

The Impact of Alternative Learning System in Cotabato Division: A Case Study

Tarhata S. Guiamalon¹, Dedith A. Sandigan², Sema G. Dilna³

¹Graduate School, Cotabato State University, Philippines

²Fort Pikit Elementary School, Cotabato Division, Philippines

³Office of the University President, Cotabato State University, Philippines

Abstract

As a result of the world Declaration of Education for All (EFA) in 1990, the Philippines designed Alternative Learning System (ALS), a program that will provide non-formal education to out-of-school children (OSC), out-of-school youth (OSY), illiterate adults and marginalized Filipinos that will address illiteracy and promote continuing education. This research study used the qualitative research design involving the Cotabato Division in the province of North Cotabato implementing the ALS A&E program. The mobile teachers, District ALS program coordinators, ALS A&E passers, and the division ALS program supervisors were the respondents of this study. The studies were conducted in Cotabato Division particularly Central Elementary Schools. It was concluded that the ALS program was successful in providing basic learning needs to its beneficiaries and most of them pass the A&E test and were able to obtain an elementary or high school diploma and even college degree. The Alternative System Program of the Department of Education has great impact in Social and Economic Development of the North Cotabato Province.

Keywords— Education for All, Impact, Alternative Learning System, Case Study, Out-of-school youth

1. Introduction

In the Philippines, Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a program designed to provide non-formal education to out-of-school children (OSC), out-of-school youth (OSY), illiterate adults and marginalized Filipinos that will address illiteracy and promote continuing education. The Department of Education (DepEd) particularly the Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS) is in-charged to oversee the program. Both the elementary and secondary levels of education are provided free by the Department of Education. To guarantee the right to education of all Filipino citizens, the Republic Act 6655 or "Free Secondary Education Act" and Republic Act 9155 or "Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001" serves as blueprints of the DepEd. As stated in the act, this education is intended to be a realistic alternative to current formal education instruction, integrating both non-formal and informal sources of knowledge for out-of-school youth and adults (Principal's Handbook, 2005).

As a result of the world Declaration of Education for All (EFA) in 1990, ALS is responsible for providing demand-driven learning options. In 2001, the country adapted Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and in 2003 it adopted the Decade for Literacy. Despite this educational goal, the country still continues to suffer from high dropout rates. 62% of the population or 11,000,000 students drop out each year (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2010).

In Pinca's 2015 report, the ALS has been identified as a Community-Based Learning Service in which students' intellectual capacity is developed along their chosen career path along with the development of their sense of social responsibility and the opportunity to serve their local community. To achieve meaningful learning outcomes with such a diverse group of students, ALS teachers have to do their best (Galima, 2012). In an effort to address these challenges due to the changing world and knowledge economy, different options have been proposed and implemented by countries all around the globe to help individuals receive education through non-formal and informal education (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004), which is particularly important for countries like the Philippines (Nath, Sylvia, & Grimes, 1999). Moreover, ALS

teachers empower students academically through various teaching strategies to prepare students for the A and E exams. The teachers focus on the learning strands developed by DepEd: problem-solving and critical thinking skills, communication and self-development skills, and a sense of community. These aspects feed directly into five academic subjects: Math, English, Science, Filipino and History. (Sanchez, 2015)

Reports show that the A and E approval rate has increased steadily from 9% in 2000 to 21% in 2006 (Caoili, 2007). The pass rate peaked at 28% in 2013, but the number didn't hold up in 2014. Verzosa (2006) said that the lack of modules and under-resources in the learning centers are common problems in implementing the ALS A&E program. Accreditation and equivalence are often difficult to pass. And there are some scholars who would advocate the idea that the high drop-out rates and low outcomes can be attributed not only to the education system, but to symptoms of larger and broader social problems such as poverty and inequality. Critics would call development initiatives like ALS and NFE patch solutions. What is really required is structural change (Roger, 2004).

On the other hand, the idea of informal learning emanating from the workplace, community and life itself led to the practice of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). It is sometimes referred to as Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) and describes a process that involves identifying, articulating, and demonstrating the range of achievement and skills that an individual has acquired. (Morrissey et al., 2008). Out-of-school youth who have been unable to continue their studies after a long period of time have the option of ALS Accreditation and Equivalency (A and E), which reduces drop-out rates to complete their primary and secondary education outside of school. (Parugpug, 2014) When an out-of-school youth is uninterested in the classroom and attractive for employment, this led to students dropping out of the program, as reported in the study by Atilano et al. (2016).

2. Objectives of the Study

The study discusses the success stories of the ALS beneficiaries, describes the process of the Pre-implementation, Implementation, and Post-implementation of the ALS program and the benefits the program offers to the beneficiaries.

3. Methodology

Using a descriptive approach, the study was conducted.. This is appropriate in this study because it was interested to describe the extent of implementation status of the Alternative Learning Systems graduates in Cotabato Division for the school year 2016-2017. The study was conducted in Cotabato Division in the province of North Cotabato implementing the ALS A&E program particularly five Central Elementary Schools in Cotabato Division. This research study used the qualitative research design involving the Cotabato Division in the province of North Cotabato implementing the ALS A&E program. The mobile teachers, District ALS program coordinators, ALS A&E passers, and the division ALS program supervisors were the respondents of this study.

4. Results and Discussions

Attainment of ALS Objectives

The ALS A&E program aimed to equip the learners with life skills to cope successfully with situations in their day-to-day life. Life skills measured include self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relations skills, decision-making, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, coping with emotions, dealing with stress, and entrepreneurship. All respondents affirmed that these goals on life skills were achieved to a great extent. When determining the extent of learners' acquisition of life skills, the mobile teachers and supervisors considered their portfolios, test results, and reflection journals. This also means that the ALS A&E program was able to successfully promote life skills like self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relationships, decision-making, problem solving, creativity, critical thinking, and coping with stress and emotions.

Moreover, the ALS A&E objectives on Increase Literacy Skills were also highly attained. These were in interest, capabilities of democratic characteristics, socio-economic origins and status and addressing the

needs of marginalized group. According to beneficiaries, they do not base the learner's socio-economic status as long as they are willing to enroll in the program. These findings showed that the ALS program attend to the need and was able to increase the literacy capability of the learners.

A learning area is called a learning strand in the ALS, and it is the equivalent of a subject in formal education. There are three strands of learning associated with these skills: Communication Skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), Problem Solving and Critical Thinking (numeracy), Sustainable Use of Resources/Productivity (ability to earn a living through self-employment, outside employment, entrepreneurship, sustainable use of resources, and appropriate technology, Development of One's Self and a Sense of Community (personal and national history and identity, sense of cultural pride, recognition of civil and political rights), and Expanding One's World Vision (understanding and appreciating diversity, peace and nonviolent resolution of conflict, and global awareness).

The manifestation of the attainment of the goals and objectives were the data on enrollment. Furthermore, the enrollment for the last three (3) years in Basic Literacy Program, there were 34 Male and 74 Female enrolled for a total of 108 in the school year 2013. The following year, there were 87 males and 155 females for a total of 242 enrolled. On 2015 there were only 6 males and 59 females for a total 65 enrolled. This means that the year 2014 has the most total number of enrolled students for Basic Literacy Program. Also, the enrollment in A&E Elementary has been improving for the last three (3) years. On 2013, the total numbers of enrolled students were 73 with 32 males and 41 Females students. The following year, the students who were enrolled increased to 171 total numbers with 66 males and 105 females. On 2015, the number of students who enrolled was 249 with 173 males and 76 female students. Lastly, the total number of students on A&E Secondary in 2013 was 159 with 72 males and 87 female students. On 2014, the total number of students increased to 363 with 190 males and 173 students. On 2015, the total number of students increased tremendously with 516 students with 269 males and 247 females. These finding shows that the A&E Secondary was effective based on the number of students who were enrolled.

Process on Pre-Implementation

The processes on Basic Literacy Program on Pre-Implementation were all undertaken. These were listing of potential learners, selection of service providers, community literacy mapping, and house to house visit when asked about it; it was found out that the respondents did the survey on areas that might have the potential learners. They have also conducted and house to house visit to see if the potential learner is willing to enroll in the program.

Other process was Contract signing using LSCS with qualified service providers, screening of learners, conduct of Functional Literacy Test (FLT), preparation of individual learning and agreement (ILA). When asked about it, it was found out that before choosing the learner, they must go through the proper screening and interviews that are required by the program. With these, it showed that in pre-implementing the program, the needed learners are well screened and chosen.

Process on Implementation

The process on Implementation were keeping individual learner's assessment and learning progress form, development of localized learning materials, ILA-based modules, color-coded, vertical page layout-modules, use of andragogy, tracking of learner's progress, use of Learner's Portfolio, and conduct of summative evaluation. During the observation, it was found out that the teacher is on the process of evaluating their students and sees the progress of learner in literacy.

Further, other process was adoption of ALS, tracking of modules finished, flexible schedule, Use of Learner's Progress Chart, conduct of remediation and recording and reporting. When asked about it, the respondents said that they do remedial class for their learners in order for the learners to understand the lesson properly. These findings show that the ALS teachers are organized in producing their instructional materials. They also assess the students' learning progress.

Process on Post-Implementation

For Post-Implementation, the processes undertaken during the post-implementation of Basic literacy were Assessment of Literacy Gained, Reporting. When asked about it, the respondents said that they allowed their learners to report in a certain topic but also guided them in delivering it. These showed that the ALS teachers assessed the progress of their students in order to see if there will be a need to re-assess in presenting their lessons.

ALS Impact to Beneficiaries

The North Cotabato Division Office sees to it that they planned ahead before the implementation of school programs and activities, they developed skillfully school plan, they worked on the improvement of the physical aspects and facilities of the school, they also managed systematically and utilities other generated funds in accordance with accounting and auditing rules and regulations. During the observation, it was found out that the schools are well equipped with facilities and utilities needed for accreditation and also for the learners' sake.

Moreover, during the interview, the officials of the North Cotabato School Division assured that they really work for strengthening of their linkages and networking with stakeholders for financial support and other materials, they also used all management functions to address problems and weaknesses of teachers and created learning environment conducive and inclusive to all pupils. When asked about it, the respondents said that they are equipped with teaching materials needed. They are also supported with financial problems if there is any.

Furthermore, when visited, it was found out that they prepared a school budget and operate within that budget, maintains, analyzing, and interpreting student records information and assists in the recruitment and selection of personnel for instructional responsibilities. This result showed that the program attend to the needs of the program may it be financial or any support needed.

The Division of Cotabato through the Alternative Learning System brought the beautiful promise of education to the inmates of North Cotabato District Jail and Kabacan District Jail (Romualdo, 2014). Through the intervention, a number of inmates had the chance to pursue their education despite serving their jail terms. At least Seventeen (17) of them were from the North Cotabato District Jail and four (4) from the Kabacan District jail marched to receive their certificates as elementary and high school graduates.

Of the graduates, 2 finished tertiary, 11 finished high school while the six completed the elementary grades. There was a 52-year-old graduate and a 18-year-old graduate. One of the passers of the ALS Accreditation and Equivalency program in jail was Marites Pillo, 45 years old. She finished only third year high school due to early marriage. She confided that she has already spent six years in the jail and that she will be leaving prison last December. She was now enrolled in Skills Training Program under the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). According to her *“Abot-langit and aking kasiyahan nang malaman ko na pumasa ako sa exam. Pakiramndam ko, abot-kamay na rin and aking mga pangarap na akala ko ay hindi matutupad dahil sa aking pagkakamali na nagging dahilan ng aking pagkabilanggo”*

She further said *“Malaki and aking pasasalamat sa ALS at sa mga taong tumulong sa akin dahil nagkaroon ng direksyon ang aking buhay. Nagpapasalamat din ako sa aming guro dahil sa pagbibigay niya sa mga kasama ko at sa akin ng pag-asang maipagpatuloy and aming pag-aaral”*.

During the interview with the Instructional manager of the A&E learning sessions, he disclosed that there are times when he feels fear and apprehension while getting inside the jails in order to conduct classes. However, he said that he went on with the work because it is his commitment as an ALS teacher and because he wanted to do his share for “Education for All”. He further said that some inmates are difficult to deal with. However, there are also who would like to learn and who dreamed to take their lives to a new direction.

The Division ALS coordinator said that taking ALS to the jails helps him to really appreciate the big role that the system played in education. He shared that is not just about doing a regular task but it's about fulfilling a mission, that it is about giving hope and providing inspiration to others, and that it is about changing life. She further said that conducting the conferring certificates of graduation inside the jail, seeing inmates march to receive their certificates, and handling them the piece of paper certifying that they've graduated is a moving experience.

With commitment and support of the Department of Education, the goals and objectives, the implementation of the ALS program has impact to the beneficiaries. The indicators of the improvement of learner's quality of life were evident as shared by the ALS recipient. Despite many obstacles, they still managed to complete the ALS sessions, their drive to change the way the things were happening in their lives pushed them to strive hard for better life ahead. Phyrudz said, *"nice talaga ang buhay ng me natapus, Life is so inspiring thanks to sir Meds and mam Tons, who inspired me to continue my studies despite the hardship.*

There were different stories from successful passers. They faced a lot of sacrifices. Those around the corners, from where they came, generally spoke negatively. Others tried to discourage them. As shared by Ate Sor, a mobile teacher, "It is so painful hearing those negative comments but fortunately those statements did not stop the learners from making their dream a reality. With their will to be freed from the bondage of poverty, one learner endured all the mockery from those people. Maam Phyrudz life journey was rough, however, it did not stop her to struggle. Her dream came true when she graduated and pass the LET exam. In no case that this newly hired teacher I of DepEd declined everytime she was requested to speak before a crowd of ALS learners. *Binibigyan ko talaga ng time maam Deth ang mga ganyang bagay kasi I wanted to be their model.*

Meanwhile, another ALS passer shared his stories of extreme poverty as the reason why he stopped school. *"Kung wala pa ang ALS A&E ambot asa ko karun, way man kwarta ako ginikanan (Without ALS A&E program I don't know where I am today, My parents don't have money) unya tan awa ko karun eskwela nako hehehe (look at me now I am studying already hehehe)*

On the other hand, the Cotabato Division also produced Magna Cum Laude. She is from Katipunan Arakan, Cotabato, and was a second-year student of Katipunan High School when she quit because of financial difficulties and early marriage. According to her, her former teacher was the one who persuaded her to continue her studies through the alternative Learning or ALS.

Upon being asked how she managed her time during the course, she replied, *"I did my best to complete the modules and complete assignments within the allotted time.". Thereafter, I would submit all the modules to my former teacher for my answer to be checked. With God's mercy and with the help of my teachers, I got a good score for every learning strand. Mathematics was quite my Waterloo, so I had to ask help from a math teacher. After few months of studying with ALS. I was called to the district office to join in the rigid review for the A&E Examination".*

Following her passing of the Accreditation and Equivalency exam, she enrolled in Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology (CFST), Katipunan Campus for the course of Agricultural technology. After she finished the two year course, she decided to take up Bachelor of Science in Agriculture major in Agricultural Education. Having graduated with flying colors, she found no difficulty in finding a job. She was immediately hired as a contract of service instructor at CFCST Katipunan Internal Unit where she graduated.

"To those who stopped due to financial difficulties and to those who are victims of circumstances. Don't lose hope. It's not too late. You can still continue your studies. DepEd ALS will catch you and help you reach for your dream. Don't ever think it's too late or you're old enough or you don't have money, or you're ashamed or you're afraid. These excuses won't help you at all. Believe you can still succeed despite the odds. Remember, education is a lifetime treasure and key to a new and better life. Age does not matter in

attaining succeed. We don't need a lot of money to go to school. Our government is ready to help us. ALS was with me and ALS is still there for you". She narrated.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the ALS program has successfully met the basic learning needs of its beneficiaries, and most beneficiaries are able to pass the A and E examination and earn a high school diploma and even college credits. It has a significant impact on the economic and social development of North Cotabato Province through the Alternative System Program of the Department of Education.

6. Recommendations

In the light of the findings and conclusion this study, it is strongly recommended that:

1. Curriculum enhancement and evaluation on a regular basis to ensure that students' learning experiences are enhancing their knowledge.
2. ALS teachers capacity building in order to improve their teaching skills.
3. Students supports might be considered as a motivator for out-of-school youth to attend school and avoid dropping out.

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