

Lived-experience of former ALS (Alternative Learning System) students of Nagcarlan, Laguna, Philippines

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Abstract

The institutionalization of the Alternative Learning System in basic education in the Philippines (Republic Act 11510) last December 2020 paved the way for the out-of-school youth, adults, unreached, undeserved, conflict-affected communities, and communities in emergency situations to avail of systematic and flexible basic education program. The Department of Education in Nagcarlan is one of districts in Laguna, Philippines who is very passionate about this program, and through years of implementation, there were those who have even succeeded up to college graduation. This study focused on tracing those graduates and learning from them the struggles or obstacles they overcame going to college success. Six former ALS passers who obtained baccalaureate degree agreed to participate in this qualitative study. Through online survey containing five qualitative questions with follow-up inquiries through social media, the investigation of their path to success was documented. Responses were analyzed by developing themes from the patterns in their responses. The five major findings are as follows: (1) Education is a way of lifting one's status in life as a person mature in age, achieve dreams, and raise a family; (2) Time management is the best way to grip one's responsibilities in terms of having a family, work and household chores; (3) Lack of opportunities, worries, fulfilling a dream of finishing secondary school and being a different person are the perspective of ALS students; (4) College study poses to ALS passers a survival-of-the-fittest in education as insecurities, struggles, fear and pressure are present to stop them, but with the help of others and self-determination, they are able to conquer all those obstacles; and (5) Despite having difficulty in time management, financial instability, and adjustment to new lessons, ALS passers chose to be inspired, work hard, be patient and diligent for them to overcome obstacles. Recommendations were laid down for out-of-school-youths, adults, families, Department of Education officials and future researchers at the end of the study.

Keywords: alternative, learning system, education, youth, adults, college, obstacles

1. Introduction and Rationale

Due to certain factors, many children and adults have been unable to finish their studies. According to recent statistics, 23% of people between the ages of 15 and 30 are not enrolled in school, including about 3.7 million youth between the ages of 16 and 24 and 3.1 million young adults between the ages of 25 and 30. It indicates that not all Filipino children achieve in completing their education. The Department of Education (DepEd) established the Alternative Learning System (ALS) as a parallel educational pathway for students who did not complete their basic education through the traditional school system. In addition to preparing students for the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test, the Alternative Learning System (ALS) teaches functional literacy skills. Students who pass the A&E Test are given a certificate that is equivalent to an official elementary or junior high school diploma. When Leonor Briones became DepEd Secretary in 2016,

she made ALS one of her top priorities.

The Department of Education (DepEd) offers a second opportunity, an informal education initiative called Alternative Learning System (ALS) to out-of-school children and adults. It is a useful alternative to the current formal instruction that enables students to complete their basic education in a way that suits their circumstances and needs. This adaptable program allows for learning to occur whenever and wherever is most convenient for the learners. People who complete the ALS program are considered secondary-level graduates and are eligible to enroll in senior high school.

Furthermore, The Alternative Learning System (ALS) in Nagcarlan, Laguna started in 2014. Many individuals have been allowed to graduate and get a proper job that enables them to sustain the necessities of their families and individuals. Alternative Learning System (ALS) will help the working and disadvantaged individuals who want to finish their primary and secondary education. The following learning strands are the main emphasis of the ALS Program: (1) Communication skills (English and Filipino). (2) Critical thinking and literary abilities in science. (3) Problem-solving and mathematical skills. (4) Life and work skills; (5) Understanding the self and society and (6) Digital literacy. This research aimed in understanding the experience of former (ALS) who have completed baccalaureate degrees and how they manage their academics and obligations in life.

2. Literature Review

The World Bank (2018) initiated an investigation entitled “The Philippines Alternative Learning System: A Second Chance to Develop the Human Capital of Out-of-School Youth and Adults.” The following are key findings of the said study:

- Despite the remarkable progress in expanding access to basic education, the education data in 2016 shows that about half of Filipino students are struggling to complete basic education on time.
- The Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) leads in the delivery of a “second chance” program to build human capital of out of school youth and adults through the implementation of the Alternative Learning System (ALS). ALS enrollees who pass the accreditation and equivalency (A&E) exam receive a government credential that can facilitate access to higher education, vocational training, and overall better employment prospects.
- The number of ALS learners being reached by the program has increased. From 537,666 in 2016, the learners enrolled in the program increased to 641,584 in 2017.
- There is a range of challenges in striving to implement the ALS, which responds to out-of-school youth and adults who have various motivations for learning and face diverse geographical and socioeconomic conditions. Recent statistics indicate that about 3.7 million youth aged 16-24 and 3.1 million young adults aged 25-30 did not complete junior high school and are out of school, which is about 23% of those aged 15 to 30¹.
- The budget for ALS has remained at less than 1% of the public basic education spending.
- Between 2014 and 2016, about 60% of ALS enrollees attended learning sessions regularly and 30% passed the A&E exam. Female participants consistently outperformed their male counterparts, and urban participants passed the A&E exam at a higher rate than rural participants.
- Upon the completion of ALS, 60% of the enrollees who passed the A&E exam enrolled in tertiary education or vocational training. A&E passers were twice more likely to obtain full-time formal jobs compared to those who did not pass the A&E.
- The ALS has a key role in enabling school dropouts to develop their human capital and improve their long-term educational outcomes and employment prospects.

The study of Valeza, et. al. (2017) with regards to the implementation of ALS program by Arnold Janssen Catholic Mission Foundation (AJCMF) revealed two salient findings: the primary motivation and objective of the ALS learners is to have the opportunity in attaining a job, and, lack of interest is the primal cognitive which prompts ALS learners to drop out of the program.

Twenty-first century skills of ALS learners were investigated by Tindowen, et.al. (2017). In their study, 150 ALS learners across five schools in Northern Philippines participated in the study through descriptive survey method. Results revealed that the ALS learners have a low level of acquisition of 21st-century skills. Furthermore, results of the independent-sample t test and one-way ANOVA test revealed that sex, age, and employment status affect the acquisition of learners on 21st-century skills.

Results in the study made by Abad and Galleto (2020) with regards to the implementation of ALS program in DepEd Division of Dapitan City, Philippines revealed that ALS instruction's high support mechanism was small and positively low but significantly related to the teachers' highly positive attitudes towards work and the teachers' best practices in implementing the program. However, room for more significant improvement is deemed essential to raise the high to very high support since the teachers as implementers of the program possessed high disposition and registered best practices in embracing the program's implementation in the city.

Apao, et. al. (2014) mentioned in their study that after completion of the program, the ALS passers improved their quality of living by engaging in jobs or entrepreneurial activities that increase financial stability, participating actively in community events and social gatherings, cultivating a positive outlook in life and developing the passion for pursuing higher education. Also, the Alternative Learning System A&E program in the Philippines is effective in cultivating the life skills of the recipients. The program has improved the quality of living of the respondents as they continue their pursuit for meaning and significance in life.

The report in East Asia and Pacific (2016) highlights nine findings in their executive summary: (1) Only a small proportion of the target population are enrolled in the ALS program. (2) The first target group for ALS are students who drop out of high school for financial reasons. (3) Performance-based payment is expected to improve performance. (4) The current arrangement for monitoring activities within the ALS program can be improved. (5) Labor market returns to ALS are significant only when learners successfully pass the Secondary A&E exam. (6) Small class size (fewer than 40 learners per facilitator) is more efficient. (7) A holistic approach is required for a socially efficient solution for students who do not complete school and those who are at high risk. (8) An expansion of ALS may distort incentives among students currently in school. (9) Early intervention guarantees greater returns.

Findings in the study made by Egcas and Garganera (2019) showed that the educational attainment of the ALS learner passers improved wherein majority of them finished vocational courses and college degrees. The family monthly income of the respondents also increased along with the improvement in their employment status. Majority of the learner-passers were employed by other persons, business and government establishments. Still a majority of the learner-passers became professionals; there was a dramatic shift from physical labor to office and profession-based jobs. Thus, ALS programs and projects contributed to the improvement of the ALS learners in terms of their educational attainment, family monthly income, employment status, and nature of jobs. Moreover, supports of local government unit and other stakeholders helped the sustainability of ALS programs and projects implementation.

Results of the analyses made in the study by Labarrete (2021) revealed that the portfolio, module-based, and performance-based are the three main formats use in assessing students learning enrolled in the program. Generally, the usage of these formats addresses learners' diversity and conforms to the performance standards outlined in the new ALS 2.0 Curriculum which incorporates Education and Skills Training (EST) to the Alternative Learning System (ALS), thereby having the program of the government called ALS-EST.

The study by Mamba, et. al. (2021) investigated on the college-readiness of ALS graduates in Northeastern Philippines. This descriptive correlational study investigated the interplay of study orientation and college readiness of 143 ALS graduates (77 males and 66 females) enrolled in a public university in Northeastern Philippines. The results revealed that the ALS graduates have unfavorable study orientation and are not college-ready. The study orientation also was found to significantly influence and predict college readiness.

Alternative Learning System provides a second chance schooling to marginalized learners to the end that they are able to find a better job and pursue further education. The program requires highly dedicated and multi-skilled teachers who have to deal with diverse types of learners. Nevertheless, reports show from the study made by Arzadon and Nato (2015) that ALS has not produced significant results that address the needs of out-of-school youth and adults.

The results of the study made by Castolo and Chan (2016) provide insights in the determination of the unmet needs of the learners and put to surface whether ALS intervention is sufficiently intensive to achieve desired goals for the out of school youth. Findings suggest that educational inputs along with its processes have a statistical significant relationship with all its result and the challenges in the implementation of the program.

UNICEF (2021) in their study shows that many learners aspired to finish basic education and decided to enroll in the ALS programme because of its flexible schedule, which enables them to attend to work and/or other day-to-day commitments while studying. When they joined ALS, learners who encountered issues with lessons were less likely to complete the programme. Moreover, some learners discontinued with the ALS programme for the same reasons they left formal education: lack of financial support and parental guidance, lack of interest, and vices. To add, learners who were not fully prepared for the A&E Test were not able to take and pass the exam once they completed the ALS programme. In particular, learners with job were less likely to take and pass the A&E Test than those who did not have jobs.

The above-mentioned readings shed light into the unfolding and analysis of the experience of former ALS students along the path of their journey and success in college life.

2.1. Research Questions

This study focuses on lived experience of former ALS students who have finished baccalaureate degree in Nagcarlan, Laguna.

Specifically, the researchers sought to find the answers using the following qualitative questions:

1. How do former ALS students handle/manage their time between school activities and their responsibilities?
2. How was you feeling before, during and after your ALS days?
3. What are the experiences of former ALS students in their mental health before and after they graduate?
4. What are the possible reason/s why you push to study again?
5. What do you think are the obstacle/s you encounter during your ALS days and how did you face those obstacles?

2.2. Scope and Limitation

The researchers made an exploration on the experience of former ALS (alternative learning system) students who have finished Baccalaureate degree in Nagcarlan, Laguna, Philippines. ALS was established for those who did not finish basic education via formal school system. This study focused on how they were able to finish their baccalaureate degree despite the obstacle/s they encountered during their ALS' days. By gathering data through online survey with 5 qualitative questions and focused group discussion that followed,

the researchers were able to make conclusion and recommendation regarding the findings of the study.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Sampling

Nine former ALS students of Nagcarlan who graduated college were contacted through social media and six of them were able to answer online survey containing qualitative questions regarding their feat towards college graduation from their days in Alternative Learning System.

3.2. Data Collection

Online survey through Google form was used to conduct survey. Former ALS students who are now college graduates were enjoined to answer qualitative questions contained in the online form. Participants were instructed to provide answers in at least two sentences so as to provide clear picture of their answers. Some of the six participants have job already, still they managed to participate in this study. Whenever clarifications are needed from their answers in the online survey, they were communicated through social media.

3.3. Ethical Issues

To ensure proper treatment of the participants and of the data as well, the following actions were taken:

1. A coordination with the ALS Coordinator of Nagcarlan was previously done to ask assistance in the conduct of the study, particularly in contacting the college graduates who were formerly ALS students.
2. Indorsement from the Public Schools District Supervisor of DepEd Nagcarlan that signifies her permission to conduct the study in the district, and to ask guidance and advice as well in coming up with a comprehensive study.
3. Voluntary participation was the approach as the Google form was distributed to former ALS students as they are free to choose whether to participate or not.
4. Information obtained using Google Form was kept secured, not divulging personal information from the participants, but only the responses to qualitative questions.
5. Informed consent was secured from the participants of focused group discussion so as to gain their commitment in being part of the study.
6. Noted and recorded responses were not also divulged in terms of the personal data of the participants, but only the qualitative data obtained from the focused group discussion.

3.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative data gathered from online survey were harvested, sorted as to question item, and were treated with Word Cloud Generator. Words that are frequently appearing were analyzed as to their connection to ideas and their association with other words. Clarification of the thoughts and ideas were checked across or against the transcription from the focused group discussion. Word Clouds were generated in connection to frequently appearing words from the responses obtained to every questions. With the Word Clouds and the responses from the focused group discussion, themes were developed that represent patterns of thoughts and

ideas regarding the topic being investigated.

4. Discussion of Findings

4.1. Entering ALS to Finish Study amidst Life Difficulty

This segment of the study features the answer of the six participants to the qualitative question “What is the reason you entered in ALS? Why did you decide to continue studying?” Here are the responses of the participants:

* Participant 1

“I stopped attending school in two separate years. The first was when I was 2nd year high school, and that was immediately before the implementation of K-12 program, and the second was when I was in Grade 10 because of various problems I faced regarding my family and myself, so I was stopped attending school. And because I wanted to finish my studies and catch up with my batch mates, I decided to enter ALS. I continued to study because it was my dream to be able to graduate. It's just that many trials came my way, but I didn't stop until I reached my goal.”

* Participant 2

“I am thankful to (ALS) Alternative Learning System because they served as a ladder for me to achieve, graduate in college and pursue my dreams. The only reason why I resumed schooling was to pass my secondary level in ALS. I thought that if I passed it, I could find a work to help my partner, and chances would make it to work. That time when I finished high school through ALS, my partner convinced me to study in college. He said that there is a better opportunity waiting for me if I graduate in college. I doubted myself and thought that it's difficult, especially that I have children and lacked financially. But I'm thankful to God that when we needed some financial aid, He provided it. And I'm thankful for my supportive and loving partner. And now, I graduated Bachelor of Elementary Education, major in Content Course last August 27, 2020, but due to pandemic, there was no graduating ceremony. Despite that, I am very happy to achieve my dream. I am very thankful to my teachers, Sir Ric and Ma'am Au, who committed their time in teaching us so we can pass the ALS exam. I hope that my story will become an inspiration to my co-ALS learners. Continue striving for your dreams. If I can do it, then you can do it, too.”

* Participant 3

“I studied at ALS because I wanted to be able to continue my studies. I stopped when I was in the 4th year of high school because I got married early. Back then, I told myself that I would find a way to get into ALS, so I didn't hesitate to try. I thought it was not too late to continue so I tried to study again. I was still young at that time, and it wouldn't be an obstacle if I really wanted to graduate.”

* Participant 4

“Being a graduate of high school is what I've been dreaming for since I stopped in 3rd year HS because of having an early children and family. It's hard to find work if you weren't a graduate. And Lord has been powerful that I even graduated in college.”

* Participant 5

“I want to change my life and ALS is the only hope I see to continue my studies. Since I am already

24 years old at that time, if I took normal schooling, I might end up giving up. Cause high school is 6 years and too long for me.”

* Participant 6

“At the age of 15 I was only a Grade 7 student. Because of my age I realized that I should be in the 4th year High school, that's why I enrolled in ALS. ALS gave me the motivation to continue studying. Age is not a barrier to learning, but we must work hard to achieve our goals.”

Looking at the responses of the participants, four salient reasons for entering ALS and finishing study amidst life's difficulty can be deduced:

(1) **Passing/Finishing High School** - When the K-12 program started last 2013 (as implementation of the Republic Act 10533 otherwise known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013), it was known to many that after finishing SHS, learners can find job. That is why, many of the participants in this study recollected that when they entered ALS, they just wanted to finish or passed the test for high school.

(2) **Helping partner and raising children** - Another reason of entering ALS and continuing to study is for their children or for helping their partner in raising children and earning for a living when they finish studying. The halt in their study is since they already have other focus (their family), but they decided to continue studying because their family becomes their motivation.

(3) **Getting mature in age** - The third reason is their age which if they will not continue to study, addition of years to their age might give them more difficulty in studying. They have realized that their age is supposed to have accomplished something in terms of educational attainment, and this thought made them decide to finish high school through ALS program.

(4) **Achieving goal in life** - Their goal in life was another burning passion for them to continue studying by entering ALS. They want to achieve it and they know that it is through education that they can achieve their dream. In Philippine culture, it is said that education is the heritage that parents can give to their children and finishing a specific stage of education is something that a family man or woman can provide as legacy to their children that they themselves have accomplished it. Education is a way coming out of poverty because having a good education can paved a way for good job.

To summarize the answer of the six participants, the first theme was formulated and is presented here:

First Theme – On Entering ALS and Finishing Study

Education is a way of lifting one's status in life as a person mature in age, achieve dreams, and raise a family with good academic heritage in the midst of life's difficulty.

4.2. Managing Responsibilities of being a Student and a Partner during ALS Days

This segment of the study features the answer of the six participants to the qualitative question “How were you able to handle/manage your time between school activities and other responsibilities during your ALS years?”. Here are the responses of the participants:

* Participant 1

“Back then, we only went to ALS 2 or 1 day a week sometimes, so it wasn't difficult for me to manage my time. Because of this, I was able to keep up my work during those times. ALS has really helped those like

us who have a sideline while studying.”

* Participant 2

“I have time for my family and house chores because my schedule in ALS wasn't every day. After I did my chores then I'll do my modules in ALS.”

* Participant 3

“It was difficult for me because at that time I already had one child. I had the experience of going in with him only to get into ALS. I don't know how I was able to do that, maybe with the guidance of the one above.”

* Participant 4

“My days in ALS was my guide in balancing my responsibilities in studying, working and house chores. Every Saturday was only my schedule so it doesn't hinder my work or my daily chores in house. There was no money involved when I was studying in ALS so it's very convenient to work without thinking the expenses in school.”

* Participant 5

“Time management especially since I am a working student. Priorities for finishing work earlier so I have time to study. Learn to enjoy things even when they are difficult”

* Participant 6

“When I was studying ALS, I was working as a babysitter. I am able to study because my grandmother helps me every time I go to ALS. I can't say that studying in ALS is difficult because many ALS teachers helped us to review. They give us hand outs and time to do each activity they give us. I only do time management; I have time for studying and working.”

Looking at the responses of the participants, they have done Time Management to handle their time as a student and a partner in terms of:

- (1) **Having a Family** – Having an early family can cause a person to stop their study and raise their children first. But since life is not fair for everyone they need to continue where they stop to sustain the needs for them (family). They were able to balance their time for them despite the difficulty of being a student again because their family is their inspiration of studying again.
- (2) **Work** – It is normal for a student to have a job while they are studying to support their needs in daily life. Especially in this time of pandemic, that instead of continuing where they stop, they find opportunities because life is hard for them. But in ALS, it did not hinder their work so it is very convenient for them while they were studying.
- (3) **House/Daily Chores** – As a partner and a mother or father, they have their own responsibilities after their school days. But even amidst the pandemic, they were able to perform their duties inside their house. That despite the difficulty of learning again, they did not forget their own responsibilities that able them to know the importance of time management.

To summarize the answers of the six participants, the second theme was created and is presented here:

**Second Theme - Managing Responsibilities of being a Student
and a Partner during ALS Days**

Time management is the best way to grip one's responsibilities in terms of
having a family, work and household chores.

4.3. Life's Perspective and the Alternative Learning System

To answer the third question of the study, "How would you compare or contrast your perspective before, during and after finishing study under ALS? (Kindly provide at least three sentences for your answer)", the participants responses as follows:

* Participant 1

"My perspective has changed since I graduated from ALS. When I was just studying at ALS, I thought that my future classmates would be the types of people who are lazy to study and criticize. But the longer I studied here, the more I realized that what I thought was wrong because I get to know them one by one and I get to know our different stories. They studied at ALS because they also have dreams. Yes, others were stopped in their study because of poverty, but most of us studied at ALS because this was the only way we saw to make our dreams come true. There are housemaids in our class, and their employees allowed them to study while working. They want to graduate, but we have different problems that we face in life, so the path we take after studying at ALS is also different. So when I passed the exam, I promised myself that I would continue and that I would not waste the opportunity that ALS gave me, because, after all, I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to continue in college, but my other classmates didn't."

* Participant 2

"Before I studied in ALS, lack of opportunities was there because I didn't graduated secondary. I'm also afraid to stand in front of other people because I felt that they think low of me."

* Participant 3

"While I was studying at ALS, I had in my mind that ALS would make a great contribution to my life and it would fulfill my dream of finishing secondary school but it didn't end there when I passed ALS, it gave me the opportunity to go to college and graduate. ALS can help a lot more because it doesn't just end with graduating from secondary school it will take you to your desired dream."

* Participant 4

"Before, I had my worries in continuing my study in ALS. First is, if I can graduate in high school and if I can pass the examination after studying. I got to the point where I was scared because they said graduates from ALS cannot enroll in 4-year college courses, only vocational courses can be enrolled if you are a graduate of ALS. I have proven that a DIPLOMA in ALS is equivalent to a DIPLOMA in a regular HS graduate. Fortunately, I don't just believe what other people say. It is better to know the truth first in order to make good decisions in life."

* Participant 5

"I can be a different person, I can reach my dreams as long as I work hard. That there is nothing impossible just trust in the Lord's process. And there is someone who will support you until the end."

* Participant 6

"When I was studying ALS, I had a bit of a hard time because I didn't know much about making a "SANAYSAY". At first, there were a lot of mistakes but after a while I got used to it. It was a great feeling when my name came out as one of the ALS passers. I am very happy because I can enrol in college."

Looking at the responses of the participants, there are four perspective before, during and after

finishing study under ALS that can be deduced:

- (1) **Lack of opportunities**- The perspective of ALS students is lack of opportunities because they did not graduate in regular school. It often happens that being a high school graduate is required for a person to get hired for the job they wanted.
- (2) **Worries** – Their second perspective is their worries that ALS graduates will not be able to take 4-year college courses. Also, they are worried that people might look down on them because they did not graduate from regular school.
- (3) **Dream of finishing secondary school**- Many students did not finish secondary school because of their particular reasons. But when ALS began to open, they were given the opportunity to achieve their dream of finishing secondary school.
- (4) **Can be a different person**- Their fourth perspective is they can be a different person that can fulfill their dreams. ALS helps their students to grab their chance to be a better version of their selves they wanted.

To summarize the answer of the six participants the third theme was formulated and is presented here:

Third theme- Life's Perspective and the Alternative Learning System
 Lack of opportunities, worries, fulfilling a dream of finishing secondary school and being a different person are the perspective of ALS students.

4.4. Well-being Matters in College Years

This segment of the study features the answer of the six participants to the qualitative question “What experience can you relate to us with regards to your emotional, mental and social health during your college years?”. Here are the responses of the participants:

* Participant 1

“When I was just starting college, I was very nervous. I think that my classmates might look down on me because sometimes when you graduate with ALS, they will think you're lazy or you stopped studying, that's one of the things that really scared me and I might be bullied again at school. But despite that, I still tried because I don't want to be a coward and I have a dream. And luckily the school I went to was an ALS-friendly school so I didn't experience my thoughts. Sometimes I have insecurities about myself and look down on others because they are graduates from regular school and the others are still SHS graduates, but I am still lucky because my classmates and professors were not judgmental. I also had many ALS Graduate classmates in San Pablo so it was easy for me to adjust.”

* Participant 2

“There are so many struggles I experienced when I step in college. I experienced meeting my classmates that are boosting with intelligence because they are properly educated in formal school. I also had classmates that degraded me because I graduated in ALS. There are professors that felt proud because I decided to continue studying and all the things happened, I made it as an inspiration to do my best and cope up with them even I am from ALS. I am proud to be an ALS passer and what they can do, then I can too.”

* Participant 3

“While I was in college, I was afraid at first that I might not be able to keep up with them but I thought that I can, that what they can do I can do, what about the stress, and how can I get through college because it is difficult to divide time between studies and family. I worked hard to get high grades and was passionate about studying even though it was difficult at times.”

* Participant 4

“When I was in college, I had a hard time adjusting to the lesson because it's been a few days since school and I've been stuck studying for a long time. Most of my classmates are younger than me, but this does not prevent me from making friends. I focused on my goal of graduating college no matter what.”

* Participant 5

“To be honest, this is pressure, especially in my case where the experience is limited. But one thing that is funny is that I am challenged to do better to change and face what I am afraid of. I learn to accept that everything is changing and I have to adapt to those changes.”

* Participant 6

“It is very difficult and tiring especially when there are subjects that I have to study alone. There are times when I want to give up because I don't know a lot about other subjects and I have a hard time adjusting to new lessons.”

Looking at the responses of the participants, four reasons of why well-being matters in college years can be deduced:

- (1) **Insecurities** – Being insecure of others are common for those who feel unfair of life. Finding fault on themselves to create a lie and confusion in their heads. They believe that they are inferior of others because they didn't pass by the normal way or process. But no one can save them with those insecurities but themselves only. Convincing their selves that they can do it too will help them get rid of those insecurities.
- (2) **Struggles** – Struggling after years of not studying can be feel during college days. They feel that they cannot cope up with their classmates because they are an ALS. But having those struggles, time will fly and it will turn into positive vibes that will allow them to face the hardships. After that, they will realize that everything that happened is part of process to success.
- (3) **Fear** – Fear of being bullied because you are an ALS, fear of being a failure after working hard can threaten one's well-being and cause of low self-esteem. Being afraid will not help an individual to grow with others. They will know the importance of communicating with others because they not leaving their comfort zone. To surpass those fears, they need to stand of their own feet and face the reality so they can feel the warmth of outside.
- (4) **Pressure** – Pressure is very usual for a student. They feel pressured because experiences and chances are limited. For them, they need to double the hard work. This chance was given to them to help their own families. They are putting themselves in pressure knowing that success is near but there are a lot of responsibilities and obstacles they need to surpass before they reach their final destination. But putting one's self under a lot of pressure can help them feel that they have their goal to achieve. That they have opportunities to come after that pressure.

Fourth Theme – Well-being Matters in College Years

College study poses to ALS passers a survival-of-the-fittest in education as insecurities, struggles, fear and pressure are present to stop them, but with the help of others and self-determination, they are able to conquer all those obstacles.

4.5. Overcoming Obstacles

To answer the fifth question of the study, “What do you think are the obstacles you encountered during your college days and how did you face and overcome those obstacles? (Kindly provide at least three sentences for your answer)”, the participants responses as follows:

* Participant 1

“In my opinion, the obstacle I experienced during my college days was the point where we had to do a research paper. Since I didn't study at SHS, my group mates and I, who are also ALS Graduates, had a hard time keeping up. Because to be honest, we didn't experience doing that unlike the rest of our group who did SHS. That's why we also had a misunderstanding with our SHS Graduate classmate. But even so, we still worked hard, studied, and researched how to develop our research paper. And eventually, we passed. It's always hard at the beginning but if you work hard you can overcome all the challenges that come your way as long as you believe in yourself.”

* Participant 2

“First of all the hindrance I experienced was time management. I lost my time for my family and children. I study, and study, and study during my college time and I almost forgot my time in our house. I just thought that I need to study because I feel pity for those who are making my dream a success and if I ever graduated its for the future of my family too. Even though I am busy with my studies, I never forgot to asked my partner how was his/her work and the study of my children. They are my inspirations to survive this challenge.”

* Participant 3

“My time is divided between my family, my children, and my studies, that's the hardest part. There are times when I don't know what to prioritize, especially since my children are also studying. In the morning before I go to school, it is necessary to prepare for their needs, during the day it is time for me to study and at nighttime, it is reserved for teaching the children their assignments. It's not a joke, but I can handle it, just patience and diligence to finish.”

* Participant 4

“When I was in college, the biggest hindrance was financial stability in life. I applied for scholarship to lessen the expenses in school. One of the hindrances too was my self-esteem. There were times that I felt discouraged but I need to continue for my family.”

* Participant 5

“To be honest, it's my job again because I am a still working student during my college, the pressure that I need to review because of the examination, quizzes and quiz bee but I don't have enough time to get. There was a point I want to give up but the good thing is I am surrounded by good people who pushed me that I can finish no matter how hard and tiring it is, it will all be worth it. I also reminded myself that God will not put me in this position without reason, the only thing I can hold on to is not to give up. Because I know that God's plan is greater than mine.”

* Participant 6

“When I went to college, I had a hard time adjusting to the new lessons I faced. Especially in the English subject because I'm not good at grammar. Also in the subject of Math because it is too broad and I

only reached grade 7 in high school so I have difficulty in this subject. But because of hard work and my friends who are helping me, I was able to complete my studies.”

Looking at the responses of the participants, there are four sensible obstacles they encountered during their college days and how did they face and overcome those obstacles that can be deduced:

- (1) **Time management-** It was difficult to manage their time in their family, school works, and duties at home but despite that, they chose to be patient and diligent so that they could finish studying at ALS.
- (2) **Financial instability** - People cannot avoid having problems when it comes to financial stability. This is one of the reasons why students stop studying. However, they did not continue to use this as a reason to stop studying. They made a way to continue their studies by being a working student.
- (3) **Self-esteem-** Their self-esteem becomes low because they are afraid of being looked down upon or judged by people. They also felt discouraged but they tried on being strong and using their family as an inspiration to continue their studies. But they realized that they should focus on their dream and goal to graduate.
- (4) **Understanding the new lessons-** It is hard to understand the new lessons especially if they did not catch them up when they were in regular school. But because of their hard work, they were able to understand each lesson gradually until they graduated.

Egcas and Garganera’s (2019) finding in their study continue to be upheld in this new exploration, in that, despite obstacles, educational attainment of ALS learner passers improves as the number of college graduate increase every year. They are motivated to achieve higher heights and provide more for their family.

To summarize the answer of the six participants the fifth theme was formulated and is presented here:

Fifth theme- Overcoming Obstacles

Despite having difficulty in time management, financial instability, and adjustment to new lessons, ALS passers chose to be inspired, work hard, be patience and diligent for them to overcome obstacles.

5. Recommendations and Reflection

5.1. Recommendations

Based on the results and discussion of the study, the following recommendations to target group of people are enumerated:

1. **Family and friends** of ALS learners should seek way on how to give moral support to the education aspiration of their loved ones. It is indeed a difficult task to cope up with one thing if there are other big responsibilities at hand.
2. **Out of school youths and adults** should strive to continue their academic study no matter what age they may be now, as this study desired to motivate them to achieve their goal in life. And after passing the accreditation and equivalency test, they may even continue in college no matter how difficult life is. The

hardships that they may encounter just like the participants of this study is non-significant compared to the success that they can harvest.

3. **Department of Education Officials** should endeavor to strengthen ALS program implementation in selected schools, looking into the avenue of hiring, recruiting, or placing manpower who will be able to sustain the success that ALS program is attaining now, or even strengthen weak points to encourage more learners suited for this program.

4. **Future researchers** may also want to explore on other avenues that ALS completers have entered after passing the A & E Equivalency Test. They may have entered into vocational course, or may have already found a noble job because of ALS program. This exploratory studies in the future will indeed impact the minds of other out of school youths and students.

5.2. Reflection

ALS Nagcarlan serves as an opportunity for people who have not completed their studies. While the researchers conducted this study, they observed the different experiences of the former students who entered into this government program. Although they encountered various obstacles, they were able to overcome them by having the desire to graduate. They didn't waste the opportunity to be a student and learn again. The authors were awed by the strength in them, thus, commending their valiant heart of continuing to pursue advancement in life not only for them, but for their family as well.

This study provides realization and motivation about the experiences that ALS students have when they enter ALS in Nagcarlan. Former ALS students proved that age, time, or financial instability should not be used as hindrances or excuses to cease growing and developing. Obstacles are part of people's lives and when they overcome them, they can attain good results. The students have been through a lot of hardships but due to their hard work and perseverance, they got the result they wanted. As Antoine de-Saint Exupery once wrote, "Self-discovery comes when one measures oneself against an obstacle." People will never know they can surpass what they know they are until they tried and give their best. This is the heart of those who do not lose hope, but continue to surge on through life's battle. And only at that time, they will discover inner strength and beauty that they themselves have not noticed at first. And these are the stories of those who boldly accepted the challenge to grow and succeed amidst life's obstacles.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to extend gratitude for the love, encouragement and support of the following who had made this study possible towards accomplishment:

- Emma L. Izon – Principal II, Talangan Integrated National High School
- Ricardo G. Callos – Alternative Learning System (ALS) Coordinator, DepEd Nagcarlan
- Gregoria B. Gutierrez, EdD – Public Schools District Supervisor, DepEd Nagcarlan

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