

LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF ALS A & E PASSERS IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERVENTION PROGRAM

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Abstract

This study was conducted to explore the learning experiences of ALS A & E passers in Grade 11 Senior High School learning environment of Sta. Josefa National High School, Sta. Josefa Agusan del Sur in the school year 2019 – 2020. It focused on the students' experiences in learning environment and learning engagement. A qualitative approach of research was employed in this study using phenomenological study method. The data were gathered through face-to-face oral interview of ten (10) identified ALS A & E passers who are currently enrolled in Senior High School. The data gathered were analyzed through thematic analysis. In terms of the ALS students' experiences in senior high school learning environment, the study revealed that students are somewhat unaccustomed with the school environment, hesitant to socialize with peers, amazed with the school facilities, and thinking that all teachers are terrors. Further, in terms of learning engagement, it is revealed that ALS students experienced difficulty in coping up with the lessons, feeling uneasy during class discussion, hard to connect with class activities, and thinking to stop schooling. Based from the results project ALE (Alternatives in Learning Enhancement) was created. It is an intervention program that aims to enhance the learning experiences of ALS students in Senior High School and reach out the marginalized students of ALS to pursue their studies by employing different activities. This will then be institutionalized and be utilized in Sta. Josefa District I.

Keywords: ALS A & E Passers, Learning Environment, Learning Engagement, Experiences, Intervention Program

INTRODUCTION

The importance of the environment in a student's learning is shown by student engagement. It uses a basic interpretation of the environment as a collection of external factors influencing student behavior (Maloshonok, 2014). Cavanagh (2012) pointed out that student involvement has grown in importance as a factor in research on learning environments and instructional design. Student engagement and learning environments are connected phenomena that have long been the focus of extensive theoretical and empirical research.

Philippines has always been responsive to the different challenges in education such as high rates of school dropouts, out-of-school-youth (OSY), and absence of formal schooling (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015). In this regard, the Republic Act No. 9155, known as the Governance Act of Basic Education, was decreed to provide an Alternative Learning System (ALS).

The ALS parallel learning method offers a workable substitute for the current formal education curriculum. It includes both informal and non-formal sources of information and expertise (RA No. 9155, 2011). The Department of Education (DepEd) is in charge of the ALS program, which aims to give basic education to Filipinos who are underprivileged, depressed, and

unserved (DDUs) (Arzadon & Nato, 2015). The World Bank Group (2018) reports that the number of ALS students increased to 641,584 in 2017 from 537,666 in 2016, and that ALS sessions are held in approximately 4 467 community learning centers spread out across the nation. This instance demonstrates how the Philippines' alternative delivery system for ALS is expanding.

The majority of earlier research' findings, according to experts, were focused on broad, quantitative issues without taking the learners' experiences and psychological composition into account (Garbin, & Omanito, 2016). The academic dispositions of ALS learners, which are crucial for pursuing formal educational goals beyond their completed informal basic education, are poorly understood. The World Bank Group (2018) recognizes the importance of the large proportion—an average of 60%—of ALS graduates and Accreditation & Equivalency (A&E) exam passers who are engaged in postsecondary education. As a result, it is crucial to look at how ALS learners transfer from non-formal to formal educational settings in light of how it may affect their academic results. It would be quite challenging to introduce pupils to a method that is different from how they are used to (Omwirhiren and Ibrahim, 2016).

The researcher, who is a Senior High School teacher, also observed this scenario in school in which students who are ALS A & E passers are not totally engaged in the teaching and learning process as they are now in the new learning environment. The transition from ALS to senior high school is a big adjustment to the part of the students.

With the premises above, the researcher felt a need to conduct a study determining the learning experiences of the ten (10) ALS A & E passers who are enrolled in Senior High School with regard to their new learning environment and on their learning engagement. This will then be the basis for crafting an intervention program.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This part presents various literature and studies about the themes based on the concept of the study. Emphasis is given to those that concern with the variables under the study.

The discussion is organized according to themes such as: Alternative Learning System and ALS Students Learning Experience.

ON ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM

In the Philippines, a parallel education system known as the Alternative Learning System (ALS) gives out-of-school youth and adult (OSYA) learners the chance to improve their functional and basic reading skills as well as access comparable pathways to finish their basic education. The Alternative Learning System (ALS), which includes both informal and non-formal sources of knowledge and skills, is a feasible replacement for the current formal education system. As a second chance education program, it seeks to give OSYA students the tools they need to continue their education in a way, at a time, and location that works for them and their needs so they may improve their quality of life and contribute positively to society (Department of Education).

For the past five decades, DepEd has operated parallel education systems for youth and adults who did not complete basic formal education. The current incarnation of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) includes two core components, the Basic Literacy Program and the Accreditation and

Equivalency (A and E) Programs. Obtaining this credential enables ALS participants to apply to higher education and training institutions or to jobs that require a high school education.

The implementation of ALS in the Philippines also encountered different issues and concerns. As pointed out by Igarashi (2018) ALS experienced low participation and passing rates, lack of skills training for procurement of better jobs in the future, shortage of budget, and mixture of participants exhibiting different states and drives. However, the latest and most challenging part in the implementation of ALS is its correspondence to the new K-12 curriculum and the enrollment of its graduates to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). With this, Department of Education issued the DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2019 or the Guidelines on the Implementation of the Enhanced Alternative Learning System 2.0 on the 2019 ALS K-12 Curriculum sets the provisions in ensuring strategic, efficient, and effective management of the implementation of enhanced ALS 2.0. On the other hand, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) issued CMO No. 10, s. 2018 which guided public and private HEIs in admitting ALS completers.

Since ALS is one of DepEd's leading platforms for addressing the academic needs of Filipinos who are not enrolled in school, it has offered a number of programs geared toward improving its general instructional methods and practices, including the creation of new ALS modules that are parallel to K-12 basic formal education and mobile learning delivery mode (Villenes, Iglane-Villenes, & Alcaraz, 2017). The target population of ALS has also increased to include prisoners, indigenous peoples (IPs), rebel returns, and domestic staff (Egcas & Garganera, 2019).

Despite significant advancements, ALS still has a number of issues. According to recent data, 3.7 million children and 3.1 million young adults did not complete their junior high education (World Bank Group, 2018), which suggests that at most 88% of these groups are still not covered by ALS plus the 34% of program non-completers. In terms of funding, the World Bank Group (2018) has advised the alleviation of ALS's operational and financial bottleneck given that its budget has consistently been less than 1% of the public basic education spending. Additionally, ALS students' diverse topographical and socioeconomic circumstances, as well as their learning motivations, are ongoing challenges that demand essential attention at this time (United Nations Children's Fund, 2012).

ALS STUDENTS' LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Student achievement has been linked to crucial concepts such as student involvement in the classroom. It is an activity that fosters growth and involves directing attention in a proactive manner in reaction to the environment. It is associated with a variety of educational outcomes, including achievement, attendance, conduct, dropout risk, and completion. It also plays a key role in understanding dropout, particularly when it comes to the progressive process that affects a student's life and ultimately determines whether or not they decide to withdraw. Additionally, multiple studies have shown that student engagement is a strong predictor of accomplishment and conduct in schools and that it is associated with increased academic performance (Hart, Stewart, and Jimerson, 2011).

The importance of the environment in a student's learning is shown by the student engagement. It uses a basic interpretation of the environment as a collection of external factors influencing student behavior (Maloshonok, 2014). Student involvement has grown in importance as a factor in research

on learning environments and instructional design, according to Cavanagh (2012). Student engagement and learning environments are connected phenomena that have long been the focus of extensive theoretical and empirical research.

In the context of Alternative Learning System, there are only a few studies on how engaged the ALS A & E passers who are enrolled in senior high school in their studies as they are now in different learning environment. Republic Act No. 11510 (ALS Act) emphasized that A&E Test JHS level passers are qualified to enroll in SHS or in selected technical vocational education and training programs through TESDA and A&E Test SHS level passers are qualified to enroll in higher education, or in technical vocational education and training programs through TESDA (Official Gazette, 2020). Further, DepEd has intensified its programs through ALS in SHS. This allows the JHS ALS completers, especially those who are underprivileged to continue their education and not be part of the growing number of out-of-school youths and paved the way to cater to the needs of the learners and provide opportunities for them to acquire vocational and technical skills which enhance their work readiness and increase their employability.

There would be several issues if teachers exposed students to a different teaching style than they are used to. For instance, students could struggle to determine the best teaching and learning strategies, prioritize the subjects they should learn, or become accustomed to the teacher's control techniques. Their capacity to engage in school activities, build relationships with their teachers, and perform well in school may all be negatively impacted by these issues (Ameh & Dantani, 2012).

The Alternative Learning System graduates have a poor study orientation and are not college-ready, according to research by Mamba, et al. (2021) titled Study Orientation and College Readiness Among Alternative Learning System Graduates in Northeastern Philippines. Additionally, it was discovered that the study orientation had a big impact on predicting college preparation. The results suggest that ALS graduates should improve their study habits and attitudes because they are crucial abilities in raising their college preparation. This study, which explores whether ALS students are prepared to go on to the next grade level by examining their learning experiences, is partly linked to the current study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was conducted to explore the learning experiences of ALS A & E passers in Senior high school learning environment of Sta. Josefa National High School, Sta. Josefa Agusan del Sur.

Specifically, this study sought to the answer the following questions.

1. What are the learning experiences of ALS A & E passers in senior high school in terms of
 - 1.1 learning environment; and
 - 1.2 Learning engagement?
2. What intervention program can be designed to enhance ALS students learning experience?
3. How can this intervention program be institutionalized?

METHODS

Sampling

This study utilized purposive sampling involving the ten (10) identified ALS A & E passers who are currently enrolled in Senior High School of Sta. Josefa National High School. Out from these ten (10)

students, five (5) were enrolled in Shielded Metal Arc Welding (SMAW), four (4) were enrolled in Automotive, and one (1) was enrolled in ICT.

Data Collection

The data were gathered by getting the lists of Grade 11 ALS A & E passers. The researcher sought the District Supervisor's approval for the conduct of the study. The identified ALS A & E passers were interviewed individually utilizing unstructured interview format. The interview was audio recorded and transcribed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As defined, a learning environment is more than just a classroom—it's a space in which students feel safe and supported in their pursuit of knowledge, as well as inspired by their surroundings (Western Government University, nd). It also encompasses the culture of a school or class—its presiding ethos and characteristics, including how individuals interact with and treat one another—as well as the ways in which teachers may organize an educational setting to facilitate learning (Great School Partnership, 2014). The four (4) themes that emerged from this study that described the learning experiences of ALS A & E passers in terms of the learning environment are *somewhat unaccustomed with the school environment, hesitant to socialize with peers, amazed with the school facilities, and thinking that all teachers are terrors*. Learning engagement is the ability to motivationally and behaviorally engage in an effective learning process (SUNY Empire State College). The four (4) emerging themes that described the learning experiences of ALS A & E passers in terms of learning engagement are *difficulty in coping up with the lessons, feeling uneasy during class discussion, hard to connect with class activities, and Thinking to stop schooling*.

PROPOSED INTERVENTION PROGRAM FOR ALS A & E PASSERS IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Project ALE (Alternatives in Learning Enhancement)

Project ALE (Alternatives in Learning Enhancement) was created to enhance the learning experiences of the ALS A & E passers in Senior High School learning environment. Further, this program aims to make Senior High School appealing to the part of marginalized students in Alternative Learning System and be motivated to finish their studies.

Based on the findings obtained from the interview, ALS students in Senior High experienced big adjustment on their new learning environment and on their learning engagement. The findings highlighted that the students experienced being somewhat unaccustomed with the new learning environment, hesitant to socialize with peers, and thought that all teachers are terror teachers. Further on their learning engagement, ALS students experienced difficulty in coping up with the lesson, felt uneasy during class discussion, could hardly connect with class activities and thought of stopping going to school. Because of these reasons revealed during the interview, Project ALE (Alternatives in Learning Enhancement) was created. This has the following components of program

- (1) Senior High School Advocacy Program,
- (2) ALS to Senior High School Program, and
- (3) Bridging the Gaps Program.

The program not only helps the students but also the parents, teachers and the school who have significant role on how the child grows and develop as a learner. Further, it is believed that

cooperation and strong participation in school community can bring success to the goals and objectives of the institution as a whole.

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