

# A Phenomenological Study of Decision-Making, Educational Barriers, and Facilitative Guidance in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Senior High School

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**Abstract**— This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Senior High School learners and teachers in Butuan City, Philippines, focusing on decision-making, educational barriers, facilitative guidance, resilience, and future orientation. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological method. Findings revealed that learners continually navigated poverty, limited resources, family responsibilities, and social stigma as they made significant educational and life decisions. Two major themes emerged: Transformative Resilience and Empowered Future Orientation. Participants demonstrated resilience through adaptive coping, perseverance, self-confidence, and problem-solving abilities developed from recurring encounters with adversity. Facilitative guidance from teachers, characterized by mentorship, emotional support, and trust-based relationships, strengthened learners' agency and persistence. Furthermore, educational engagement fostered hope, career aspirations, and positive future perspectives among learners and teachers. The study concludes that resilience, agency, and future-oriented thinking are cultivated through supportive educational environments, highlighting the vital role of ALS in empowering marginalized learners toward meaningful educational and life outcomes.

**Keywords**— Alternative Learning System, phenomenology, resilience, decision-making, future orientation, facilitative guidance.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Philippines serves as a parallel and flexible basic education pathway for learners who cannot access or complete formal schooling due to socioeconomic, geographic, familial, or personal circumstances [1]. Republic Act No. 11510 institutionalized ALS to provide out-of-school children, youth, and adults in special cases with equitable opportunities to improve life skills, work readiness, self-employment capacity, and access to further education [2]. In Senior High School, ALS becomes especially significant because it offers marginalized learners a second-chance route to complete basic education while responding to their lived realities and community-based learning needs [3]. For ALS learners, decision-making is not merely academic but survival-oriented, as choices about schooling are often shaped by poverty, work demands, family responsibilities, limited support, and emotional pressures [4].

Within this context, the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood track, particularly Home Economics, strengthens ALS by linking education with practical competencies in food

preparation, household management, entrepreneurship, and livelihood development [5]. These competencies are relevant because TVL education is designed to improve employability, entrepreneurial readiness, and life skills among learners who require immediate and functional pathways toward economic participation [6]. However, despite the promise of ALS and TVL-based learning, learners continue to encounter barriers such as financial difficulties, time constraints, limited access to technology, inadequate learning resources, and weak social support systems [7]. Recent studies further show that ALS implementation remains challenged by unequal access, resource limitations, and the need for stronger learner-centered instructional support [8].

Facilitative guidance from teachers and instructional managers is therefore essential in sustaining learner participation, motivation, and persistence in ALS Senior High School [9]. Through mentorship, emotional support, flexible learning strategies, and trust-based communication, instructional managers can help learners transform difficult circumstances into opportunities for resilience, self-direction, and educational continuity [10]. In this regard, the present phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of ALS Senior High School learners in Butuan City as they make educational decisions, confront barriers, and receive facilitative guidance from their teachers [11]. By foregrounding learners' voices, the study aims to generate practical insights for educators, policymakers, and communities in strengthening inclusive, responsive, and empowerment-oriented ALS implementation [12].

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This section presents the research design, respondents, instruments, and statistical methods used to examine the relationships among the study's key variables.

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of ALS Senior High School learners and instructional managers regarding decision-making, educational barriers, and facilitative guidance. The phenomenological approach enabled the study to capture the meanings participants attach to their experiences, providing a rich and holistic understanding of how they navigate challenges and

make sense of their educational journeys within the ALS context [11].

*Research Locale*

The study was conducted in selected Alternative Learning System (ALS) Senior High School learning centers in Butuan City, Caraga Region, Philippines, a diverse educational hub serving out-of-school youth, adult learners, and marginalized individuals seeking alternative pathways to complete their education. The city's established ALS programs and diverse learner backgrounds provide a rich context for exploring learners' lived experiences of decision-making, educational barriers, and facilitative guidance in flexible learning environments.

*Research Respondents*

The respondents of this study were eighteen ALS Senior High School students enrolled in Butuan City's Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) track during the 2025–2026 school year, along with their seven instructional managers, who led class sessions and served as respondents. The instructional supervisors offered their thoughts on assistance and guidance, and the learners were purposefully chosen to represent underrepresented and non-traditional students overcoming educational obstacles.

*Research Instrument*

The primary research instrument was a validated semi-structured interview guide designed to explore the lived experiences of ALS Senior High School learners and instructional managers regarding decision-making, educational barriers, and facilitative guidance. The instrument underwent face and content validation by three education and qualitative research experts, whose recommendations improved its clarity, relevance, sequencing, and contextual appropriateness, ensuring its suitability for capturing rich and authentic participant narratives.

*Data Analysis*

Data were collected through a semi-structured interview guide and analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological method, which involved identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, developing exhaustive descriptions, and validating findings with participants. Guided by the ALS Resilience and Empowerment Framework (AREF), the analysis revealed key themes related to survival-driven decision-making, educational barriers, teacher-supported agency, resilience development, and the role of collaborative and motivational practices in fostering learner empowerment.

*Ethical Considerations*

The study adhered to established ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and justice by obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and safeguarding the confidentiality and anonymity of all ALS learners and instructional managers involved in the research. Participants were treated with sensitivity and respect throughout the data collection process, and all information was securely managed

to protect their rights, dignity, and welfare while contributing to the improvement of ALS Senior High School programs.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents and discusses the study's findings based on the gathered data, highlighting key results and their implications for the research objectives.

*3.1 Alternative Learning System (ALS) Senior High School learners experience, navigate, and make significant educational and life decisions within an ecosystem of persistent barriers*

TABLE 1: Thematic Analysis on Alternative Learning System (ALS) Senior High School

Category	Themes	Sub-themes
<b>Learners experience</b>	Confronting Educational Marginalization	Experiences of Exclusion; Resource Scarcity; Emotional Challenges
<b>Navigate</b>	Exercising Resilience Amid Challenges	Adaptive Coping; Self-Motivation; Seeking Support Systems
<b>Significant education</b>	Education as a Pathway for Transformation	Skill Acquisition; Self-Improvement; Future Employment Aspirations
<b>Life decision</b>	Agency Within Constraints	Survival-Based Decisions; Educational Prioritization; Family-Centered Choices
<b>Persistent Barriers</b>	Intersecting Socioeconomic Challenges	Poverty; Work Obligations; Social Expectations; Limited Educational Resources

*Theme One: Confronting Educational Marginalization*

This theme captures the lived experiences of ALS Senior High School learners as they confront exclusion, resource scarcity, and emotional challenges that shape their educational participation and persistence, as reflected in their responses.

**KI 1:** "There were times when I felt ashamed because some people looked down on ALS learners and thought we were less capable than those in regular schools."

**KI 2:** "I struggled to attend classes regularly because I did not always have money for transportation and school materials."

**KI 3:** "Balancing family responsibilities and studies was emotionally exhausting, but I continued because I wanted a better future for myself and my family."

The narratives reveal that educational marginalization among ALS learners is manifested through experiences of social exclusion, inadequate access to educational resources, and emotional burdens associated with socioeconomic adversity. These findings support the argument that marginalized learners often encounter structural inequalities that limit educational participation and reinforce feelings of isolation and disadvantage [13]. Despite these challenges, learners demonstrated perseverance and educational commitment, highlighting resilience as a critical factor in sustaining engagement within alternative education programs designed for vulnerable populations [12][14].

*Theme Two: Exercising Resilience Amid Challenges*

This theme reflects how ALS Senior High School learners develop resilience by adopting adaptive coping strategies,

sustaining self-motivation, and seeking support systems to overcome educational and personal challenges.

**KI 1:** "Whenever I faced financial problems, I reminded myself why I returned to school and focused on my goal of finishing my studies."

**KI 2:** "I learned to manage my time between work, family responsibilities, and school because giving up was never an option for me."

**KI 3:** "My teachers, classmates, and family encouraged me to continue studying, especially when I felt overwhelmed by my problems."

The participants' narratives demonstrate that resilience among ALS learners is strengthened through adaptive coping mechanisms, intrinsic motivation, and reliance on supportive social networks. Research indicates that resilient learners are more likely to persist in educational settings when they possess strong personal goals and receive meaningful emotional and academic support from significant others [15]. Furthermore, social support and self-determination function as protective factors that enable marginalized learners to navigate adversity and sustain educational engagement despite persistent socioeconomic constraints [16, 17].

*Theme Three: Education as a Pathway for Transformation*

This theme highlights how ALS Senior High School learners perceive education as a transformative pathway toward personal growth, skill development, and improved future opportunities.

**KI 1:** "Through ALS, I learned practical skills that I can use to earn a living and support my family someday."

**KI 2:** "Finishing Senior High School is important to me because it will help me find a stable job and improve my future."

**KI 3:** "Education changed how I see myself because it gave me confidence that I can achieve my goals despite my struggles."

The participants viewed education as a powerful mechanism for transformation, enabling them to acquire practical skills, strengthen self-confidence, and pursue meaningful employment opportunities. Their narratives align with the human capital perspective, which emphasizes that education enhances individuals' knowledge, competencies, and socioeconomic mobility through skill acquisition and lifelong learning opportunities [18]. Moreover, alternative education programs contribute to learner empowerment by fostering self-improvement and future orientation, particularly among marginalized populations seeking pathways toward personal and economic advancement [19, 20].

*Theme Four: Agency Within Constraints*

This theme illustrates how ALS Senior High School learners exercise personal agency and make important educational and life decisions despite being constrained by socioeconomic and familial circumstances.

**KI 6:** "There were times when I had to choose between attending class and working to help my family, but I always tried to continue my education whenever possible."

**KI 9:** "My decisions were often based on what my family needed, yet I still found ways to pursue my studies because I wanted a better future."

**KI 13:** "Although life was difficult, I prioritized finishing school because I believed education would open more opportunities for my family and me."

The findings demonstrate that learners continuously negotiate between immediate survival needs and long-term educational aspirations, reflecting agency exercised within structural constraints. Their experiences suggest that educational decisions are often shaped by economic realities and family obligations, requiring learners to balance competing priorities while maintaining their commitment to schooling [21]. Despite these limitations, participants exhibited purposeful decision-making and future-oriented thinking, highlighting the capacity of marginalized learners to pursue educational goals amid adversity [22, 23].

*Theme Five: Intersecting Socioeconomic Challenges*

This theme captures the interconnected socioeconomic barriers that ALS Senior High School learners encounter, including poverty, work obligations, social expectations, and limited educational resources.

*Key Informant Responses*

**KI 4:** "Sometimes I could not attend learning sessions because I needed to work and earn money for our daily needs."

**KI 7:** "The lack of gadgets and internet access made it difficult for me to complete some learning activities and communicate with teachers."

**KI 8:** "People expected me to focus on helping my family rather than studying, which made continuing my education more challenging."

The participants' accounts reveal that educational barriers are multidimensional, with poverty, employment responsibilities, limited learning resources, and social pressures simultaneously influencing educational participation. These intersecting disadvantages create cumulative challenges that increase learners' vulnerability to educational disengagement and restrict access to learning opportunities [24]. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that learners continue to pursue education despite these obstacles, demonstrating determination and adaptability as they navigate complex socioeconomic realities [25, 26].

*3.2 The recurring experiences of making consequential decisions amid challenges contribute to the evolving sense of self, competence, and future possibility for both ALS learners and the ALS teachers who guide them*

TABLE 2: Developing Self, Competence, and Future Possibilities Through Consequential Decision-Making

Category	Themes	Sub-themes
Developing Self and Competence Amid Challenges	Transformative Resilience	Self-Confidence; Adaptive Decision-Making; Persistence; Meaning-Making
Envisioning Future Possibilities Through Guidance	Empowered Future Orientation	Educational Advancement; Employment Aspirations; Teacher Mentorship; Hope for the Future

*Theme One: Transformative Resilience*

This theme highlights how repeated experiences of making consequential decisions amid challenges strengthened ALS learners' and teachers' resilience, enabling them to adapt, persevere, and grow despite persistent obstacles.

**KI 1:** *"Every challenge I faced taught me to be stronger because giving up would only make my situation harder."*

**KI 2:** *"Balancing work, family, and school was difficult, but those experiences helped me become more responsible and determined."*

**KI 3:** *"The struggles I encountered made me realize that I am capable of overcoming problems and achieving my goals."*

**KI 4:** *"As a teacher, guiding learners through their difficulties also strengthened my patience, understanding, and commitment to helping them succeed."*

The findings suggest that resilience emerged as a transformative process shaped by repeated encounters with adversity and consequential decision-making. Through continuous adaptation to educational, financial, and personal challenges, both learners and teachers developed greater self-efficacy, perseverance, and emotional strength, which are essential characteristics of resilient individuals facing uncertain circumstances [27]. The narratives further demonstrate that resilience is not merely an individual trait but a dynamic developmental process nurtured through experience, supportive relationships, and opportunities for meaningful participation in educational environments [28].

*Theme Two: Empowered Future Orientation*

This theme reflects how learners and teachers developed a stronger sense of hope, purpose, and future possibilities through educational experiences and facilitative guidance within the ALS program.

**KI 6:** *"Finishing my education motivates me because I want to secure a better future for my family."*

**KI 7:** *"ALS gave me confidence that I can continue studying or find better employment opportunities someday."*

**KI 8:** *"The encouragement of my teachers helped me believe that my dreams are achievable despite my current situation."*

**KI 9:** *"Seeing learners become more hopeful and goal-oriented inspires me to continue supporting their educational journey."*

The participants' narratives reveal that future orientation was strengthened through educational engagement, supportive mentorship, and the belief that present sacrifices can lead to improved life outcomes. This empowered perspective enabled learners to establish meaningful goals, sustain motivation, and maintain optimism despite socioeconomic constraints, thereby fostering long-term educational persistence and personal development [29]. Moreover, teachers played a critical role in cultivating hope and aspiration by reinforcing learners' sense of possibility and encouraging them to envision pathways toward social mobility and lifelong success [30, 31].

IV. CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that ALS Senior High School learners and teachers develop transformative resilience and empowered future orientation through recurring experiences of making consequential decisions amid persistent challenges. Learners demonstrated the ability to adapt to financial difficulties,

family responsibilities, social barriers, and educational constraints, while teachers strengthened their commitment to facilitative guidance through mentorship and emotional support. These experiences contributed to increased self-confidence, adaptive competence, perseverance, and a stronger sense of purpose among both learners and educators. Moreover, educational engagement and supportive relationships fostered hope, future aspirations, and belief in the possibility of achieving meaningful personal and socioeconomic advancement. Overall, the study highlights that resilience, agency, and future-oriented thinking are cultivated through continuous decision-making processes and supportive educational environments, underscoring the vital role of ALS in empowering marginalized learners to navigate challenges and pursue improved life opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION

It is advised that ALS programs have a comprehensive strategy that tackles both relational dynamics and structural impediments in light of the findings of SOP 1 and SOP 2. Financial aid, adaptable learning strategies, and counseling services should be provided to students to help them overcome poverty, stigma, and resource constraints as they juggle multiple responsibilities. In addition to offering tailored, context-sensitive advice that relates lessons to actual circumstances, instructional managers must continue to promote open communication, trust, and emotional support. Crucially, educators should strike a balance between encouraging learner autonomy and fulfilling their advisory role, ensuring that advice enhances rather than limits autonomous decision-making. ALS students can be better prepared to persevere in their education, make important decisions, and turn obstacles into opportunities for growth by integrating structural support, affective care, and learner-centered interventions.

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