement Test (PEPT)
- Individuals who opt not to go back to formal school system

BLP employs three distinct states of the learning process, namely 1) Facilitator Aided Instruction, 2) Transition to Self-Learning Stage, and 3) Self-Learning Stage. Equally important, Learning Facilitators utilizes 1) Learning Group Sessions, 2) Organization of Learners, 3) Identification of Learning Goals, 4) Preparation of Individual Learning Agreement (ILA), 5) Variety of Presentation/Strategies, and 6) Follow-up Visits/Home Visits.

In terms of the transition to self-learning, i.e. autonomous learning, the processes observed are the following: 1) Learners are expected to use the modules independently (alone), followed by a 2) discussion by group, and lastly, 3) a formulation of Individual Learning Agreement. BLP follows face-to-face learning, modular approach, study groups, print and audio-



based learning, tutorial mentoring and home visits, and self and interactive learning as teaching methods. Equally important, the following are the available learning resources for BLP learners:

- 21 modules for the basic reader stage
- 32 modules for the neo-literate stage
- 15 modules for the post literate stage
- 33 modules are in Braille

Each learning module is accompanied by a Facilitator's Guide. The mode of language instruction can be in English, Filipino, or the community's local dialect, i.e. Tagalog, Ilocano, Pangasinense, Kapampangan, Bicolano, Hiligaynon, Cebuano, Waray, Maranao, Tausug, Maguindanaoan.

1.8.2 Accreditation and Equivalency Program (A&E)

The Accreditation and Equivalency Program (A&E) provides an alternative platform of learning for OSYA, ages 15 years and above, who are basically literate but have not completed the 10 years of basic education as mandated by the Philippine 1987 Constitution. This program provides a second chance to OSYA to complete basic education, but are either school drop-outs or unable to avail financially the educational opportunities of the formal school system.

A&E program visions to empower the Filipino OSYA to continue their education. In this way, they are expected to have a platform to improve their quality of life. Its mission is to provide learning opportunities by which OSYA can gain adequate knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to become a contributing member of the society. A&E aims to:

- Provide a system for assessing levels of literacy and other non-formal learning achievement covering basic and functional education skills and competencies designed to be comparable to that of the formal school system;
- Offer an alternative pathway by which out-of-school youth and adults earn an educational qualification comparable to the elementary and secondary school system,
- Enable the out-of-school youth and adults to gain reading, writing and numeracy skills to meet their learning goals as they define them to gain the skills they need to improve their economic status and function more effectively in society.

1.8.3 Life Skills for Work Readiness and Civic Engagement Program

The Life Skills for Work Readiness and Civic Engagement Program, rolled out in 2019, is anchored under the goal of informal education which is to intensify the second chance education program. It is developed under the Mindanao Youth Development project of the United States Agency for International Development(USAID).

To be specific, the program aimed at addressing the mismatch between skills taught in school and skills demanded in the workplace that left young Filipinos experiencing difficulties in finding jobs, starting their own businesses, and contributing to their communities. Building up



on its partnership with MYDev and USAID, DepEd is mainstreaming the program to develop skills and competencies of the target learners such as communications, leadership, workplace safety, and financial literacy skills. In MYDev, Life Skills include two sets of skills namely, a) Work Readiness Skills, i.e. work-related skills needed by young people to be successful at work in the formal, non-formal, and informal sectors; and b) Civic Engagement Skills, i.e. values and skills for living in and helping to improve quality of life in our community and overall society

1.8.4 Other ALS Programs

a) Program for Indigenous Peoples: Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd)

The Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program is DepEd's response to the right of indigenous peoples (IP) to basic education that is responsive to their context, respects their identities, and promotes the value of their indigenous knowledge, skills, and other aspects of their cultural heritage.

Section 8.4, Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act No. 10533 refers to IPEd as the "program that supports education initiatives undertaken through formal, non-formal, and informal modalities with emphasis on any of, but not limited to, the key areas of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices and community history, indigenous languages, Indigenous Learning System (ILS) and community life cycle-based curriculum and assessment, educational goals, aspirations and competencies specific to the Indigenous Cultural Community (ICC), engagement of elders and other community members in the teaching-learning process, assessment, and management of the initiative, recognition and continuing practice of the community's ILS, and the rights and responsibilities of ICCs."

DepEd Order No. 22, s. 2016 states the program's objectives which are the following: to 1) make the curriculum culturally responsive to the specific community context of IP learners; 2) build the capacity of teachers, school heads, and other concerned personnel at different levels of governance in implementing culture-based education for IPs; 3) support the development of culturally appropriate learning resources and learning environment responsive to the specific community context of IP learners; 4) strengthen the policy environment supportive of IPEd; and 5) address the learning needs of IP learners who lack access to basic education services.

This program started as a research and development project which aims to provide basic education support services to IP communities. It was initially implemented at the tribal communities in Dumalneg, Ilocos Norte, Gen. Nakar, Quezon, and Botolan, Zambales. The IPEd Program supports the realization of the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum, which subscribes to the following standards and principles, among others: inclusive, culture-sensitive, and flexible enough to enable and allow schools to localise, indigenise, and enhance based on the community's educational and social context.

a) Program for Muslim Migrants: Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education in Alternative Learning System (ALIVE in ALS)



The Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education in Alternative Learning System (ALIVE in ALS), anchored under the DepEd's Education for All (EFA) Plan, is designed to respond to the Muslim Migrants. As a result of various factors, notably the peace and order situation in Mindanao, many Muslim groups has moved into other regions, provinces, and cities. Majority of them moved into the National Capital Region, Metro Cebu, Iloilo, Bacolod, and Baguio City. To address the massive migration, this program was established order to improve the quality of life of Muslim OSY and adults. It is the overall goal of ALIVE to be able to positively contribute to the peace efforts of the government.

Guided by the holistic approach of ALIVE, the program ensures that the core learning elements are linear to the basic Islamic concerns in the entire learning experience of Muslim OSY and adults. The program includes Basic Literacy Program + ALIVE; Accreditation & Equivalency (A&E) Program + ALIVE; Informal Education + ALIVE; Technical Vocational Education Program + ALIVE; and Entrepreneurship Development + ALIVE.

b) Program for Hearing Impairment: Alternative Learning System for Differently-Abled Persons (ALS-DAP)

The Alternative Learning System for Differently-Abled Persons (ALS-DAP) project aims to deliver BLP to the special/differently-abled OSYA, i.e. hearing impaired learners who have not availed/have no access to the formal school system. ALS-DAP centres on specialised approaches, such as the sign language (mute), and braille (blind) as modes of instruction.

ALS-DAP is a special project that envisions improving the lives of OSYA-DAP, who despite their limitations, can become more productive citizens of the country. The main thrust of the project stipulates the development of the basic literacy skills in reading, writing, and numeracy.

c) Program for Adolescents: Adolescent Reproductive Health (ARH)

The Adolescent Reproductive Health (ARH), in partnership with the Department of Health (DOH), is a project for out-of-school adolescents ages 9-24 years old. ARH is a life skills-based education program for adolescents who are in high-risk behavior, sex-related or non-sex related behavior.

d) Programs for Parents: Parent Education

The Parent Education program, under INFED, is a life skills short-term course which aims to address the special needs and interests of Filipino parents, specifically through boosting their self-esteem in owning their responsibilities in the family and community.

d) Program for Poor Families: Family Basic Literacy Program (FBLP)

The Family Basic Literacy Program (FBLP) is a literacy service learning intervention, specifically designed for poor families in the depressed, deprived, and underserved (DDU) areas.



FBLP employs literate family members to facilitate the learning of non-literate members. This program addresses the needs of non-literate family members by upgrading their literacy skills and improving their educational opportunities.

e) Program for Disadvantaged Children: Informal Education for Disadvantaged Children

The program envisions addressing the special needs and interests of the street and working children. It is specifically designed as a short-term educational activity that intends to use life skills and active learning approaches/strategies aimed at developing/enhancing the following: 1) social, 2) civic, 3) aesthetic, 4) cultural, and 5) recreational physical and personal development of street/working children. Equally important, the learning materials utilised in this program are developed/adopted/adapted from learning resources tailored-fit for the specific needs of the learners.

f) Radio-Based Instruction (RBI)

In partnership with the Southern Broadcasting Network (SBN), the BALS implemented the Radio-Based Instruction as an alternative delivery mode utilizing the ALS A&E system in radio broadcast. The program aimed at providing learning opportunities for OSYA learners to acquire equivalency in basic education.

Significantly, the program paved the way to more opportunities for OSYA to gain adequate knowledge, attitude, values and skills needed to improve the quality of their life, alongside increasing their community participation.

2. Alternative Learning System (ALS) Response to Pandemic

With the risks brought by the widespread of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Philippine Government closed schools one month earlier last March 2020 and moved the typical start of the Academic Year (A.Y.) from June to October for A.Y. 2020-2021. This has caused social, political, economic, and even educational downturn with the latter affecting the number of enrollees in schools and the major transition to online distance learning. This is manifested even in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) which is already considered as an alternative and flexible learning system for out-of-school youth and adults (OSYAs) who have not finished basic education in the formal schools. According to ALS DepEd Undersecretary G.H. Ambat, there were only 360, 554 ALS enrollees nationwide last August which showed a drastic decline from the usual enrollment rate of over 800,000 in the previous years.

Accordingly, ALS, like the formal education system, has also adjusted its approaches in order to maintain its flagship program of continuing education. The Department of Education (DepEd) has introduced fund utilization, modifications, and methodologies to provide basic and functional literacy and life skills and still reach out to the most vulnerable and marginalized youth



even in the new normal. To ensure that OSYAs have equal and continuous access to basic education services even amidst the pandemic, the ALS Task Force shall implement a quality delivery of the ALS program while simultaneously adhering to the basic health, safety, and community quarantine standards and protocols. The ALS-Task Force renders an integral part in the implementation of ALS during the pandemic, as they act as the focal point for the coordination of the range of activities under the ALS road map towards the full development and operationalisation of the new ALS 2.0 program (DepEd Order, No. 003, s. 2019).

2.1 Republic Act 11510: Enactment of the Alternative Learning System Law

The Republic Act 11510, otherwise known as “*An Act Institutionalizing the Alternative Learning System In Basic Education for Out-of-School Children in Special Cases and Adults And Appropriating Funds Therefor*” (2020), declares that the State shall provide adequate support to ensure that more Out-of-School Youth and Adults (OSYA) will be able to have access to quality education. The timely passage of the ALS-ACT during the pandemic is perceived to contribute to the mandated strengthening and expansion of its implementation. DepEd reaffirms this commitment ensuring that no learner will be left behind, amid a pandemic. It also underscores the country’s thrust in the potential of OSYA learners.

Particularly, Section 3 of R.A. 11510 states the following objectives:

- a) Provide adequate, timely and quality attention and support the basic learning needs of out-of-school children in special cases and adults including indigenous peoples;
- b) Guarantee equitable access for all learners, including those who reside in the unreached, underserved, conflict-affected communities, and communities in emergency situations to avail of systematic, flexible and appropriate alternative basic education programs outside of the formal school system;
- c) Promote lifelong opportunities anchored on the Alternative Learning System (ALS) K to 12 Basic Education and Curriculum (BEC) that takes a holistic, integrated and intersectoral approach, and provide pathways across modes of learning that will ensure learners will become caring, self-reliant, independent, productive, and patriotic citizens by allowing such learners to pursue further education, after participating in the ALS program and passing the accreditation and equivalency assessments or certifications, or both required by the Department of Education (DepEd), or seek employment;
- d) Hire, capacitate, and deploy ALS Teachers, Community ALS Implementers and Learning Facilitators to deliver a range of ALS programs especially in far-flung, unserved, underserved, conflict-affected communities, and communities in emergency situations;
- e) Design specialized programs for learners with disabilities, taking into consideration their different levels of learning needs and other functional difficulties in the development of instructional materials and learning resources in accessible format;
- f) Develop, integrate, and utilize non-formal and informal education approaches and strategies in the delivery of the ALS programs and the assessment of learning



outcomes and competencies of ALS learners by providing flexibility in the duration of learning programs, learning contents, and delivery strategies, among others;

- g) Improve access to education and other learning opportunities and raise the level of literacy to contribute to an individual's sustainable future; and
- h) Strengthen non-formal basic education programs while ensuring support to the policy of the DepEd that school age children should be enrolled in formal education, and that they should be able to return to the formal education system, in the event that they drop-out.

The law stipulates the expansion of its linkages between DepEd and the local government units (LGUs), NGOs, and other sectors. A striking passage in the law declares that it will create a new coordinated leadership and focal office for the continuous implementation of ALS, and shall be called the new Bureau of Alternative Education (BAE). Further, the ALS Facilitators Program will be strengthened through pre-service and in-service training. Additional learning materials and teaching items will be created and recalibrated to paved the way to an equitable support to ALS Teachers whose contexts and competencies may vary, based on the community areas they serve, i.e. rural, urban, and geographically disadvantaged areas. This passage shall be provided in coordination with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM).

The ALS program aims to empower OSYA learners through providing a viable learning option that can stand for decades. However, with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Philippine education system, a number of basic education learners were unable to enroll in the formal school system. This posits that there will be a rise in the number of OSYA. The ALS-ACT is deemed a platform that can help address DepEd's response to a bigger demand for the ALS Program.

2.2 Utilization, Monitoring, and Reporting of Program Support Funds (PSF) for ALS

With the huge shift to online and/or distance learning, DepEd has immediately released DepEd Order No. 33 s. 2020 that provide guidelines to ensure that utilization of funds for ALS will be managed and maximized efficiently and effectively. This states that a Program Support Fund (PSF) will be given to each region and shall be allocated to three major components on 1) support to operations, 2) regional mass training of ALS teachers, and 3) reproduction of learning resources for the mass training.

The first component, support to operations, is intended for activities in program management including monitoring and evaluation, communication and meal expenses for meetings and training between ALS teachers, District Coordinators, and Division ALS Focal person, and other activities for operational issues. It also includes activities on capacity building like conduct of training and workshops on ALS K to 12 Curriculum and Learning Continuity Plan for DepEd-procured and non-DepEd financed implementers, as well as conduct of learner development programs. Support to operations also includes teaching and learning resources such as, printing and reproduction, supplies and materials, expenses for Radio-based Instructions (RBIs), and other eligible expenses.



Regional mass training of ALS teachers, on the other hand, includes program management expenses on pre- and post-planning meetings, monitoring and evaluation, communication expenses for trainers and facilitators, supplies and materials, and other allowable expenses. Meanwhile, the reproduction of learning resources for the mass training includes supplies and materials, printing and reproduction of ALS teaching and learning materials, and miscellaneous expenses related to reproduction of ALS materials for training.

2.3 Modifications of ALS (Learning Continuity Plan)

DepEd released DepEd Memorandum No. 67 s. 2020 last October to enumerate guidelines on the implementation of the Alternative Learning System programs. This order highlights the modification of the ALS program as part of its Learning Continuity Plan focusing on five vital areas, namely, curriculum, learning delivery, learning resources, learning assessment, and program management.

2.3.1 Curriculum

One distinct feature of ALS even before the pandemic was its utilization of the Individual Learning Agreement (ILA) which serves as a learning contract developed by both the teacher and the learner. The ILA consists of the identified learning goals, strategies, and timeline. For the 2020-2021 academic year, there will be weekly learning contracts to monitor students more closely on their progress. In addition, the ALS curriculum will also include lessons on health promotions and discussions on COVID-19, quarantine protocols, and minimum health standards. Agribusiness, digital literacy for business, and entrepreneurship will also be introduced using blended learning as part of the digital citizenship strand and life and career skills training programs.

2.3.2 Learning Delivery

There are three modes of learning delivery identified to continue the implementation of ALS learning sessions. The first one is the blended approach for advanced elementary and junior and senior high school wherein the main material to be utilized to support learning is the learning modules. In this kind of delivery, teachers are encouraged to design weekly learning plans/agreements for each student and are enjoined to provide learning support, such as, feedback, explanations, and answers to queries, through various social media platforms. To evaluate the students' learning progress, weekly assessment tasks from the module post-tests and teacher-made assessments will be conducted together with the working folder or portfolio to record the students' outputs and reflections.

On the other hand, the second learning delivery is the special learning sessions for lower elementary and basic literacy level learners. Since young learners need more support from the



teacher, this type of delivery involves the conduct of face-to-face sessions once approved and permitted by the local Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF). Since this already requires a face-to-face interaction, the prescribed health standards and various levels of community quarantine still need to be observed and strictly implemented.

The last delivery mode is the online and distance learning. The former is encouraged for those students who have access to the internet and digital devices. In this learning setup, webinar and asynchronous activities are conducted. The ICT4ALS website can be used for additional supplementary materials and apps. Similarly, students and facilitators can also access the DepEd Commons and other DepEd Learning Resource Portals which contain online resources and review materials for each grade level. The latter, distance learning, is intended to reach a wider scope of target learners with its utilization of radio and television. Radio-based Instruction (RBI) consists of downloadable audio materials and scripts that can be played to local community radio stations while television can be maximized using educational channels, such as DepEd TV and Knowledge Channel, to supplement learning. Currently, there are 133 areas in the Philippines broadcasting the DepEd ALS Channel which includes Metro Manila; and three areas in Cebu – Balanban and Asturias, Carcar to Minglanilla, and Toledo City. Nine areas in Davao also broadcast the ALS channel, including Bansalan, Panabo, and Digos in Davao del Sur; Banangga, Nabunturan, and Mati in Davao Oriental; Tagum, Davao del Norte; and Cabantian and Calinan in Davao City.

2.3.3 Learning Materials

In order to facilitate independent learning, learning resources have been modified and have been made available for easier access. For instance, the existing ALS modules were modified into self-directed modules with self-learning activities and pre- and post-tests. Moreover, the ALS Task Force prepared an inventory of learning resources and soft copies of ALS modules available in four identified websites and applications: ICT4ALS, DepEd Learning Resource Portal, DepEd Commons, and AralMuna Application. Additionally, MyDev Life Skills FM or RBI, under the Education Development Center's Work Ready Now! (WRN!), alongside ALS TV, were launched as supplementary materials for other ALS existing programs in partnership with MYDev and USAID.

Notably, the ICT4ALS is a website developed by the ALS Task Force, UNICEF Philippines Education Team, and other partners that includes online resources for learners and supplementary materials on ICT-based distance teaching for teachers. The DepEd Learning Resource Portal and the AralMuna App are also platforms with many learning resources which everyone can use most especially in the new normal. The DepEd Commons is an online learning platform that has online review materials and modules authored by subject matter experts from public schools and prepared by the Open Educational Resources (OER) for all grade levels, even including Senior High School subjects.

Equally significant, through the collaboration of DepEd and USAID, the self-directed Life Skills module(s) was launched last August, 2020 to pave the way for learning continuity amid pandemic. Alongside its launch is the commencement of the "National Online Training of Master



Trainers on the Delivery of ALS Life Skills Self-Directed Modules.” The project highlighted the significance of the self-directed modules as means to address the remote learning delivery modality.

2.3.4 Learning Assessment

Given the different learning delivery modes, students will be assessed and evaluated through post-tests included in the learning modules and teacher-made assessments while being supervised by a parent, sibling, peer, or the teacher himself during CLC visits. ALS learners are also encouraged to write weekly learning reflections about the new knowledge and skills acquired, the struggles and difficulties they are having in the lessons, and the concepts they don't understand. Moreover, students should prepare their working portfolio including their outputs and reflections. The facilitator, in turn, is expected to give feedback, clarifications, further discussions, and support to the students through social media platforms. They must render higher order thinking skills by asking concept-checking questions to the learner(s) to maintain the presence of social learning.

2.3.5 Program Management

In relation to the contextualized, non-formal curriculum offered by ALS, the life skills are still emphasized as part of the skills to be developed for A.Y. 2020-2021. The ALS Task Force also converted the life skills module into self-directed modules where modules 1-6 should be implemented during the first two months of intervention and modules 7-9 to be implemented during the last two months of intervention. Aside from this, capacity building programs will also be implemented for ALS implementers and DepEd field officials to equip them with necessary skills and training for online distance learning as part of the modifications for program management.

3. Methodology

The present research is anchored on a qualitative-descriptive research design which aim is to gain an understanding of an ongoing phenomenon using mostly qualitative methods such as participant interviews, observation, and content analysis. Particularly, this study intends to provide a description of existing policies and programmes on adult learning and education of the Department of Education through the Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS) and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their implementation.

3.1. Study Participants



The informants of the study are the various stakeholders of the Alternative Learning System of the Department of Education, namely the ALS facilitators, the ALS administrators, the learners or students, and the officials of the local government units (LGUs). There are two groups of informants based on location or district in which these individuals currently reside or are assigned. One of these is Quezon City which is a major city and an urban community located within the greater capital of Metro Manila, and the other one is the province of Batangas which is located in the region of Southern Luzon and is mostly composed of rural communities. The selection of the locale is purposive since it is by intention that both urban and rural communities be considered in this research.

There are two categories of the ALS facilitators as stipulated in the manual from the Department of Education: the district ALS coordinators (DALSc), who mainly perform administrative tasks such as the planning and monitoring of the ALS programs, but can also perform teaching tasks, and the ALS mobile teachers (MTs), who are mostly in charge of the teaching and program implementation. These district coordinators and mobile teachers are professionally trained teachers who taught Basic Education for some years before they were assigned to the ALS program. Since the ALS coordinators mostly perform administrative duties, it was decided that separate interviews be conducted among them and with the ALS mobile teachers. There were four (4) mobile teachers who participated in the Quezon City group, while there were four (4) district coordinators and four (4) mobile teachers in the Batangas group. In this study, this group was collectively referred to as Instructional Managers (IMs).

Apart from the district coordinators, the Education Program Specialists (EPSAs) also participated as ALS administrators in the study. The EPSAs are officials assigned by DepEd to perform planning and development of the ALS curriculum, and at the same time monitor the implementation of the existing programs. The EPSAs are recognized to hold a higher position in the DepEd compared to the district coordinators. There were four EPSAs who participated in the Batangas group focus group discussions and interviews. In Quezon City, ALS administrators were not able to join the focus group discussions because of conflicts in schedule, but they were active during the initial meetings and interviews.

The learner-informants are enrolled students of two of the programs offered by BALS which are the Basic Literacy Program (BLP) and the Accreditation and Equivalency Program (A&E). There are other programs under the ALS, but these two were chosen because of the active enrollment of learners in these programs, and because they are constantly offered by DepEd. At the time of the data gathering phase, these were the only two programs being implemented by DepEd within the selected research locales. The learners from the BLP are mostly out-of-school youth (OSY) and non-literate adults. On the other hand, the informants from the A&E program are students 15 years old and above, and who have mostly already attended formal school in the past but were not able to complete basic education for various reasons. In the Quezon City group, there were seven (7) learner-informants, while the Batangas group had a total of twelve (12). In the selection of the learner-informants, it was greatly considered that the groups be composed of an almost equal number of male and female participants to account for differences in gendered perspectives and experiences.

The last group of informants are the officials of LGUs. They are mostly representatives of the *barangay*, which is the smallest government unit in the Philippines. The *barangay* LGUs are the ones who work closely with the District Coordinators and Mobile Teachers in the implementation of the ALS programs within the community. The Quezon City group had two (2) LGU officials who participated in the interviews, while the Batangas group had three (3). These LGU participants hold positions in the *barangay* such as *chairman* or *captain* and *councilors*.



3.2. Data Gathering Procedure

The data for this study was collected through qualitative means such as interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis.

Initial and informal online meetings were conducted first with the district coordinators of both Quezon City and Batangas. The objectives of these meetings were to introduce to the district coordinators the goal of the current research project, and to discuss with them their possible participation in the research process. The said activity also included initial and informal interviews since the district coordinators were already asked some basic information with regard to the ALS programs being implemented in their locales.

Online focus group discussions (FGDs) were scheduled with the assistance of the EPSAs of Quezon City and Batangas. The FGDs involved three groups of informants: Group 1-ALS mobile teachers, Group 2 – Students or Learners, and Group 3 – EPSAs, District Coordinators and LGU officials. Separate FGDs were conducted among the three groups of informants, as well as for the participants of the Quezon City and Batangas groups. Hence, a total of six (6) FGDs were implemented during the data gathering phase.

The FGDs were guided by researcher-made questionnaires. Each of the three informant groups has its own set of questions depending on the information needed for this research. FGDs averaging at around two (2) hours per session were conducted via Zoom online meeting platform, and were also recorded using the same application. All FGDs underwent transcription, and the transcribed data was coded to identify the emerging themes of the discussion.

In addition to interviews and FGDs, documents that were requested from the district coordinators were also analyzed based on their content and objectives. These documents include: documents describing the ALS policies and programs, ALS learning modules, ALS curriculum and continuity plan, and sample activities and portfolios of the ALS learners.

3.3. Ethical Considerations of the Study

To ensure the ethical treatment of the informants, consent forms in Filipino were sent via email to the ALS district administrators at least a week before the interview to inform the participants about their roles and rights as informants in the research. The ALS administrators were the ones who distributed the forms to the teachers, learners, and LGU officials. The consent form includes information with regard to data privacy and protection, and participants' right to withdraw at any stage of the research process. The signed consent were returned to the researchers-in-charge before the actual interviews were conducted.

Based on the provisions stipulated in the *Philippine Republic Act No. 10173* or the *Data Privacy Act (DPA) of 2012* and the University Data Privacy Manual, the team takes the following measures to ensure confidentiality, privacy and anonymity of the participants in the different stages of the research process such as anonymization of participants, safeguarding of data, utilizing both digital and physical security, ensuring secure data storage, access, and retrieval, and other pertinent data privacy measures.



Storage of such data may be from three (3) to five (5) years as deemed appropriate by the funder and the participating project teams. Also, all security protocols and data safety measures will be discussed with participants, research assistants, staff of the Research Centre for Social Sciences and Education (RCSSSED) of the University of Santo Tomas and the Transformare team members to ensure that they understand these protocols.

4. Key Findings

This section reports the key findings based on the analysis of data gathered primarily through interviews and focus group discussions conducted among two groups involved in the study, which are the Quezon City and the Batangas Province groups. The report gives a description of the challenges in the implementation of ALS during the period of pandemic as experienced by the participants, and the support provided by the government to ALS learners and instructors as a means of mitigating such challenges brought about by the pandemic.

4.1. Challenges Met on the Implementation of ALS During the Pandemic

4.1.1. Learners

The learners in the study are enrolled students of two ALS programs which are the Basic Literacy Program (BLP) and the Accreditation and Equivalency Program (A&E). In general, ALS learners who participated in the study considered the lack of or limited resources, the lack of or limited opportunities for direct instruction, and multi-level responsibilities as the major challenges in their learning under the ALS programs during the period of pandemic.

4.1.1.1. Lack of/Limited Resources.

Apparently, the major challenge of learners even before the pandemic is their limited or lack of financial resources. In Quezon City, which is a major urban city in the greater capital of Metro Manila, the pandemic aggravated these concerns all the more because many of these adult learners lost their jobs. Many can hardly participate in online classes because they do not have money to avail mobile data. This was confirmed by their instructional managers (IMS) who shared that absenteeism increased because aside from their inability to avail mobile data, many didn't have access to gadgets and the Internet. According to some IMSs, their students lamented the fact that regular school children were given tablets for their online classes while they were left on their own.



In the rural area of Batangas, difficulty in getting internet access is even more pronounced. Because most learners live in remote areas, students do not even have access to online learning materials. Also because of financial constraints, the learners have difficulty purchasing basic gadgets or tools like cellphone units, sim card, and mobile data, and if they do purchase them, this merely adds up to their daily expenses.

In Quezon City, even if classes were not held online, transportation expenses were a problem for many of them who had to get the modules from the center or school, and it did not help that the modules were distributed in a “piece-meal” manner. For those who were not able to get any financial support from the local government or the Department of Education, learners from the Quezon City group shared that they had to buy their own supplies and sometimes had to print materials such as the modules using their own money. In rural Batangas, accessibility of materials was even more difficult. During the pandemic, there has been only one center or pick-up point from where learners can retrieve their leaning materials or modules. For most learners, this pick-up point was far from their homes and transportation in the rural areas were even more difficult, not to mention the additional financial challenge to allot for the transportation fees.

4.1.1.2. Lack of/Limited Opportunities for Direct Instruction

The learners shared that prior to the pandemic, they could meet with their IMs once or twice a week to receive direct instruction. This was true even for the adults who were enrolled in the equivalency programs. However, when the pandemic broke out, explicit or direct instruction was no longer or minimally provided. The new mode of instruction, particularly modular learning, is the prevalent source of challenge for the learners in the middle of the pandemic. Both groups expressed that it was difficult for them to do the activities in the modules when no direct instruction was provided.

In the Quezon City group, some learners expressed their desire to have longer online sessions with their IMs because their current schedule did not allow them to fully understand the lessons in the modules. In Batangas, synchronous online class sessions were not even available because of learners’ less access to internet and gadgets. Online modes of instruction were limited to group chats and forum like the Facebook Messenger. The interaction was limited to text messaging wherein students only ask questions in relation to the modules that they have to accomplish. Since there was no direct teacher’s supervision, the learners shared that independent learning is hard, especially to those who are still learning basic literacy. Since many Filipino adult learners attend continuing education program to make up for the basic formal schooling that they have missed, it is expected that they don’t yet possess the necessary literacy skills needed to engage in independent learning. Additionally, the transactional distance brought forth by the pandemic has even made learning more challenging for them.

Additionally, participants from the Quezon City group also experienced the effects of the lack of Instructional Managers. The informants recognized that their IMs were doing all they could do to help and inspire them to learn. However, they were also aware that there were not enough of them to teach them and do all the work. This became more evident during the pandemic. Their teachers became so busy attending meetings and training and working on the



delayed results of Batch 2019-2020. Even those who were attending online classes lamented that sometimes they only had one meeting per month. While they felt frustrated, they also acknowledged the difficult situation of their teachers. Add to this the fact that one teacher had to teach students from different levels almost the whole day. That is the reason why they see the need to have more ALS IMs since some of them had the same IM for years.

4.1.1.3. Multilevel Responsibilities

Adult learners have multilevel responsibilities. Hence, balancing their time to study, attend online classes, work, and other responsibilities at home has been one of the major challenges even before the pandemic. In the Quezon City group, it was common among the learners' household to have children, and these children sometimes attending their online classes simultaneously or one after the other which was problematic for those who didn't have individual gadgets and/or space in their homes to make online learning conducive. In the Batangas group, the learners expressed their difficulties in terms of time management, as most of them are working in rural related activities and livelihood such as farming, fishing, and merchandising. Some learners shared that they face difficulties in terms of submission since they have to supervise their children's learning while simultaneously learning at their own pace.

4.1.2. Instructional Managers (IMs)

The instructional Managers (IMs) are the ALS mobile teachers and facilitators who are in charge of the implementing the various ALS programs. During the time of the study, the Instructional Managers who are informants for this research are currently handling both BLP and A&E ALS programs. Based on the results of the interview, the IMs reported the following as major challenges in their implementation of the ALS programs: limited resources, limited online pedagogical knowledge, and student absenteeism.

4.1.2.1. Limited Resources

Difficulty due to financial constraints are not only being experienced by the students, but the Instructional Managers as well. During the pandemic education, having a regular mobile data allowance is necessary to conduct online classes and to communicate with students. According to some of the IMs in the Quezon City group, the load allowance was not given regularly by the DepEd. At times, it was given once a month or every two months or not at all. The informants assume that it probably depends on the budget of DepEd how much allowance is given and when. The Batangas group also reported that they also needed to extend their expenses to transportation allowance as some of them are delivering the learning materials door-to-door to students' homes. Although a hazard pay is provided to cover on times that they need to go to remote areas, still it will depend on their salary grade/plantilla position multiplied to how many grade levels they are handling. Similarly, this allowance is not regularly given as also observed in the Quezon City group.



Both groups experienced challenges when it comes to module production and distribution. Printed modules are limited, and not all students have access to the soft copies of the materials. According to the IMs, due to lack of printing equipment and materials, such as bond paper(s) and ink to sustain the distribution, there were time when they were using their own allowance to cater all learners.

There are also unique challenges faced by IMs who are catering special needs groups like learners in incarceration. In the Batangas group, The IMs shared that for learners who are serving their sentence in BJMP (Bureau of Jail Management and Penology), it is apparent that there is no equipment available for supplementary materials, such as video and other media resources. This is different before the pandemic broke out, as the IM can go inside and render direct supervision, while sharing the module(s) accompanied with a full set of supplementary materials. Moreover, although provided with mobile data allowance, some of them also experienced troubles in terms of gadget acquisition to deliver online learning.

4.1.2.2. Limited Online Pedagogical Knowledge

Both groups of informants shared their concerns about their lack of pedagogical knowledge in handling online classes. In the Quezon City group, it was observed that similar to the ALS learners, IMs also struggled to shift from the traditional mode of learning to online delivery and implementations of lessons. It was particularly challenging to those handling Basic Literacy Program (BLP) students. The latter are learners who must acquire basic literacy skills. Some BLP IMs were worried that they would not be able to guide and teach their students well. In Batangas, an IM shared that no direct supervision for the learners results in low quality assessments, e.g. to the point where the penmanship of the learner differs from one modular activity to another, and below the standard training delivered for their SPED and BJMP (jail) learners.

In Quezon City, those who used to handle ‘captive learners’ in jails and rehabilitation centers had to shift to online teaching because face-to-face sessions were prohibited. In Batangas, even online classes were not accessible, instead IMs only delivered module materials to the Bureau as adherence to pandemic protocols.

Quezon informants expressed that another concern is the administration of assessments online. The other IMs shared that though they undergo a lot of teacher training lately and are willing to undergo further teacher training, it would take time before they would get used to teaching online. In the Batangas group, it was observed that another reason for the difficulty transitioning to an online mode is the age and digital aptitude of the instructors. Some teachers are already in the retirement age; thus, they are not adept when it comes to digital literacy, *i.e.* managing group Facebook Messengers, Zoom classes, and other online-related activities.

Moreover, the informants recognized the need to revisit and revise the ALS curriculum. According to the EPSAs and IMs of Batangas, the curriculum must be updated linearly to the needs of the learners, particularly veering away from the formal schooling set-up. Given that the



module material(s) available are being used for the last 7 years, certainly, this must be updated as well.

4.1.2.3. Student Absenteeism

Apparently, the major challenge of IMs during the pandemic is to maintain the decreasing rate of their enrollees. Since many students do not have access to the Internet, and have to juggle their multilevel responsibilities at home and at work, many of them are entirely dropping out in the middle of the academic year. Informants from the Quezon City group expressed that one difficulty common among the IMs was ensuring that students attend the online sessions. Many of their students did not have access to the Internet, and these students could only send them SMS messages to inquire about and clarify points in the lessons. Module and student ratio is not 1:1, so students who do not have printed copies of the modules sometimes resort to absenteeism. Moreover, since some of their ALS have work/jobs, this also caused them to miss some class sessions.

On the other hand, an IM in Batangas also shared that another reason for student decline, especially for the Youth learners ages 15 to 20, was their exposure to vices such as cigarettes, and at worst, drugs. Some LGUs were also tagged as non-cooperative; thus, IMs and EPSAs faced difficulty in coordination to fully provide mapping and tracers of the ALS learners. This posed a dilemma in delivering enrollment endorsements through Google Forms, as adherence to the protocols.

4.1.3. Local Government Units (LGUs) and Other ALS Partners

The Local Government Units (LGUs) in this study were represented by the officials of the barangay, which is the smallest government unit in the Philippines. On the other hand, the other ALS partners pertain to the EPSAs or the ALS specialists/administrators. LGUs play an important role in assisting the ALS administrators in implementing their various programs within communities. The officials of the LGUs see limited resources and recruitment of the students into the program as the major challenges of implementing ALS during the pandemic, while the EPSAs or ALS administrators see limited resources and implementation as major challenges in fulfilling their roles in the pandemic period.

4.1.3.1. Limited Resources

The informants of the Quezon City LGUs expressed difficulty in providing usual financial support for the ALS. Apparently, the LGUs' major role in the implementation of ALS in the community is to provide financial support. They were aware that the students who enroll in ALS belong to the less-privileged groups. During the pandemic, they helped the ALS learners print learning materials such as their learning portfolios. Before the pandemic, the barangay officials had more time and resources to share with ALS (school supplies, uniform, bags), but because the



barangay's resources are now being used for COVID-related activities, ALS is not getting its usual support.

The EPSAs of the Batangas group also shared that although there was an available Php 4,000 travel allowance for reimbursement, secured with an authority to travel, most IMs and EPSAs were experiencing difficulties in the distribution of materials in terms of safety. Usually, they were travelling on their own or completely, no transport was being provided. However, due to support from a number of partner LGUs, some of them were able to travel safely through Barangay Patrols. LGUs in Batangas also provided the printing for materials since there has been a scarcity in terms of its distribution. This is in relation to delayed Government project biddings, thus, according to them, those in the field suffer the most.

4.1.3.2. Recruitment

A barangay captain in the Quezon City group shared that recruitment of BLP learners during the pandemic became even more challenging. The target learners were more concerned in their economic well-being than going back to learning.

4.1.3.3. Implementation of Current ALS Curriculum

Apparently, the EPSAs face a major challenge in the implementation of the current ALS curriculum which is linear to the formal school set-up. Furthermore, the adjustments created by the DepEd Central Office, in adherence to the pandemic protocols, contributed to a lot more challenges they faced even before the pandemic broke out, such as in monitoring and evaluation of the learners' portfolios. In terms of the enrollment rate, the head office is encouraging them to exhaust their resources to maintain or increase their 'captive' learners. However, due to pandemic protocols, coordination and learners mapping conducted by the IMs (composed of ALS teachers and District ALS Coordinators or DALSCs), remains a glaring challenge.

4.2. Support Provided to ALS Learners and Teachers During the Pandemic

The second part of the report focuses on the support provided to the ALS learners and teachers by the Department of Education and the Local Government Units.

4.2.1. Professional and Personal Development Trainings for Teachers

DepEd is continuously providing ALS IMs with appropriate training before and during the pandemic. DepEd delivers appropriate training during the pandemic. During the pandemic, the ALS implementers and teachers were offered free online training and webinar sessions to further their digital literacy skills, e.g. Zoom session management, database management, and other



workshops in handling online mode of instruction. Trainings that focused on health protocols were also provided.

In connection, most of the teachers expressed their intention to undergo more training that will allow them to learn more about remote teaching as well to know the content of their lessons better. It is important to note that the educational background of most ALS teachers prepares them to teach in the formal school setting which is different from the ALS context. Moreover, it is important to note that ALS supplementary materials are provided by the Central Office in encapsulated format available for Android applications. In lieu, IMs expressed their intention to undergo more training, particularly highlighting the need to cover other courses highlighting information technology (IT) practical training and development.

4.2.2. Financial Support to Instructional Manager and Learners

4.2.2.1. DepEd

In the Batangas group, DepEd delivered and provided funds for the procurement of school supplies and equipment needed for printing. The school supplies included ballpens and notebooks for students. Ten (10) reams of bond paper for each ALS teacher were also provided and access to riso machine, ink, and printer for the printing and distribution of modules. The Department also included the procurement and distribution of medical supplies to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. This includes air ball purifiers, face masks, face shields, alcohols, medicines, and vitamins. They also provided travel allowance and hazard pay for the IMs, aside from assigning the nearest district station for the pickup of the learning materials.

In the Quezon City group, some IMS shared that their divisions provide financial support in the form of regular load allowance that they could use in conducting their online classes and in communicating with their students.

4.2.2.2. Local Government Unit and Non-Government Organizations

It appears that the ALS IMs considered their LGU officials as their source of support/assistance in terms of learning materials production, gadget [tablet] for online classes, and money to buy Internet access cards. According to the IMs, barangay officials assisted them in reproducing their materials, in giving them teaching supplies. In Quezon City, some teachers also received tablets from their Kabataan (*Sangguniang Kabataan* or Barangay Youth Organization) officials. Similar to the teachers, the students acknowledge the assistance given to them by their LGU officials. The latter provided assistance in forms of printing modules, activities, and learning portfolios. However, LGU officials, particularly in Quezon City, would like to appeal to higher authorities to give a bigger internet allowance to the teachers, and if possible, that students also receive tablets which were provided to students in the formal sector which also resorted to on-line classes due to the pandemic.



A barangay councilor in Quezon City also shared that the Barangay helps in identifying and mobilizing prospective ALS learners since they know who among their constituents can benefit from ALS. One barangay allowed the use of an air-conditioned room at the barangay hall for the ALS session of the students. However, the barangay hall is currently undergoing renovation hence, students cannot use it for their learning sessions and at the same time face to face meetings are not encouraged because of the pandemic. This is an example of how LGUs can provide a conducive learning environment for ALS students in the absence of community learning centers as stipulated in the RA 11510.

Based on the IMs and the learners sharing in the Batangas group, NGOs are also rendering assistance to the program. For instance, the Ayala Foundation was able to provide a few laptop units, tablets, and Globe sim cards to a number of ALS teachers and learners. Furthermore, aside from the 1.7 Million support fund from the DepEd, most LGUs in Batangas Province are as well, in full support in the distribution and retrieval of module materials. They are offering the free service of Barangay Patrol for transportation, and extending their assistance to the printing of the modules (providing ink and bond papers from their Barangay funds).

4.2.3. Socio-emotional Support for Instructional Manager and Learners

4.2.3.1. DepEd

DepEd recognizes that working and living during these challenging times are quite stressful. Thus, the Quezon City informants reported having received trainings on stress management and well-being are also provided to teachers including the IMs. On their part, the IMS saw to it that they talk to their students not only to help them cope with their lessons but also to check how they were coping emotionally. In fact, many of them used their own money to avail mobile data so that they could interact with them as needed. Some students said that their teachers encourage them to continue studying despite the difficult times.

4.2.4. Institutionalization of the Alternative Learning System in Basic Education

The passage of Republic Act No. 11510 also known as the Alternative Learning System Act which aims to provide adequate, timely, and quality attention and support to the basic learning needs of out-of-school children in special cases and adults including indigenous peoples (IPs) is considered as a major breakthrough in the informal and non-formal sector as it institutionalizes the alternative learning system in basic education. Under the law, the ALS program is expanded and strengthened to provide increased opportunities for out-of-school children in special cases and adult learners, including indigenous peoples, to develop basic and functional literacy and life skills, and pursue an equivalent pathway to complete basic education. The law makes possible the further realization of every individuals right to quality education and the vision of “inclusive education” within reach as it guarantees equitable access for all learners, including those who reside in the unreached, underserved, conflict-affected communities, and communities in emergency situations to avail of systematic, flexible, and appropriate alternative basic education programs outside of the formal school system. The law was passed halfway of



the year 2020, when the whole world was being ravaged by the pandemic. The law in its entirety holds a lot of promise for the Alternative Learning System in the country. The presence of the pandemic however, limited all of these great possibilities.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

Needless to say, one of the sectors that has been badly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic is the education sector both the formal and the non-formal ones. The implementation of the ALS program even prior to the onset of the Covid19 pandemic, is already beset with problems. These problems remain and during the pandemic, additional concerns beset the ALS learners and instructional managers.

To be specific, financial constraints and lack of resources remain a prevalent challenge for both the learners and IMs as observed in both urban and rural locales (Quezon City and Batangas). Budget management and outdated curriculum development materials, and assessment policies are indicative of the lack of understanding from the Central Office on the adequate implementation of linear ALS policies and programmes.

Apparently, many of the challenges being experienced by the adult learners and instructional managers are indicative of the lack of understanding of adult education and learners, as well as the importance being accorded to ALS in the Philippines. It is given less priority in the budget, curriculum development, and teacher agency and this is highlighted during the pandemic.

In both study locales, efforts have been exerted to provide different forms of support to ALS learners and instructional managers through DepEd divisions, LGU officials, and instructional managers to alleviate the challenges brought about by the pandemic. The financial support given, however, was found to be inadequate both by the IMs and learners.

Moreover, the government exerted efforts and enhanced policies to address the worsening situation brought about by the health crisis through the issuance of Department Order No.33 series of 2020, which stipulated the allocation of financial resources for the implementation of ALS program. On the other hand, the presence of legislative framework and policy issuances in support of the implementation of ALS such as R.A. 11510 and DepEd Order, does not guarantee that program operations will go smoothly as planned, as there will always be gap in the implementation of said policies even under normal circumstances.



5.2. Policy Recommendations

5.2.1. ALS Implementation

The passage of Republic Act No. 11510 amidst the pandemic should give hope to all involved in the implementation of ALS, specifically the learners and the instructional managers. All stakeholders in the education of Filipino adults should see its full implementation in terms of the following:

- Annual budget allocation for adult education and special budget allocation during difficult times such as the pandemic.
- Annual budget for adult education, highlighting to offer a variety of courses, trainings and other development sessions in terms of livelihood education for rural areas, such as table skirting, napkin folding, shirt dyeing and printing, cooking, food and beverage services, cosmetology, candle making, and rag making, to name a few respectively.
- Support to local government units and the Department of Education in terms of rigorous recruitment of Filipino adult learners who lack basic literacy skills
- Support to local government units in terms of gadgets, materials, and other supplies that can be used to help adult learners
- Support to implementers and learners in terms of gadgets, materials and other supplies relevant for the independent learning process
- Support to instructional managers in terms of provision of instructional materials and relevant professional and personal training.
- Support to ALS implementers (EPSAs, DALSCs, and teachers) in terms of provision for updated instructional materials, trainings, and appropriate curriculum for the ALS learners linear to the K to 12 curriculum
- Hiring of more qualified instructional managers
- Provision of additional benefits including hazard pays to instructional managers and ALS coordinators.
- Support to other providers of adult education in the country in particular the non-government organizations since they can help alleviate the voluminous works of the DepED instructional managers

5.2.2. Adult Literacy Teaching and Learning

That pedagogy and andragogy are two different approaches is the same even in a remote learning setup. Thus, it is important that instructional managers and all those involved in adult literacy education should understand the nature of adult learning and their literacy characteristics. The professional training provided to the instructional managers should focus on this, otherwise adult literacy instruction even if it finds sufficient financial support will still be undertheorized.

All these recommendations are geared toward empowering the ALS learners and instructional managers as well as making them feel that they are important learners in the scheme of the learning system in the country.



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