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From Assessment to Action: Analyzing Alternative Learning System Learners' Performance in Magsaysay, Palawan, towards Sustainable Extension Program

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ABSTRACT

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This study examined the learners' performance in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Program in Magsaysay, Palawan, to develop a long-term extension activity program for PalawanSU-PCAT Teacher Education. The study looked at the demographics of ALS students, their primary reasons for enrolling, and their Functional Literacy Test (FLT) performance levels in six key competencies: communication skills (English and Filipino), scientific literacy, critical thinking, mathematical problem-solving, life and career skills, and digital citizenship. The study used a mixed-method research design, combining quantitative data from surveys and FLT results with qualitative insights from the respondents' interviews, to identify gaps and provide treatments. The findings revealed that the ALS program mostly enrolled male adolescents and young adults from low-income families, emphasizing its role in closing educational gaps. Financial instability emerged as a dominant factor as the primary reason why learners chose the program

for their Basic Education. Learners demonstrated moderate achievement, with considerable obstacles in English literacy, mathematical reasoning, scientific analysis, and digital citizenship. Based on these findings, the study created Project COUNT (Connecting, Optimizing, and Unfolding New Knowledge through Tutorial), a structured extension program that combines one-on-one tutorials, small-group sessions, and community-based learning assistance to improve ALS delivery. The learners' performance in the Alternative Learning System indicates modest progress but also emphasizes the need for focused interventions to overcome competency gaps in English reading, mathematical and problem-solving skills, scientific reasoning, and digital citizenship.

INTRODUCTION

Ensuring accessible and equitable quality education for everyone remains a crucial concern, especially for marginalized communities who do not attend traditional schools. The ALS is a well-known intervention that aims to provide a second opportunity at education to out-of-school youth and adults, in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has established ALS as a flexible learning pathway that allows students to complete basic education. Local legislators' push to expand ALS to all barangays highlights its perceived importance in resolving educational gaps and providing lifelong learning opportunities on a large scale (Republic Act No. 11510, also known as the ALS Act). Beyond the Philippines, other countries in the Asia-Pacific region have adopted similar strategies through Community Learning Centers (CLCs). These centers are widely regarded as instrumental in advancing literacy and lifelong learning, particularly among disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. According to Le (2018) and Belete et al. (2022), CLCs serve diverse populations such as women and children in poverty, geographically isolated and underdeveloped communities, indigenous minorities, persons with disabilities, those with chronic health conditions, racial or ethnic minorities, the elderly, and others with limited or no access to formal education—especially in impoverished rural areas. In Indonesia, for example, community-based initiatives like Taman Baca Masyarakat (TBM), or Community Reading Parks, function as localized CLCs that support literacy and learning at the grassroots level (Novrita, 2025). These models highlight the region's shared commitment to creating accessible, community-driven educational opportunities for those traditionally left behind.

However, implementing ALS poses enormous hurdles, as demonstrated by the scenario in Magsaysay, Palawan. During the 2022-2023 school year, the district's program had low completion rates, with only 14.50% of pupils completing the Portfolio Assessment and 6.11% progressing to Senior High School. The results from the ALS District Office show a significant disparity between enrollment and successful program completion, implying that present

implementation efforts are insufficient. The district focal person has specifically emphasized that assistance from various agencies and extensionists is "desperately needed" to manage the increasing number of learners and enhance outcomes, emphasizing the crucial need for external support.

This local issue clearly demonstrates a vacuum in which higher education institutions (HEIs) can act through their mandated community extension programs. Extension is an important component of higher education that aims to foster a mutually beneficial relationship between academics and society by applying knowledge to community concerns (Soska & Butterfield, 2013). In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) requires HEIs to participate in such activities and directs them to connect with communities for developmental impact. The gap is thus defined as the lack of an organized, long-term extension program geared to address ALS in Magsaysay. This gap motivated the current researcher to examine the ALS program in Magsaysay, Palawan, to determine its specific needs and shortcomings, as well as to create an evidence-based, long-term extension activity program for PalawanSU-PCAT's Teacher Education Department.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to analyze the learners' performance in the ALS program of Magsaysay, Palawan which will be served as the basis for sustainable extension activity program of the PalawanSU-PCAT Teacher Education. Specifically, the objectives of the study are the following: (1) To determine the demographic profile of the learners in the Alternative Learning System of the Magsaysay District, Magsaysay, Palawan. (2) To discover the primary reason why respondents, choose the Alternative Learning System for their basic education. (3) To assess the level of learning and performance of the students in the program after the administration of the Functional Literacy Test (FLT) in terms of communication skills in English and Filipino, Scientific Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills, Mathematical and Problem-Solving Skills, Life and Career Skills, and Digital Citizenship. (4) To design an intervention program in the implementation of the BSEd Program extension activity.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used a mixed method research design to analyze the learners' performance in the ALS program of Magsaysay, Palawan. The findings are intended to serve as the basis for developing a sustainable extension activity program for the PSU-PCAT Teacher Education department. According to Aramo-Immonen (2013), mixed methods research is a method of inquiry that incorporates or associates both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Mixed

methods design gives academics from various disciplines with a rigorous way to answering research issues.

By using this method, the researchers analyzed, interpreted, and reported the level of performance of the learners from the ALS program.

Population and Sampling

The respondents of this study were the 25 total population of learners in the Alternative Learning System of Magsaysay District who were officially enrolled in the system during the School Year 2024 – 2025.

Instrumentation

The researchers used a survey questionnaire and interview guide questionnaire to collect data from the respondents. Part I of the questionnaire included the learners Demographic Profile information, such as age, sex, and monthly income, which will be provided by the teacher-respondents. Part II of the survey was the results of the Functional Literacy Test, which was provided by the teacher-respondents. Part III was the direct interview to the students to determine the reasons why they chose to enroll in the program instead of the formal schooling and their suggestions in the intervention program that would possibly include in the implementation of the Teacher Education Extension Program.

Data Collection

The researcher, first and foremost, secured approval from the office of the district supervisor and secured all the necessary documents for data gathering. Upon completion of all the documents, the researcher informed the ALS Focal Person regarding the planned data gathering for the analysis. Afterwards, the researcher proceeded to the location to conduct the data gathering. After all the necessary data gathered, the information collated, organized and filed accordingly. Furthermore, the researcher organized and analyzed the data for further interpretation.

Treatment of Data

After the data gathering procedure, the researchers organized the data and tallied the result. In tallying, the researchers employed descriptive statistics such as frequency count, mean, rank, and percentage.

For the interview of the participants, the data analysis used is Cresswell's (2013) suggested research procedure for conducting qualitative research.

The researcher gathered the data from the interview and stored it in a reliable storage. The researcher made an extra copy and saved it in the other storage.

The researcher organized and prepared the recorded audio. Then, he made sure that the recorded audios were clear and ready for data analysis, where he reflected on it's over all meaning and took down notes on general thoughts about the data at this stage.

The researcher transcribed through verbatim the recorded audio from the participants. After transcribing the data through software, he checked the accuracy of the transcribed data, then analyzed, identified the themes, and prepared a detailed prescription for each identified theme.

Ethical Considerations

This document certifies that this study's purpose is to analyze the alternative learning system program of Magsaysay, Palawan as basis for sustainable extension activity program of the PalawanSU-PCAT Teacher Education. The researcher explained the purpose of the research, their right to refuse to participate, their comprehension of the study's confidentiality boundaries, and their right to receive a copy of the study's results if they so desire. Respondents are required to sign a consent form indicating their desire to cooperate and that they are not being pressured in any way.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1

Distribution of Respondents' Sex and Age

Profile	*f*	%
Sex		
Male	17	68.00
Female	8	32.00
Age		
11 - 13 year old	2	8.00
14 - 16 year old	10	40.00
17 - 19 year old	9	36.00
20 – 22 year old	2	8.00
23 year old and above	2	8.00
Total	25	100.00

It is worth noting that 68.00% of the students enrolled in the program were male and 32.00% female. Desulo and Dio's (2016) examination into the profile and performance of A&E passers in the province of Sorsogon confirmed the findings, with 63.46% males and 36.54% females. This suggests that the majority of students experiencing an educational crisis due to various circumstances are male.

The ALS program primarily serves adolescents, with a majority of learners

being mid-to-late teenagers which also supported by the findings of Tindowen et al. (2017), who enrolled 65.00% (98) learners aged 16-20 in the program from the Northern Philippines. This demographic focus suggests the program is effectively tailored for this age group, though it may have lower participation from very young or older learners

Table 2
Distribution of Respondents' Monthly Family Income

Income Cluster	Range of Monthly Family Income	*f*	%
Low income	Less than Php 18,200	25	100.00
Middle-income class	Between Php 18,200 to Php 109,200	0	0.00
Upper income	At least Php 109,200	0	0.00
	Total	25	100.00

The Socioeconomic Profile of ALS Learners indicates that ALS participants in Magsaysay, Palawan, come exclusively from low-income households. This finding aligns with the ALS program's primary objective of providing education to marginalized and economically disadvantaged individuals who cannot access formal schooling. The results were supported by the study of Tomarong and Rañoa (2024) where it is noticeable that 62.79% of the ALS learners respondents in the Region 10 have a monthly income of 5000.00 and below. The majority of respondents' monthly income, which is significantly below the poverty threshold released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) for the year 2018 at Php 10,481.00, it can be concluded that many of them have indeed halted their studies to work and earn money to help provide for their families' needs.

Primary Reason Why Learners Chose the Alternative Learning System for their Basic Education

The analysis of twenty-five (25) ALS learners revealed diverse motivations for opting for alternative education. Financial instability emerged as a dominant factor, with many learners citing the need to work or support their families, making traditional schooling impractical. Several respondents highlighted that ALS provided flexibility, allowing them to balance work and studies.

Another significant reason was the need to work, particularly among older adolescents and young adults who had to prioritize employment over formal schooling. *"kailangan po kasing mag-obra nalang para may pangbakal y ang pagkaen." "kami ara pambakal at pamasahe papakon school, maman makon si nanay mag obra kami ren lang."*

Some learners expressed that bullying in traditional schools negatively impacted their academic performance and self-esteem, leading them to seek a more supportive environment in ALS. *"ako moro perming ingsusuway akeng mga classmates at entremes, maman ara ko ren e seled seled."*

Teacher-related reasons also influenced their decision, with a few students citing unfavorable experiences such as unfair treatment or a lack of involvement in traditional institutions, which was supported by the study of Martir (2019) stating that embarrassment and humiliation from teachers and other school personnel were one of the factors relative to the increasing number of retained learners. Meanwhile, those from broken households frequently selected ALS owing to their unstable home settings, which made constant school attendance challenging.

Thus, ALS provides a critical alternative for students experiencing socioeconomic constraints, workplace responsibilities, social difficulties, or family issues, giving them a second chance to complete their education in a more accessible and accommodating atmosphere.

Students' Learning Level and Performance in the Functional Literacy Test

Table 3

Students' Level of Performance in Answering the Personal Information Sheet

Learning Level	Score	*f*	%
Basic Level	0 – 4	2	8.00
Lower Level	5	4	16.00
Advanced Elem.	6	5	20.00
Junior HS	7 – 8	13	52.00
Senior HS	9 - 10	1	4.00
	Total	25	100.00
	Mean	6.40 Advanced Elem.	

The assessment results demonstrate a fundamental and nuanced difference in the ALS learners' literacy skills: the capacity to complete a prescribed, formulaic exercise vs the ability to write creative, related language. While a slight majority (52%) demonstrated adequate literacy by completing a Personal Information Sheet at the Junior High School level, a significant proportion (44%) struggled significantly when asked to write a short paragraph about themselves at the Basic

to Elementary level.

Table 4

Learners' Level of Performance in the Different Learning Strands (LS)

Learning Level	Frequency						
N = 25	LS 1 (Eng)	LS 1 (Fil)	LS 2	LS 3	LS 4	LS 5	LS 6
Basic / Lower Level	8	2	4	4	1	1	2
Advanced Elem.	4	2	2	5	7	4	2
Junior HS	13	20	18	15	16	19	20
Senior HS	0	1	1	1	1	11	1
Mean	4.36	6.04	3.60	5.0	4.04	4.68	3.68
Learning Level	Advance Elem	Junior HS	Junior HS	Junior HS	Junior HS	Junior HS	Junior HS

Legend: Learning Strands (LS) such as Communication Skills in English (LS 1), Communication Skills in Filipino (LS 1), Scientific Literacy and Critical Thinking (LS 2), Mathematics and Problem Solving Skills (LS 3), Life & Career (LS 4), Understanding the Self & Society (LS 5), and Digital Citizenship (LS 6).

Based on the FLT results for ALS learners in Magsaysay, Palawan, the overall performance across various learning strands is at a Junior High School level, indicating moderate success for the program. The strongest areas were Communication Skills in Filipino and providing basic Personal Information, while most other strands including Mathematics, Life & Career, and Understanding Self & Society also clustered at the Junior High School level. However, significant gaps were identified, as very few learners achieved Senior High School proficiency in any subject.

The results highlight specific challenges, with English Communication Skills, Scientific Literacy and Critical Thinking, and Digital Citizenship ranking as the poorest categories. These findings, supported by cited studies, indicate that Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners have low proficiency in communication, scientific literacy, critical thinking, and mathematics, necessitating targeted interventions such as practical drills and differentiated instruction (Tindowen et al., 2017; Ocampo, 2021). These findings can help to build long-term extension programs that use real-life scenarios and ICT tactics to address these deficiencies while supporting different learning styles (Flavian, 2016; Ocampo, 2021).

Table 5
Learners' Overall Learning Level After the Administration of FLT

Learning Level	Score	*f*	%
Basic Level	0 – 9	2	8.00
Lower Level	10 - 13	0	0.00
Advanced Elem.	14 - 27	1	4.00
Junior HS	28 - 64	21	84.00
Senior HS	65 - 98	1	4.00
	Total	25	100.00

This distribution highlights the ALS program's effectiveness in preparing most learners for JHS equivalency but also underscores challenges in advancing them to higher levels or addressing the needs of those at the Basic Level. The absence of learners in the Lower Level may indicate a gap in mid-tier competencies or the need for targeted interventions for struggling students. To enhance sustainability, the program could incorporate differentiated instruction, remedial support for low performers, and advanced modules for learners nearing SHS equivalency. Further investigation into barriers preventing progression beyond JHS would also strengthen future extension activities.

Proposed Extension Program as Intervention

Project COUNT (Connecting, Optimizing, and Unfolding New knowledge through Tutorial) is designed to assist learners in the ALS program who are unable to manage independent learning through one-on-one instruction or mentoring of the lesson content aligned with the learning competencies by providing additional and supplementary learning materials and guiding them in answering the assessments provided in the worksheets. It is also an avenue to continue connecting with the learners, continuing their education and enhancing their basic literacy and numeracy at home.

The one-to-one tutorial, small group discussion, and school visitation will be focused on competency gaps in the English literacy, Mathematical and problem-solving skills, scientific reasoning, and digital citizenship which will be done on the duration stated in the Memorandum of Agreement between the Agency and the University.

The designed intervention program will serve as the community extension program of the PalawanSU-PCAT Bachelor of Secondary Education, with the professors serving as extensionists in partnership with the ALS Program of Magsaysay, District, Magsaysay, Palawan.

CONCLUSIONS

The study highlights that the ALS program in Magsaysay, Palawan, primarily serves male adolescents and young adults from low-income households, reflecting its role in addressing educational gaps among marginalized groups. These findings underscore the need for sustainable extension activities tailored to the socioeconomic and demographic realities of ALS learners to enhance accessibility and effectiveness.

The learners' performance in the ALS indicates modest progress, but also emphasizes the need for focused interventions to overcome competency gaps in English reading, mathematical and problem-solving skills, scientific reasoning, and digital citizenship. These findings give a solid platform for creating a long-term extension activity program that strengthens weaker regions, improves instructional methodologies, and assures holistic learner development.

The proposed Extension program, Project COUNT, was designed based on the study's findings and will effectively improve the Alternative Learning System by providing targeted one-on-one and small-group tutorials, closing competency gaps, and encouraging continuous education through structured community engagement and supplementary materials.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

To improve the sustainability and impact of the ALS program in Magsaysay, Palawan, Local Government Units (LGUs) and educational stakeholders should dedicate more resources to targeted capacity-building activities. These should prioritize improving instructional delivery in English literacy, mathematics problem-solving, scientific reasoning, and digital citizenship through specialized teacher training, the integration of ICT in the teaching learning process for digital citizenship, and the creation of contextualized learning resources. Partnerships with NGOs and private sector groups should also be sought to secure money for infrastructure improvements, such as digitally equipped learning centers, in order to overcome technological gaps and promote fair access for all learners.

Furthermore, the implementation of Project COUNT should include regular monitoring and evaluation methods to measure its efficacy in closing learner skill gaps. Community involvement should be prioritized by forming relationships that encourage ownership and long-term commitment. To ensure scalability, the program's techniques, such as one-on-one tutorials and small-group sessions, should be documented and translated into a repeatable framework for nearby municipalities facing comparable educational issues. Government officials may also consider including ALS extension programs in local development plans to institutionalize support and ensure long-term funding for future initiatives. In

essence, Project COUNT is designed as a scalable and adaptable model, poised for implementation in other areas with ALS programs to create widespread educational change.

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