FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DROPOUT RATE IN ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM – ACCREDITATION AND EQUIVALENCY PROGRAM

Erick B. Atilano*
Rose Anne G. Omanito
Camille Joy Desipeda
Zayra Jane M. Domingo
Shari Naldee L. Garbin

University of the Philippines Diliman
Philippines
atilanoerick@gmail.com

Abstract: Illiteracy and poverty were the worst adversary the Philippine government has been encountering. For many years, efforts and funds were expended by the government to alleviate the problem that affects mostly the underprivileged citizens of the country. In search for prompt gratification of their needs, children and youth struggle to keep up with schooling and tend to satisfy their immediate concern by dropping out of school. This research study aimed to look into the factors influencing the dropout rate in Alternative Learning System – Accreditation and Equivalency Program of the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines. The result of this study was utilized in planning and developing a proposed responsive guidance program for the ALS learners. It was found out that majority of the reasons for dropping out from the program happened due to lack of interest and employment.

INTRODUCTION

Every Filipino has a right to free basic education, however, many Filipinos do not have a chance to attend and finish formal basic education. There are those who dropout from schools due to various external and internal reasons, while some do not even have schools in their communities. By the declaration in the 1987 constitution - *The State shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels, and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all,* the government has vowed to eradicate illiteracy and make education reach every citizen. For decades, Philippines has been head to head with its battle with illiteracy and has been putting so much importance in the improvement of basic education as it entails the growth and development of the nation (Rodriguez, 2007).

Illiteracy was noted as the biggest obstacle that hampers the economic growth of a country. Southeast Asian and African countries, most especially, have been bombarded with economic crisis brought about by poverty which links to illiteracy. Philippines was tagged as one of the countries to have the highest poverty incidence rates in Southeast Asia. Amongst everyone, the Out-of-School Children (OSC), Out-of-School Youth (OSYs), and Out-of-School Adults (OSAs) were the most affected by poverty due to lack of educational opportunities created, however, by illiteracy itself (Apao et al., 2014).

To alleviate the issue, Alternative Learning System (ALS) was established to provide all Filipinos the chance to have access and complete their basic education in a way that fits their distinct situations and needs (DepEd, 2016). Alternative Learning System is a parallel learning system which combined non-formal education and informal sources of knowledge and skills (DepEd, 2016). It specifically targets the learning needs of school leavers, adults and other learners from marginalized groups who do not have access to formal education. Through ALS, those who are "deprived, depressed, and underserved" as described by the law will now be offered with education towards Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test that may grant either elementary or high school diplomas (Arzadon and Nato, 2015). This test was developed by the Bureau of Non-formal Education (BNFE) and is administered yearly. It provides an alternative means of certification of learning for Filipinos and foreigners aged 15 years old and above who are unable to avail or do not have access of the formal school system, or who have dropped out of the formal elementary and secondary schools but are not basically illiterate. Passers of the test will get a chance to be go back to the formal basic education system, higher education or any technical-vocational school ("Philippine Education for All 2015: Implementation and Challenges Philippines", 2015).

It was established to benefit those who cannot afford formal schooling and follows whatever their available schedule. It reaches out to elementary and secondary school dropouts, youth and adults who, although in school, are over-aged for grade 6 and 4th year, unemployed/underemployed OSYs and Adults, Industry-based workers, housewives, maids, factory workers, drivers, members of cultural minorities/Indigenous People (IP), Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)/physically challenged and inmates and rebel.

Furthermore, ALS seeks to improve the socio-economic status of the OSYs and the poor by enhancing their basic educational capability through functional education and literacy, and continuing education programs, which will enable them to become more self-reliant, be integrated more effectively into the social and economic enhancement and self-growth opportunities; promotion of literacy programs for the attainment of basic skills that include numeracy and functional literacy and which are basic needs for every individual; development of livelihood skills which manifest in the individual specific competencies that prepare, improve, and enhance employability and economic productivity and the expansion of certification and equivalency programs, which are administered by the formal Education subsystem, into the non-formal sector.

Prior to the program, learners under the ALS will be assessed and profiled to identify their level and appropriate learning interventions. After which, they will be classified as Basic Level, Continuing Education for elementary and secondary levels, or Lifelong Learning learners. Once they're in, they will be working together with the stakeholders and will work on determining the specific course agreements like objectives, curriculum and schedules. Similar to the formal basic education system, the ALS curriculum has five learning areas: communication skills; problem solving and critical thinking; sustainable use of resources and productivity; development of self and a sense of community; and expanding one's world vision where knowledge, respect, peace, solidarity and global awareness are taught. Upon completion of the program, a certificate signed by the DepEd secretary is issued to the graduates as counterpart of the diploma in the formal education system.

In the research locale of this study, in batch 2015 of a learning center run by a non-stock, non-profit foundation in partnership with the DepEd, 67.05% of the total enrolled learners dropped out of the ALS program, This paved way for the researchers to look into the data to uncover the reasons influencing the current trend of attendance and dropout of learners in the ALS – A&E program.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Formal education, with its overarching goals to dispense knowledge and inculcate skills to the youth, is not without flaws in its system. This is true for almost every society like the Philippines, which had 4 million children and youth who were out of school in 2013 (PSA, 2015). To address the issue of the rising number of out-of-school youth, the Department of Education has been promoting the administration of Alternative Learning System for affected and at-risk members of communities in different parts of the country. The programs seek to address problems such as illiteracy and high dropout rates, as well as lack of support for the education of indigenous people, Muslim migrants, the physically handicapped, and other disadvantaged children.

The presence of such an informal and non-formal structure of education abides by the principles on education that were upheld by various philosophers. One of them was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose works on education had become one of the central ideas for alternative education. According to Rousseau on his own political novel *Emile*, the growth of the learner should be facilitated with opportunities from a nurturing environment (Doyle and Smith, 2007). Rousseau's ideas on education were controversial during his time, as he emphasized the need for children to develop their natural capacities by a process of semi-autonomous discovery.

The Alternative Learning System subscribes to this pattern of learning, as it is a more practical option for out-of-school youth and other people who cannot cope with formal instruction. The ALS offers basic education in a way that fits their distinct needs and situations. The educational practices here can be likened to Rousseau's ideas that educational practices should be adjusted to make the people focus on what directly affects them and learn through their senses as they study and explore the natural world (Delaney, n.d.). This is widely different from the formal model of education, where a predetermined curriculum is followed by the teacher, who is an authoritarian figure who dispenses knowledge and skills according to the regulations. The students have to comply with the instructional goals and get measured by certain key metrics that will rank them on their performance.

The stages of education as envisioned by Rousseau greatly differ with the strict objectives of public formal education. In the setup of alternative education, the learning environment is controlled to encourage practical experience, not with the use of books or formal lessons. There is also more reliance on applying the knowledge

instead of focusing on theories and rote knowledge (Bertram, 2012). Schools following the formal model additionally expect learners to advance in an exacting and linear pattern from preschool to college. This is not the reality for out-of-school youth who sometimes sought to leave such a system for its pressure on attendance and mobility through the stages. More often than not, the ALS works better for them because the programs in ALS are modular and flexible. Learning can take place anytime and anywhere, depending on the convenience and availability of the learners.

John Dewey, another major philosopher on education, contributes a significant amount of support for the Alternative Learning System. His study at the turn of the 19th century about the 'democratic' notion about a curriculum that prioritized the child instead of the subject matter gained popularity among parents and educators (Rorty, 1998). Dewey's philosophical thinking that education must engage with the learners and their experiences continues to be influential in shaping and developing informal education. He pointed out that the curriculum to be followed should be relevant to the lives of the students. According to him, there should also be emphasis on the enhancement of practical life skills. This would help the learners become more invested in what they were learning in school and be more proactive on how they can improve upon their potential.

Such form of education was labelled progressive, as there is more focus on the student's progress in learning. This model follows the informal and non-formal ways of ALS programs, which seek to supplement the lack of educational development on the part of the students who are encouraged to finish the programs and acquire a certificate that is equivalent to an elementary or high school diploma. From here, the focus shifts again to the way students are learning. Is ALS really an effective measure to promote literacy and practical skills among out-of-school youth and other learners?

Learning can be studied in various models in the informal or non-formal classroom. The fundamental philosophical model consists of the study on the relationship of the teacher, student, and the learning process. In the perspective of the students in ALS programs, one of the primary motivations is to achieve the equivalency certificate and graduate in order to gain more career-related opportunities. Their reason for studying is geared towards obtaining stable employment and pursuing financial security. This makes them unable to focus on classroom activities that are solely based on knowledge without the infusion of skill enhancement tasks. Teachers emphasizing this type of curriculum will most likely fail to grab their attention and keep them interested in studying.

A student-centered approach, on the other hand, is seen to work best with students in the ALS programs. More emphasis on activities that help them achieve their goals in life strengthens their motivation to continue their studies until they graduate. Teachers who therefore understand their ALS students' motivations would be more likely to influence them towards completing their programs successfully. One way to achieve that is to engage in 'dialogics,' one of the tenets of education which was raised by Paulo Freire, whose thoughts on education became one of the seminal works of Marxist-based educational practices. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* defended progressive education as well as informal education in extension.

According to Freire, it is important for both teachers and students to take part in a respectful dialogue towards each other. It should involve 'people working together in a conversational tone of education,' not one person imposing on the ideas of others (Smith, 2002). This second scenario is a banking method, wherein the educator 'deposits' knowledge in the student. Such a method would be useless in helping students think and develop on an optimal growth. Instead, the banking approach would further put them in a state of 'oppression' as they cannot think for themselves. The consciousness of the students must be adequately nurtured in order to form the pedagogy of hope.

One way to involve students and enhance their chances of proper development is to promote 'praxis' or informed action. This does not just deepen the understanding, but is part in imbuing a sense of justice and community in students. Building on the shared experiences of ALS learners can help the programs open up new ways to motivate them further in developing their intellect and practical abilities. Through these, informal and non-formal educators can work on helping more students achieve their goals while hopefully decreasing the number of out-of-school children and youth.

When it comes to their goals, adults are generally more or less fully aware of what they want to achieve at a certain point of their lives. This also applies to the desire to finish high school or learn a new hobby. Intellectual needs have to be fulfilled to assure optimal development. Maslow would say that obtaining such goals helps a person to be closer to self-actualization. This makes it important to give adults the support they need if they want to go back to school to finish their education or venture to the fields they want to explore more.

No matter how old people get, they should be able to continue their education if they want to. Not everyone can go back to a formal type of education, too, especially with its rigid focus on a number of requirements. There are also the ages of the classmates to contend with. It can be hard to fit in an environment where one is like an elder sibling or a parent to a group of children or youth. This is one reason why many adults choose to venture to the Alternative Learning System that is available in their community. In fact, a large number of committed learners in the ALS are adults who want to finish their education and get an equivalency certificate. Their goal to succeed in ALS can be inspiring and points back to how ALS is an effective method to get people back into school.

This follows a number of philosophical movements in education such as the progressive type of education, which emphasizes student-centered learning (Spurgeon & Moore, 1994). This allows adults to be in charge of the way they learn. According to the philosophy of progressive education, learner needs, interests, and experiences are valued and become part of the learning process. This can mean a great deal, especially for adults who are not so confident with their abilities.

Additionally, there is more room for practical learning and problem solving. Applying what they learned would go a long way to enhance comprehension. John Dewey would approve of this, as he subscribes to the idea that students should be able to apply what they learned in different aspects of their lives. Other than that, progressive education gives way to collaborative learning. This allows students to work with each other in projects and class discussions. Dialogues with the teachers are also encouraged for active inquiry and push for discovery learning.

The progressive philosophy on education is not the only thing that applies to ALS for adults. The humanist tradition is strong in many ALS programs that seek to enhance personal growth and development. The learner must be self-directed and committed to the process, though. Interpersonal communication may be part of the humanist tradition, but it is still important for the learners to be more proactive in studying, researching, and fulfilling all the requirements of the program they joined. Without voluntary learning, humanist education would not work for the adults participating in the ALS programs.

Teachers in this philosophical model act as a facilitator to learning. They help the participants understand the lessons through enriching activities and guide through understanding the main themes of what they are investigating. This is especially demonstrated in the ALS setting, as it wants to help adult students achieve their educational goals.

Although not a philosopher, Carl Rogers is one of the main proponents of the humanist philosophical approach to education. His way of focusing on the learner led the way for students to feel more responsible for how they learn. Adults going through this type of strategy can then go on the discovery type of learning, in which they themselves study the basic information about the topics. The teachers will then help them through the application, which would help them find out how to do things on their own. Such independent learning can be rewarding and drive students to undertake more activities to finish their learning goals.

These two approaches in the ALS type of learning can result to adult students who have the potential to become proactive learners. However, the differences lie in the quality and execution of the models in the ALS program itself, as well as the attitudes of the students taking part in the lessons. If done properly, then the ALS programs can bring forth adults who are better off with being productive with their studies.

All students have different needs, whether in the traditional classroom settings or the centers of Alternative Learning System. Generally speaking, the students in ALS classes have more complex needs due to their individual situations at home and school. This can be considered true in almost any place with alternative learning setups. Children, teenagers, and even adults who have not finished their education grapple with various issues, which affect their learning capacities.

According to Mullen and Lambie (n.d.) from the University of South Florida, the students in Alternative Education Schools (AESs) in the United States usually deal with a variety of problems. Although their study focused on the issues of students who have been removed from their traditional school due to discipline policies, their research is still relevant to the study of general ALS concerns. They have found out that students enrolled to AES centers due to any or a combination of the following: (1) referral by school, (2) social-emotional/behavioral issues, (3) truancy, and (4) suspension or expulsion from their traditional school. As a result of these problems students from AESs show signs of delinquency, from defiant behaviors to violence and aggression. Furthermore, mental health interventions are crucial for students in AESs. There is a high prevalence of suicidal tendencies, which identifies an essential need for counseling services. Antisocial behavior, defined as any socially disruptive

behavior that goes against what society considers as normal and acceptable, is also a major problem in AESs. This can be exacerbated with illegal use of substances such as drugs and alcoholic beverages. AES centers experience this problem more than traditional schools, due to a higher number of students using or possessing these substances.

Due to a lack of suitable educational support in traditional schools, it is not surprising to note that AES students need enhancement of fundamental skills such as reading, writing, and basic math. Many AES programs in the United States offer subjects on academic basics, interpersonal skills, state-required courses, life skills, and remedial instruction.

Transitional stress from a traditional to an alternative classroom setting is also generally experienced by the students. Prolonged absences due to waiting for proper placement can adversely affect their comprehension and academic outcomes. A stigma can also be attached to children about to or attending an AES. Labels such as 'bad students' or 'problem students' can make the students feel judged and disliked, which causes resentment and lack of willingness to continue their education.

A family can hinder or increase the educational opportunities that students obtain. This proves how delinquent youth often come from homes where discipline and cohesion are less present. Their families also have higher occurrences of significant dysfunctionality, drug abuse problems, imprisonment for felonies and misdemeanors, and a history of abuse.

Even single-parent families are not spared when it comes to problems encountered by AES students. The absence of a biological parent is seen as a contributing factor in student delinquency. Students with only a single father often have the highest rate of delinquency while a large number of those enrolled in AES centers come from single-mother families.

Although the settings are widely different, there are still some parallelisms in the situations faced by the students in both the United States and the Philippines. There are many similarities in the academic and family factors, as a large number of ALS students in the Philippines face problems in their studies while getting discouraged by their situation at home. The trend of out-of-school children and youth in the Philippines is increasing, which multiplies the similar circumstances they face in alternative classrooms.

Academic factors, in particular, can be a challenge given their inadequate level of knowledge and skills. This can serve as a block to the motivation of the students to graduate with an equivalency certificate. This is only one of the possible reasons why ALS learners leave their programs. Another factor to take note of is the type of family where the student came from. Do their families offer effective emotional support for the students to complete the programs? This is an all-important question, given how the family is a viral component in a student's mindset.

In a study conducted by Berliner et al. (2008), the drop-out and re-enrolment of students or learners may be explained by "push" and "pull" factors. In their literature, they had described certain school experiences that "push" and "pull" students towards dropping out and returning. Re-enrolees reported academic struggles and the need for more help to master grade-level content, boredom, and limited ways to make up for failed courses and credits. There were also experiences that pushed them to drop out alongside family crises such as homelessness and alcohol and drug use, fatigue from physically demanding jobs, pregnancy and parenting, gang pressures, and violence in the community. These were the personal challenges that "pulled" them away from school. On the other hand, the primary reason for the learners return to school was their failure to secure stable employment and that they have realized that it is critical to get a high school diploma, which was the minimum credential needed to earn a subsistence income.

The research conducted by Mercado (2015) discussed the problems encountered by the ALS learners as well as their experiences and assessment in the program. The goals are to lessen the number of illiterate students, help them develop positive attitude, interest and proper discipline through classes, training and worthwhile activities, and to encourage the out-of-school children, youth and adults to participate in all ALS programs and projects in the area. This way, they would be more capable to assimilate themselves in their surroundings and community. The challenges and problems faced by the ALS center in Tanauan are (1) difficulty in recruiting learners especially in Basic Literacy Program (BLP) because of student shyness and indifferences, (2) absenteeism, (3) negative thoughts from parents and even barangay officials about ALS, and (4) insufficient funds to sustain the program and project.

In terms of students' problems in the content and instruction in ALS, the data revealed that students have minimal problems in the content and instruction but faced more issues with the length of the program or course.

One of the students' reasons is that they had a hard time attending all classes and the suspension of classes affected the number of days that they did attend school. Some students also said that the course was either too short or too long.

Questions raised in this part is the length of the program, mastery of the subject matter, instructional delivery, scheduling of   activities, teacher-student ratio, availability of relevant and innovative programs, and implementation of school policies and procedures have a verbal interpretation of some extent. On the other hand, the number of curricular and extra-curricular activities, flexibility of the teachers and the ability to match the demands of the labor market has a verbal interpretation of little extent. Moreover, the number of curricula and co-curricular activities have lowest mean which implies that students experience fewer problems in this aspect.

In the second part of the assessment and evaluation in the ALS, the students said that they have minimal problems with this part with the program. Their performance in the A&E test had the highest mean with verbal interpretation of some extent for the reason that there are some students who took the test for the second time. In the research, the school said it can only do so much, as the students have the final responsibility for their studies so they can pass the test. Furthermore, students experienced very minimal problem with the quality of examination, with the assessment showing the lowest mean. This implies that they are contented with their exam since they are aware that it was carefully made by the experts to assess what they have learned from their lessons. In addition, they also have minimal problems regarding the schedule of examination because it was always based on their availability and convenience since some of them are working.

METHODOLOGY
Research Design
The study utilized the descriptive survey method as the research design of the study. Descriptive research is devoted to the gathering of information about prevailing conditions or situations for the purpose of description and interpretation (Aggarwal, 2008).

Population and Sample
The population of this study was the learners who were enrolled in Alternative Learning System (ALS) - Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Program. It is a program aimed at providing an alternative pathway of learning for out-of-school children, youth and adults who are basically literate but who have not completed the 10 years of basic education mandated by the Philippine Constitution. Through this program, school dropouts are able to complete elementary and high school education outside the formal school system (DepEd, 2016).

In this study, convenient sampling method was utilized. The sample was eighty eight (88) learners who have either completed or dropped out of the ALS – A&E Program under a non-stock and non-profit foundation for the year 2015. In partnership with the Department of Education, this 10-month program aims to help ALS learners progress along the learning continuum from functional literacy to autonomous learning in mastery of skills and competencies to pass the national ALS – Accreditation and Equivalency Tests. This will award them a certificate equivalent to high school diploma qualifying them to enroll in any colleges and universities of their choice (MLALAF, 2016).

Instrumentation
Demographic profile of the participants such as age, sex, and educational attainment were obtained using a survey questionnaire. The Instructional Managers' Monitoring Sheet was also utilized to determine the participants' reasons for dropping out from the ALS – A&E Program. Likewise, informal interview with the instructional managers was done to verify the reason stipulated from the monitoring from.

Data Collection and Analysis
Quantitative data was obtained from a survey questionnaire consisted of learners' age, gender, and educational attainment. Participation of the instructional manager was solicited and data were collected. To calculate the frequency and percentage distribution of the participants according to their demographic variables, Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) was used by the researchers.

 Statistical Treatment of Data
        In the treatment of data of the study, the following statistical treatments were used:
        a.   Frequency

Frequency shows how frequent each value of a variable occurs in a set of scores (Katzer et al., 1998). This treatment was utilized in the distribution of the participants according to age, sex, educational attainment, and reasons for dropping out from the ALS Program.

b. Percentage

Percentage frequency distribution is a display of data that specifies the percentage of observations that exist for each data point or grouping of data points (Shapiro, 2008). Likewise, this treatment was applied in the distribution of the participants according to age, sex, educational attainment, and reasons for dropping out from the ALS Program.

c. Weighted Mean

Weighted mean is a procedure for combining the means of two or more groups of different sizes; it takes the sizes of the groups into account when computing the overall or grand mean (Vogt, 2005).

FINDINGS

1. The participants' age on average is 20.36. Majority (21) of the learners were aged 17 years old and comprised 23.38% of the total population. It was followed by learners aged 16 years old, (13) and 19 years old (11), which made up 14.77% and 12.50% respectively. In Erikson's Psychosocial Theory, he asserts that adolescence, which is basically between ages 12 and 18 years old, is the stage at which an individual must meet and resolve the crisis of basic ego identity. In this regard, adolescents may experiment with different roles and ideologies and try to determine the most compatible fit. Individuals who are unsuccessful in surpassing the stage may exhibit a confusion of roles, thus, they may not seem to know who or what they are, where they belong, or where they want to go. They will be usually the ones who may withdraw from the normal life sequences like education and jobs (Schultz and Schultz, 2005).

The participants were dominated by male, consisting of fifty-three (53) learners at 60.23%. On the other hand, thirty-five (35) participants were female, covering 39.77% of the learner's population. According to a research study of Mercado (2015), one of the possible reasons on why there are more male ALS learners is related to bullying. A large number of male students who stopped attending a regular school were either bullies or victims of bullies. This might have been a reason for a possible suspension or expulsion from school (in the case of bullies) or a lack of interest to continue regular schooling (on the part of bullied victims). There are also likely situations when traditional schools find some male students who are hard to deal with due to delinquent behavior or disciplinary issues. This might have affected their school attendance and performance.

The most number of learners attained grade 6 level (29) of education encompassing 32.95% of the participants. Learners who attained 3rd year in high school followed with 23 learners covering 26.14%. Based on the data, the ALS learners who stopped attending a traditional school at grade 6 level make up the highest percentage.

2. Fifty nine (59) learners which comprised 67.05% of the participants enrolled in the learning center dropped-out while only twenty nine (29) or 32.95% completed the program. A total of thirty one (31) learners comprising 35.23% of the participants expressed lack of interest as their primary reason why they dropout from the program. According to Orbeta (2010), these students often do not see the value in continuing their education and envision only small returns on the time and effort they put into their studies. Moreover, lack of personal interest is a complicated reason which entails more reasons alongside such as poor information on the value of education, impatience on the returns and benefits of education, and the accumulation of frustrations due to inability to cope with lessons primarily caused by poor school or household environment.

3. Employment ranked second on the list with seventeen (17) or 19.32% of the learners citing this reason. One reason that students think this way is that the educational system is not producing results that are relevant to the needs of students and their families. Thus, instead of schooling, the individuals then result to look for jobs to keep up and get immediate economic returns. As reiterated by Orbeta (2010), the abysmal economic conditions in the areas where there are high numbers of out-of-school children and youth influence students to drop out and look for work instead.

4. A responsive guidance program would be beneficial to ensure the holistic well being of learners especially on areas not tapped by lecture modules of the curriculum. The purpose of the responsive guidance program for ALS-A&E program is to provide all interested parties with a comprehensive aid in understanding, developing and implementing a guidance plan for the learners. The overall plan would make specific

reference to guidance and would incorporate a guidance plan that would help enable an institution or organization to define its priorities and to best deploy the resources available to it.

CONCLUSION

The following are the conclusions formulated based on the data gathered:

1. In general, the majority of the learners are adolescents and young adults with ages ranging from 16-19 years old. The number of male learners is higher than the number of female learners by more than half of the total respondents. Also, a high number of learners completed only Grade 6 and 3rd year level of formal education.

2. The majority of the reasons for dropping out from the program happened due to lack of interest and employment. As affirmed by William Glasser's Control Theory of Motivation, learners are not motivated to do their schoolwork because they think it is irrelevant to their basic human needs. This can imply that the parents or guardians of the learners might have failed to instil the value of education. It can also be surmised that the current teaching strategy is not effective in meeting the learning objectives.

3. Employment is the secondary cause of ALS dropout. This shows how important it is to hear the students out when it comes to their financial problems. Addressing this concern makes it possible to engage more learners who might get encouraged to stay on with the program if they are given assistance in acquiring food and other necessities that can help support their family's daily needs. These are crucial concerns to address, especially for demotivated students who do not see the connection between education and future employment and for students who are persevering to finish their education but cannot continue due to low income.

4. Developing and implementing a guidance program for the ALS-A&E Program is needed to provide a holistic development for the learners. It is one way to involve students and enhance their chances of proper development. This guidance program can also open up new ways to motivate the learners further by developing their intellect and practical abilities. Through these, informal and non-formal educators can work on helping more students achieve their goals while hopefully decreasing the number of out-of-school children and youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Records should be shared between instructional managers and learning centers with confidentiality offered for all students. Other than the hard copies, there must be an online database so all the information can be backed up. An online database would also make it easier to access records through virtual means. This also makes it more convenient and accessible for instructional managers, counselors, and other service providers in the learning centers to consolidate the information about each student and provide suitable interventions when necessary.

2. Instructional managers should look into the factors contributing to the learning motivation of the ALS learners in involving themselves in school or any instructional program. Alternative Learning System providers should also revisit and review the programs and balance out the relationship of the learners' ability and the appropriateness, complexity and demands of the tasks given to them as the relationship of these factors are crucial in bridging the willingness of the learners needed for a successful achievement outcome. Examining the topics to see if they are really relevant to the general educational needs of the students would additionally help in pursuing policy changes in the curricula and other programs of study. This makes it necessary for instructional managers to find out how to make their students interested in their lessons and keep them motivated to study. It is additionally vital for the teachers to help students realize the connection of the learning objectives to real-life situations they might encounter in the future.

Also, coordination with parents must be strengthened to help ensure a good relationship between the school and learners. Positive parent involvement in the program is recommended especially with adolescent learners. Students with involved parents, regardless of family income or social background, are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, as well as enroll in higher-level programs. They also have higher

chances to advance in their classes and earn credits. Students with strong and nurturing parental support are more likely to attend classes regularly, have better social skills, and usually graduate on time.

3. A career guidance programs should be provided to ALS learners to bridge education with worthwhile employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. This can increase the chances that students will get more encouraged to do their best in achieving the equivalency certificate. The program can also address various concerns, from applying for employment to resolving work-related problems. Focusing on at-risk students who show signs of wanting to pull away from the program due to employment concerns will be addressed. Moreover, instructional managers and guidance counselors coordinating with students about their career plans can additionally help to bridge the perceived gap between learning and application of knowledge in various situations.

4. A responsive guidance program should be implemented focusing on the needs and concerns of the ALS learners. Impact evaluation and follow-up should also be conducted to evaluate the outcomes of all the programs implemented. It will inform the stakeholders if certain programs are effective or suitable to target participants which give powerful information for future directions.

5. The budget for the ALS should be increased to provide more resources for the development of responsive programs for comprehensive coverage. The government should offer programs that can support their families and help them gain more lucrative sources of income. Particularly, Local Government Units (LGUs) should be tasked to launch widespread information campaigns about the importance of education. Both government and non-government organizations should also work together to help everyone receive quality education and prepare amply for life.

6. Conduct further studies regarding the effectiveness of different intervention programs conducted for the ALS – A&E learners. Moreover, the DepEd needs to urgently conduct an in-depth and thorough empirical study concerning reasons behind the rising dropout rate of their ALS A&E Program to validate the result of this study. Studying the underlying causes will help ALS teachers, coordinators, and administrators to create more effective school programs to meet the special and specific needs of their students.

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