PREVAILING ISSUES AND CONCERNS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM (ALS) IN THE BANGSAMORO AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MUSLIM MINDANAO (BARMM)

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to explore the prevailing issues and concerns of the Alternative Learning System. This employed a qualitative research design with the used of interviews among the ALS personnel on exploring the prevailing issues and concerns on the implementation of Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Thematic analysis was employed in analyzing the qualitative data. Results of the interview conducted revealed five (5) identified emerging themes on the prevailing issues and concerns of the Alternative Learning System in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). These themes are Access and Participation, Resource Constraints, Student-Related Issues, Equity and Inclusion, and Recognition and Accreditation.

Keyword: - *Prevailing issues, concerns, implementation of Alternative Learning System, and Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) of the Department of Education (DepEd) offers second chances to Out of School Youth and Adults (OSYA). Comprising both Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) programs and the Basic Literacy Program (BLP), ALS serves as a vital lifeline for those seeking educational opportunities beyond traditional schooling.

Despite strides in basic education reform across the Philippines, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) grapples with significant challenges in both access to and quality of education. Here, the OSYA rate among individuals aged 16 to 30 stands at nearly 45 percent, twice the national average. These figures underscore a pressing dilemma in the BARMM's educational landscape, demanding urgent attention to ensure children's retention in school and access to higher-quality education (World Bank, 2018).

While considerable focus, support, and interventions have been directed towards various sectorial groups, initiatives targeting youth remain limited. Adult learning programs worldwide face analogous hurdles (Aker and Sawyer, 2017). Moreover, research suggests that while out-of-school children may eventually attain academic competencies akin to those graduates in a more formal school setting in terms of the conduct of classes, socio-

emotional barriers may hinder the efficacy of educational interventions (Heckman et al., 2011; Rajasekaran and Reyes, 2019). Therefore, cultivating a positive school culture becomes imperative.

School culture epitomizes the palpable sense of safety and belonging within an educational institution, encompassing warmth, safety, and inclusivity (Hostetter et al., 2013). As per the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, school culture constitutes a multifaceted concept integral to students' educational journey. A sustainable, positive school culture nurtures youth development and fosters the skills essential for a fulfilling life in a democratic society (National School Climate Center). This positive school culture hinges on robust relationships among students, parents, stakeholders, and staff alike.

Graduates of ALS often encounter challenges in navigating post-graduation career paths due to inadequate support systems. In BARMM, ALS grapples with severe shortages of essential supplies, learning materials, operational budgets, and facilities, exacerbating challenges compared to other regions. Despite increased government spending on basic education, per-learner expenditure on ALS has dwindled in real terms (World Bank, 2018). Thus, delving into factors influencing learner and teacher performance in ALS, such as support from the education community and prevailing school culture, becomes increasingly important.

Extensive literature exists on school culture, often focusing on formal educational settings with limited exploration of stakeholders' roles. This study is aimed at exploring the prevailing issues and concerns of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) environments. The ALS context presents unique complexities, given the diverse learner demographics encompassing varying ages, experiences, and backgrounds, including familial challenges, economic hardship, experiences of abuse, and involvement in interpersonal conflict.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized qualitative research design with the used of interviews among the ALS personnel on exploring the prevailing issues and concerns on the implementation of Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Thematic analysis was employed in analyzing the qualitative data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Emerging themes on the prevailing issues and
concerns of the Alternative Learning System**

Based on the interview conducted, there are five (5) identified emerging themes on the prevailing issues and concerns of the Alternative Learning System in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). These themes are Access and Participation, Resource Constraints, Student-Related Issues, Equity and Inclusion, and Recognition and Accreditation.

Access and Participation

Majority of the respondents identified access and participation as major issues in the implementation of Alternative Learning System in BARMM. Drop-out rate and absenteeism of learners continue to persist as serious concern pointing to a broader problem of limited access to education. Limited BLGU support and lack of trainings for ALS teachers exacerbates the issue, thus, quality of instruction suffers leading to low students' performance. There are notable absence of proper monitoring and evaluation and inadequate awareness-drive and promotion of ALS programs. In addition, equivalency test difficulties further hinder the progress of the students, creating barriers for the successful completion of the program.

One of the informants narrated that the issues and challenged they are experiencing are:
Lack of trainings and workshops for IMs, Lack of learning resources, CLCs, limited slots for skills intervention. Strong support of different stakeholders.   BLGU and formal school support to ALS program. Permanent Community Learning Center and Learning Materials and Teachers Guide. Provision of a special skill training to the learners and teachers. Less Financial assistance in ALS program from LGU and BLGUs. There is an urgent need for Learning materials and facility in the learning center. Lastly, lack of training and seminars and not enough (Informant 1).

Another informant further added that:

Absenteeism of the learners because of their personal responsibilities, CLC of our own that we can use steadily and a funded livelihood program for our learners (Informant 14*).*

Informant 16 also stated that,
"The issues or concerns in Alternative Learning System is that insufficient and irrelevant learning materials, lack of facilities and materials just like printer and also lack of integration of livelihood" (Informant 16)..

Resources Constraints

Resource constraints was also identified as other major concern in the implementation of ALS programs due to scarcity of learning materials, availability of suitable materials, lack of financial support, and lack of facilities.

During the interview, one of the informants stated that the issues and challenges are:
"Lacking of ALS teachers, No School supplies received from the former school where the teacher is teaching, no other aid given from them it feels like they are being deprived from any opportunities from their former school. They have not even given a chance to refund all of their expenses in the MOOE. Implementers have been experiencing problems such as lack of learning facilities and materials, and absenteeism of learners" (Informant 2).

In addition, this was supported by the response of informant 7:
"Lack of financial assistance. ALS teachers used their own money in buying ink, bondpapers, etc. Also every graduation, we shoulder all expenses. 2. Lack of seminars and trainings. 3. Printed copies of K to 12 Learning Resources are still not provided" (Informant 7).

Informant 7 further added that,
"I hope that there is also a MOOE in our office like in the formal school. Our Division didn't support us financially. Educational resources are inadequate and don't meet the needs of the learners. Lack of instructional materials, delayed release of allowance, absence of permanent learning center and other facilities and irregular attendance of ALS students" (Informant 7).

Student-Related Issues

Twenty-five (25) to forty-nine (49) percent of the respondents claimed that student-related issues remain a challenge in the implementation of ALS programs. Inconsistent students' attendance and varying learning interest pose as significant challenge in the completion of the program. In addition, students' personal and economic issues also hinder their ability to fully participate in ALS activities. Moreover, the diverse background and learning needs of ALS learners present a complex landscape for educators and policy makers, requiring a tailored approaches to address individual learning style and abilities.

As stated by the informant,
"Inconsistent attendance of the learners also poses a concern. Some of the ALS students were also working adults who support their families. Another challenge is that educational resources are inadequate and don't meet the needs of the students" (Informant 3).

Additionally, informant 10 claimed that the
"Absenteeism of the learners who are mostly working" (informant 10) is one of the issues and challenges in the implementation of ALS .

This was further supported by informant 14:
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"*Absenteeism of the learners because of their personal responsibilities"* (Informant 14).

Equity and Inclusion

Twenty-five (25) to forty-nine (49) percent of the respondents raised the lack of scholarship programs intended for marginalized group and those who miss formal education enrolled in ALS. In addition, lack of conducive community learning center poses a significant challenge for equity and inclusion.

As claimed by informant 4:
"*For me are the following: No classroom or learning center, Laptop, printer and lighting. No Scholarship program for ALS graduates"* (Informant 4).

Recognition and Accreditation

Twenty-four percent of the respondents point-out that there are Higher Education Institutions (HEI) that do not fully recognize ALS graduates.

Informant 12 lamented that,

"Some employers or higher education institutions may not fully recognize ALS certificates or diplomas" (Informant 12).

Table 1. Emerging themes on the prevailing issues and concerns of the Alternative Learning System

Themes	Frequency	Core Ideas
1. Access and participation	General	o Drop-out rate and absenteeism remain a concern o Lack of trainings for ALS teachers o Limited BLGU support o Low students' performance o Absence of proper monitoring and evaluation o Inadequate awareness and promotion of ALS programs o Equivalency test difficulties
2. Resource constraints	General	o Scarcity of learning materials o Suitability and availability of learning resources o Lack of facilities
3. Student-related issues	Typical	o Inconsistent students' attendance o Students' learning interest o Students' personal and economic issues o Diversity of learners
4. Equity and inclusion	Typical	o No scholarship programs for the marginalized group and those who miss formal education. o Lack of community learning centers
5. Recognition and accreditation	Vibrant	o Some higher education institutions may not fully recognize ALS certificates or diplomas

Legend: *General -50% and above of the responses*
Typical- 25%-49% of the responses
Variant-24% and below of the responses

4. CONCLUSIONS

Support from the education community is crucial for fostering a conducive school culture and enhancing the performance of Alternative Learning System (ALS) teachers and learners. The school culture within Alternative Learning System (ALS) programs serves as a cornerstone in molding teaching and learning methodologies, thereby significantly impacting the quality, relevance, and efficacy of educational delivery. Through the cultivation of supportive environments, adoption of student-centered approaches, implementation of culturally relevant curriculum, provision of flexible learning pathways, and facilitation of professional development opportunities, ALS centers are instrumental in fostering enriching learning experiences for marginalized learners. Nevertheless, sustaining a favorable school culture necessitates consistent dedication, collaborative efforts, and alignment with educational objectives and values. Furthermore, research and policy interventions are imperative to fortify school culture in ALS contexts and augment the educational outcomes of learners.

The positive relationship of education community support and school culture significantly shape the school culture and educational outcomes. Parent-teacher, student-teacher, teacher-principal, and Division ALS Coordinator-Teacher relationships all hold pivotal roles. Positive relationships characterized by collaboration, trust, communication, and shared values amplify the effectiveness and success of ALS centers, fostering supportive environments, personalized learning experiences, and continuous improvement. Conversely, negative relationships characterized by authoritarianism, micromanagement, or communication barriers impede morale and hinder progress. Thus, nurturing positive relationships grounded in trust, communication, and advocacy is indispensable for creating environments conducive to teacher satisfaction, student success, and continuous improvement within ALS programs.

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