ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 10| Issue: 12| December 2024|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2024: 8.402 || ISI Value: 1.188

EMPOWERING LEARNERS AND EDUCATORS: A NEEDS ASSESSMENT-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR TRAINING AND EXTENSION PROGRAMS IN THE ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM

Eloisa C. Gabriel, Geraldyn M. Adrales, Maricar H. Sison, Glenda B. Gazzingan, Rodella F. Salas

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra19633
DOI No: 10.36713/epra19633

INTRODUCTION

The Alternative Learning System plays a crucial role in providing educational opportunities to individuals who cannot access or complete formal schooling. By offering flexible and adaptable learning pathways, ALS strives to empower learners of all backgrounds to reach their full potential. As a parallel learning system, ALS accommodates diverse learner needs, promoting inclusivity and accessibility in education (Department of Education, 2023). However, despite its significance, ALS faces various challenges that impede its effectiveness, including inadequate training for educators and a lack of tailored programs that address the unique needs of learners (Boholano et al., 2024).

To ensure the effectiveness and relevance of ALS programs, it is essential to continuously assess and address the evolving needs of both learners and educators. This study undertakes a needs assessment of the Alternative Learning System to develop a robust framework for training and extension programs tailored to these identified needs. As noted by Delmo and Yazon (2020), the successful implementation of ALS hinges on aligning program delivery with the specific needs and contexts of learners and educators. By understanding the specific challenges and aspirations of ALS learners and educators, this research endeavors to contribute to the ongoing development and improvement of the ALS system, ultimately empowering individuals and communities.

In recent years, significant reforms have been implemented under the ALS 2.0 initiative, which aims to enhance the curriculum and improve the overall quality of education provided through this system. These reforms emphasize the importance of needs assessment as a foundational element for developing effective training programs for learners and educators (Klenowski, 2002). A comprehensive needs assessment enables stakeholders to identify specific gaps in knowledge and skills, ensuring that training initiatives align with ALS participants' actual requirements (TrainingFolks, 2024).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to establish a framework for training and extension programs within the ALS by conducting a needs assessment. This research provides insights into the challenges and aspirations by focusing on the perspectives of both learners and educators of ALS in the Municipality of San Isidro. The findings serve as a basis for designing targeted professional development opportunities that empower educators and enhance the learning experience for ALS learners.

Specifically, it seeks to provide significant answers to the following:

1. What are the current learning resources, materials, and teaching practices employed in the ALS program in San Isidro?
2. What are the perceived challenges and difficulties encountered by ALS learners and teachers in San Isidro?
3. What are the training and extension program preferences of ALS learners and teachers in San Isidro?
4. Based on the needs assessment findings, what training and extension program framework can be developed for ALS learners and teachers in San Isidro based on the existing programs of NEUST?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design using qualitative method to gain a comprehensive understanding of the needs of ALS learners and teachers in San Isidro.

Participants

The participants of this study are twenty (20) ALS learners, two (2) teachers, and one (1) coordinator of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Municipality of San Isidro, Nueva Ecija.

Data Collection Methods

Focus Group Discussions: Qualitative data were collected through separate focus group discussions with learners and teachers. These discussions facilitated in-depth exploration of:

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 10| Issue: 12| December 2024|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2024: 8.402 || ISI Value: 1.188

Learners: Experiences in the ALS program, learning challenges, aspirations, and suggestions for improvement.

Teachers: Experiences in teaching ALS, insights into learner needs, challenges faced, and recommendations for training and support.

Data Analysis Techniques

Thematic Analysis: Qualitative data from the focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Current learning resources, materials, and teaching practices employed in the ALS program in San Isidro

Interviews with ALS teachers and coordinator in the Municipality of San Isidro revealed that the program faces significant limitations regarding audiovisual learning materials. The Learning Center is equipped with only one LED TV, which remains underutilized due to a lack of internet access and laptops for connectivity. Additionally, many learners in this program are returnees who prioritize work or other responsibilities. Their flexible schedules allow them to complete modules at home, leading them to go to the learning center two to three times a week. This situation aligns with broader observations in the literature, where inadequate resources have been identified as a barrier to effective teaching and learning in ALS settings (Catyong, et.al, 2023).

The teaching methods employed primarily consist of traditional approaches, such as group discussions using whiteboards, pen-and-paper seat work, and completing activities outlined in the modules. This reliance on conventional instructional strategies highlights the need for more dynamic and engaging teaching practices to better accommodate adult learners' diverse needs.

As highlighted by Flores (2022), there is a pressing need for ALS educators to adopt more learner-centered approaches that facilitate active participation and cater to varying educational backgrounds.

2. Perceived challenges and difficulties encountered by ALS learners and teachers in San Isidro

During the focus group interview with the ALS learners, the researchers noticed they needed to be more open to communicating with the teachers. Most of them seemed intimidated, especially when speaking to them in English. This was one of the challenges they mentioned during the interview. They fear being judged because they cannot communicate confidently in English. When asked about other problems they face in ALS, they stated that they also need help in understanding the module when the topics are written in English. Another challenge is comprehending Mathematics lessons. When their teacher discusses topics with them at school, they easily comprehend them; nevertheless, when given simple activities or exercises, they tend to forget immediately.

Regarding ALS teachers' challenges and difficulties, their primary concern is their students' interest in learning. This is due to the learners' notion that ALS is informal schooling in which they are not required to attend class regularly, and attendance is not factored into the assessment system. A further concern is that parents of ALS learners are not fully supportive of their children's studies. They believe that enrolling them in ALS will immediately result in promotion or completion of their education. This school year, twenty-two students are officially enrolled in ALS San Isidro, but only 50% or less attend class every day.

These challenges for ALS students and teachers underscore the importance of focused interventions to improve communication skills, comprehension skills, and overall engagement with the learning process. Strategies such as encouraging parental participation, offering specialized learning resources, and creating a supportive school climate could help both students and teachers overcome these challenges. The study of Cartoneros (2024) also suggested a collaborative, multifaceted strategy for ALS education involving continual assessment and integration of various learning modalities.

Further, the ALS coordinator and teachers wish to have IT experts to assist them in fixing the computer units they already have in the center, and to equip them with basic computer skills like using PowerPoint and excel.

3. Training and extension program preferences of ALS learners and teachers in San Isidro?

The ALS teachers and coordinator are very much appreciative of the initiative of the researchers to collaborate with them through trainings and extension programs. They really look forward on working with NEUST to assist them in transforming the lives of ALS students. They highlighted the following trainings they need:

3.1. Training for ALS Learners' Communication Skills
3.2. Training to Improve ALS Learners' Mathematical Skills
3.3. Teachers' Training about Different Teaching Strategies for Diverse Adult Learners
3.4. Intervention Programs for Parents of ALS Learners
3.5. Training on Basic Computer Literacy

Effective communication is essential for learners to articulate their thoughts and interact with others. The training must emphasize the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, which are essential components of communication within the ALS curriculum. It will enable learners to express their ideas clearly and confidently across diverse contexts.

Mathematical proficiency is required for daily problem solving and critical thinking. This training should cover basic numeracy, problem-solving skills, and real-world mathematical applications. This will help students establish confidence in their mathematical ability, which is essential for personal and professional development.

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 10| Issue: 12| December 2024|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2024: 8.402 || ISI Value: 1.188

Considering that ALS serves a diverse population of adult learners with different backgrounds and learning preferences, it is essential for educators to be equipped with an array of teaching strategies. This training should incorporate methods designed to effectively engage adult learners, including experiential learning, collaborative projects, and the integration of technology.

Engaging parents in the educational process is essential for the success of ALS learners. Intervention programs equip parents with essential tools and knowledge to effectively support their children's education at home.

Equipping teachers with basic computer skills will help them confidently use different tools for lesson planning, and creating learning materials.

4. Based on the needs assessment findings, what training and extension program framework can be developed for ALS learners and teachers in San Isidro based on the existing programs of NEUST?

The NEUST San Isidro Campus has its Extension flagship program having the following three components:

4.1. LIWANAG – ARAL for the College of Education
4.2. LIWANAG -TEKNOLOHIYA for the College of Information and Communications Technology
4.3. LIWANAG – KITA for the College of Business Management and Technology

Apparently, each component is based on the expertise of the faculty members in each department. For the findings of this study, LIWANAG-ARAL and LIWANAG TEKNOLOHIYA are the two components that can offer the training and intervention needs of the learners and teachers of ALS San Isidro.

The Project will be dubbed as Liwanag- Ar-ALS which means: **LIWANAG- A**ssistance and **R**esources for **A**daptive **L**earning and **L**iteracy **S**kills

The project will be divided in five components

- Language Literacy and Communication Skills
- Mathematics or Numeracy Literacy
- Teaching Strategies for Diverse Learners
- Assistance and Intervention to the Parents of ALS
- Basic Computer Skills

CONCLUSIONS

1. The lack of adequate audiovisual learning materials in ALS San Isidro, as well as the reliance on traditional teaching methods, highlighted the need for integrating technology and more engaging pedagogical approaches.
2. The challenges faced by ALS learners, particularly their apprehension towards English communication and difficulties in comprehending English-based learning materials, and difficulties in understanding Math topics, necessitate targeted interventions.
3. Similarly, addressing the concerns of ALS teachers, such as inconsistent student attendance, lack of parental support, and limited IT skills, is crucial. Providing professional development opportunities for teachers, particularly in technology integration and learner-centered pedagogies, as well as intervention programs for parents can significantly enhance the program's effectiveness.
4. Community engagement and partnership are essential to strengthen the ALS program in San Isidro.

Recommendations

1. Provide essential audiovisual equipment, including additional LED TVs, laptops, and reliable internet connectivity for the Learning Center. Also, provide professional development opportunities for ALS teachers on learner-centered teaching methods, such as project-based learning, collaborative activities, and differentiated instruction, using technology.
2. Provide trainings/ tutorials to improve ALS learners' English language proficiency, focusing on conversational skills, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension. Also provide trainings/ tutorials in Mathematics.
3. Equip ALS teachers with the necessary IT skills through targeted training programs. Focus on basic computer literacy, the use of educational software and online platforms. Also, develop strategies to increase parental involvement in ALS learners' education. Organize workshops or information sessions to educate parents about the program, address their concerns, and encourage their active support.
4. Create partnerships though MOA with educational institutions to provide additional resources, mentorship opportunities, or technical expertise to support the ALS program.

REFERENCES

1. *Boholano, H., Jimenez, S. T., & Alquitran, R. R. (2024). Capacity building training for ALS teachers and learners: A collaborative initiative. Cebu Normal University-College of Teacher Education. Retrieved from https://cnu.edu.ph/cnu-cte-deped-empowers-als-teachers-and-learners-in-a-capacity-building-training-through-a-unesco-jakarta-koica-grant/*
2. *Cartoneros, Mark Oliver (2024). Understanding The Essence of Teachers' Intervention In ALS Learning: A Qualitative Study. Southeast Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies. Retrieved from: file:///C:/Users/ELOISA/Downloads/UNDERSTANDING+THE+ESSENCE+OF+TEACHERS%E2%80%99+INTERVENTION+IN+ALS+LEARNING.pdf*
3. *Catyong, Christine I, Luchavez, Maria Dulce A, & Garciano, Lourdes M. (2023). Recognizing the Status, Needs, and Challenges of Alternative Learning System Students. Journal of Education and Practice. Retrieved from https://iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/viewFile/61060/63028*

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 10| Issue: 12| December 2024|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2024: 8.402 || ISI Value: 1.188

4. *Delmo, R. O., & Yazon, A. D.. Status of Alternative Learning System at the City Schools Division of Cabuyao: A basis for an improved program implementation. International Journal of Advanced Research and Publications, 4, 12-21.*
5. *Department of Education. (2023). About the Program: Alternative Learning System. Retrieved from https://www.deped.gov.ph/about-als/*
6. *Flores, Ramil D, (2022). Problems Encountered by Alternative Learning System (ALS) Teachers in Cotabato Division: Basis for a Strategic Plan. International Journal of Open-Access, Interdisciplinary & New Educational Discoveries of ETCOR Educational Research Center (iJOINED ETCOR). Retrieved from: https://etcor.org/storage/iJOINED/Vol.%20I(2),%2037-43.pdf*
7. *Klenowski, V. (2002). Developing portfolios for learning and assessment: A guide for educators. Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, 9(2), 217-227.*
8. *TrainingFolks. (2024). The importance of needs assessment for effective training programs. Retrieved from https://www.trainingfolks.com/blog/the-importance-of-needs-assessment-for-effective-training-programs*