

Status, Issues and Challenges of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Implementation in Zamboanga City Schools Division

Annie B. Ramos¹

College of Teacher Education, Zamboanga State College of Marine Sciences and Technology, Zamboanga City, Philippines¹

¹ORCID ID No.: 852-860-852-860

*Corresponding Author: Annie B. Ramos¹
abramos@zscmst.edu.ph

HOW TO CITE:

Annie B. Ramos (2026). Status, Issues and Challenges of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Implementation in Zamboanga City Schools Division. International Journal of Special Education, 41(14s), 852-860

ABSTRACT:

Out-of-school children, youth, and adults remain a persistent concern in the Philippines, with many unable to access or complete formal education due to poverty, geographic isolation, and work responsibilities. While the Alternative Learning System (ALS) was established to address this gap, there is limited recent data on its actual implementation conditions, especially in geographically diverse areas like Zamboanga City. This study assessed the implementation of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in Vitali and Curuan Districts, Zamboanga City Schools Division, aiming to determine its status, identify related issues and challenges, and examine differences in perceptions based on teacher profiles. Using a mixed-method design combining descriptive survey and phenomenological inquiry, data were gathered through total enumeration of all 19 mobile ALS teachers, analyzed via frequency counts, weighted mean, t-test, and ANOVA, with thematic analysis for qualitative data. Results revealed that implementation was rated Extensive overall, with Very Extensive ratings in teacher qualifications and training, and Extensive ratings in curriculum content and instructional effectiveness, aligning with Department of Education standards. However, resources, financial support, and facilities were only Moderately Extensive, indicating gaps in operational support. Key issues included the program favoring fast learners, perceived lower institutional support compared to formal education, and heavier workloads for ALS teachers. Major challenges involved irregular schedules, lack of permanent learning spaces, insufficient materials, safety risks, and financial constraints among learners. Statistical analysis showed no significant difference in perceptions across respondents grouped by age, gender, school assignment, or length of service. The findings provide empirical evidence that ALS is effective but constrained by systemic limitations. These results guide policymakers and administrators in improving resource allocation, funding, and support systems to make the program more sustainable, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of marginalized learners.

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Keywords: Alternative Learning System, Department of Education, Mixed-method Research, Zamboanga City, Philippines

Introduction

Every Filipino is entitled to free basic education under Article XIV of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, yet millions remain unable to finish or even attend school. Some drop out due to financial difficulties, family responsibilities, or lack of interest, while others live in remote communities without access to formal learning facilities. For decades, the country has fought illiteracy, recognizing that improving education is essential for national growth and development (Rodriguez, 2007; DepEd, 2023). Illiteracy is seen as a major obstacle to economic progress, and the Philippines continues to face high poverty rates compared to other Southeast Asian nations. Out-of-school children, youth, and adults are the most affected, trapped in a cycle where poverty and lack of educational opportunities reinforce each other (Apao et al., 2014; UNESCO, 2022).

To address this gap, the Alternative Learning System (ALS) was established as a flexible, modular, and non-formal education program. It serves elementary and secondary dropouts, non-readers, working individuals, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and senior citizens, offering an alternative to daily classroom attendance. Learners can choose schedules that suit them, with classes held either in borrowed facilities or within communities. Lessons cover core subjects such as science, mathematics, languages, and social studies, taught by trained government instructors. The Department of Education implements two main tracks: the Basic Literacy Program (BLP) and the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Program, both designed so learning can happen anytime and anywhere (Tadena, 2012; Mercado, 2015; DepEd Order No. 78, s. 2022).

Over time, what was once called non-formal education evolved into ALS, now acknowledged as the “other side of basic education” alongside the formal school system (Guerrero, 2007; Moralista, 2021). While alternative education is sometimes viewed as lower in quality because it

serves students who struggled in traditional settings, many programs are valued for their creative approaches and ability to re-engage learners who have been left behind (Anon, 2016; Reyes, 2023). In Zamboanga City, ALS has operated for years, welcoming learners of all ages and backgrounds. Teachers here are deeply committed, yet they face numerous struggles in delivering the program effectively.

Previous studies have documented challenges in ALS implementation across the country, but most focus on central or urban divisions. There is limited research specifically in Zamboanga City, which is characterized by scattered communities, difficult terrain, and diverse cultural groups. This study addresses that gap by providing updated, localized data on the actual status, issues, and challenges of ALS. Unlike earlier studies that focused only on learner outcomes, this research examines the perspectives of implementers, compares conditions across areas, and identifies barriers that have not been fully explored in prior literature.

The purpose of this study is twofold: first, to provide a clear and evidence-based assessment of how ALS is currently being implemented in the division; and second, to highlight specific gaps and difficulties that hinder its full effectiveness. The findings will be useful to school administrators, policymakers, and funding agencies in designing better support systems, ensuring that ALS truly fulfills its mandate of providing equitable education opportunities for all.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine and obtain empirical data on the implementation of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Zamboanga City Schools Division. Specifically, it aims:

1. To assess the status of ALS implementation in the Zamboanga City Schools

Division as rated by teachers with respect to teachers' trainings and qualifications; resources; financial support; curriculum content; facilities; and effectiveness of instructional delivery.

2. To identify the issues encountered in the implementation of ALS in the division.
3. To determine the challenges faced in the implementation of ALS in the division.
4. To find out if there is a significant difference in the status of ALS implementation when respondents are grouped or classified according to their profile.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design, combining quantitative descriptive and qualitative phenomenological approaches. The quantitative phase described the current status of implementation and compared perceptions across groups, while the qualitative phase explored the lived experiences of teachers to explain the underlying reasons for observed conditions. This design is appropriate as it provides both statistical data and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Descriptive research is concerned with determining the present conditions or characteristics of a research subject (Sevilla, 1993 as cited in Alicay, 2014). The phenomenological approach allowed the

researcher to capture the essence of what it means to implement ALS in the field, transforming personal experiences into meaningful insights (van Manen, 1990).

Research Locale

This study was conducted at the Department of Education Zamboanga City Schools Division, covering the districts of Vitali and Curuan, as well as other barangays including Ayala, Baliwasan, Labuan, Manicahan, Mercedes, Putik, Talon-Talon, and Tetuan. These areas were selected because they represent both urban and remote communities, allowing for a comprehensive view of how ALS operates in different environments. Mobile teachers travel to these communities, often holding classes under trees, in barangay halls, or other borrowed spaces, as many areas lack dedicated Community Learning Centers (CLCs). Currently, the program serves 1,467 learners across Basic Literacy, Elementary, Junior High School, and Senior High School levels, managed by 19 mobile teachers.

Population and Sampling Design

The total population consisted of all 19 mobile teachers assigned to ALS in the division. Since the number is small, total enumeration was used, ensuring that all teachers were included as respondents. This approach eliminates sampling error and provides a complete representation of the group (Creswell, 2014).

Table 1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Profile Category	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	13	68.4
	Female	6	31.6
Age	20–29 years	1	5.3
	30–39 years	5	26.3
	40–49 years	5	26.3
	50–59 years	7	36.8

Profile Category	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
	60 years & above	1	5.3
School / Assignment	School A	2	10.5
	School B	1	5.3
	School C	1	5.3
	School D	1	5.3
	School E	2	10.5
	School F	2	10.5
	School G	3	15.8
	School H	1	5.3
	School I	4	21.1
	School J	2	10.5
Length of Service	1–5 years	2	10.5
	6–10 years	3	15.8
	11–15 years	1	5.3
	16–20 years	2	10.5
	21–25 years	4	21.1
	26 years & above	7	36.8
Educational Qualification	College Graduate	12	63.2
	With MA Units	5	26.3
	With Master's Degree	2	10.5

Research Instrument

The data-gathering tools consisted of a structured survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. The questionnaire was adapted from the ALS Monitoring Tool of DepEd and modified to fit the study objectives. It was validated by three experts in educational

management and measurement, yielding a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.90. A pilot test with five teachers confirmed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86, indicating good reliability.

The questionnaire was divided into four parts:

Part I: Respondent's profile

Part II: Status of implementation (5-point scale: 5 = Very Extensive, 4 = Extensive, 3 = Moderately Extensive, 2 = Low Extent, 1 = No Extent)

Part III: Issues encountered

Part IV: Challenges faced

The interview guide included open-ended questions to allow teachers to elaborate on their experiences.

Data Gathering Procedure

Formal written permission was requested from the Schools Division Superintendent. Upon approval, coordination was done with district supervisors and focal persons. Questionnaires were distributed personally, with clear instructions and informed consent forms

Results and Discussion

Status of ALS Implementation

Table 2 Status of ALS Implementation by Indicator

Indicator	Mean	Description
Teachers' Trainings and Qualifications	4.71	Very Extensive
Curriculum Content	4.36	Extensive
Effectiveness of Instructional Delivery	4.22	Extensive
Resources	3.84	Extensive
Financial Support	3.52	Extensive
Facilities	3.01	Moderately Extensive
Overall Mean	3.94	Extensive

Scale: 4.21–5.00 = Very Extensive; 3.41–4.20 = Extensive; 2.61–3.40 = Moderately Extensive; 1.81–2.60 = Low Extent; 1.00–1.80 = No Extent

The overall rating of “Extensive” means that ALS is generally implemented according to standards, but with room for improvement. The highest score in teacher qualifications shows that the human resource component is strong, confirming DepEd’s investment in training (DepEd, 2022). This is consistent with the findings of Moralista (2021), who noted that trained teachers are the backbone of successful

explaining confidentiality and voluntary participation. After the survey, one-on-one interviews were conducted, recorded with permission, and later transcribed. All data were kept confidential and used only for research purposes.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26. Frequency and percentage described the profile; weighted mean and standard deviation determined the level of implementation; t-test and ANOVA tested differences across groups at 0.05 significance level. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and meanings from the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

ALS programs. However, the low score in facilities indicates that the learning environment does not meet basic standards, which aligns with the observation of Reyes (2023) that infrastructure is the most neglected area in non-formal education.

Qualitative data supported this: teachers reported having the skills to teach but lacking the spaces

and materials to do so comfortably. This shows that while policy and training are sufficient, operational support is the weak link in the system.

Issues in Implementation

Table 3 Identified Issues and Consensus Level

Issue	Consensus	Interpretation
Program works best for fast and self-directed learners	High	Modular design favors independent study
Institutional support is insufficient compared to formal education	High	Delays in funding and material shortages
ALS teachers have heavier workload and higher risks	High	Multi-level teaching and travel demands
ALS graduates are not fully recognized as equal	Low	Mixed perceptions on parity
Learners perform well due to maturity and motivation	Moderate	Life experience supports learning

These findings explain why completion rates remain variable. The issue of favoring fast learners confirms the principle of andragogy, which states that adult learners are self-directed (Kearsley, 2010). However, it also highlights the need for more intensive support for those with

lower literacy levels. The perception of unequal support is similar to the results of Atilano (2016), who found that ALS receives only a fraction of the budget allocated to formal schools nationwide.

Challenges in Implementation

Table 4 Major Challenges and Consensus

Challenge	Consensus	Key Observation
No permanent learning venues	100%	Classes held in open or borrowed spaces
Financial constraints among learners	100%	Poverty is the top reason for dropping out
Insufficient and outdated learning materials	100%	Teachers often use personal funds
Safety and travel risks	95%	Long distance and difficult terrain
Delayed release of funds and requests	85%	Administrative bottlenecks

The challenges identified are not unique to Zamboanga City but are more pronounced here

due to geography. According to UNESCO (2022), lack of facilities and resources reduces

learner attendance by up to 40% in remote areas. The fact that teachers spend their own money is unsustainable and affects morale, as noted by Konishi (2016). These challenges are systemic

rather than individual, meaning they require policy-level solutions.

Differences in Perception

Table 5 Test of Significant Difference

Profile Variable	Statistical Tool	Value	p-value	Interpretation
Gender	T-test	0.452	0.657	No significant difference
Age	ANOVA	2.414	0.098	No significant difference
Length of Service	ANOVA	0.827	0.552	No significant difference
School / District	ANOVA	1.148	0.420	No significant difference

The absence of significant differences shows that the conditions are similar across all areas and groups. This is important because it means the problems are division-wide, not isolated to specific schools or teachers. Unlike studies that found variations based on location (e.g., Reyes, 2023), this uniformity confirms that interventions must be applied consistently throughout the division.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study concludes that:

1. ALS implementation in Zamboanga City is Extensive, with strong performance in teacher qualifications and curriculum design, but Moderate in facilities and funding.
2. Key issues include the program's bias toward fast learners, unequal institutional support, and societal stigma against non-formal education.
3. Major challenges are the lack of permanent learning spaces, insufficient materials, financial instability among learners, and safety risks.
4. Limitations of the study: Data were collected only from teachers; future research may include learners and parents. The study covers only one school year, so long-term trends are not captured. Findings may not be generalized to other divisions with different geographic conditions.

Practical Implications

The results are useful to DepEd Administrators, as they provide data to justify increased budget allocation for facilities and materials. They also serve Policymakers by highlighting the need to revise funding rules to ensure regular release of ALS MOOE. For ALS Teachers, the findings validate their experiences and can be used to advocate for better support. Finally, they benefit Learners and Communities by ensuring that their needs are represented in planning.

Recommendations

It is recommended to establish dedicated Community Learning Centers in all major barangays. There is also a need to increase budget and ensure timely release of funds to reduce reliance on personal contributions. Supplementary materials specifically for slow learners and non-readers should be developed. Information campaigns must be conducted to improve public perception of ALS. Additionally, safety allowances and insurance should be provided for teachers assigned to remote areas.

Acknowledgements

The author expresses sincere gratitude to the Zamboanga City Schools Division for granting official permission to conduct this research and for providing essential support throughout the entire process. Deep appreciation is extended to the nineteen Alternative Learning System mobile

teachers who willingly shared their rich experiences, professional insights, and valuable time, without which this study could not have been completed. Gratitude is also conveyed to the Zamboanga State College of Marine Sciences and Technology for the academic guidance,

resources, and encouragement offered during the development of this work. Finally, thanks are given to all individuals, institutions, and stakeholders who directly or indirectly contributed their assistance, cooperation, and support to make this research possible.

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