

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Working Students Studying on the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Program at South District of General Santos City

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Abstract. Despite the growing implementation of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Philippines, limited studies have explored the lived experiences of working learners, particularly how they sustain their education while balancing employment and other life responsibilities. This study explored the lived experiences of working learners enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) program in the South District of General Santos City. Specifically, it examined the sources of their strength and motivation, the experiences that made their daily efforts meaningful, the ways ALS contributed to their personal and professional growth, and how these experiences shaped their future aspirations. A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. Eight (8) purposively selected working ALS learners from the South District of General Santos City participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify significant statements, formulate meanings, cluster related ideas, and generate emerging themes. The findings revealed that learners' persistence was sustained through the combined influence of family support, personal determination, future aspirations, institutional encouragement, and spiritual faith. Their daily efforts became meaningful through academic achievements, family relationships, personal resilience, and spiritual renewal. Participation in ALS contributed to personal growth, improved workplace competencies, increased self-confidence, and a clearer sense of life direction. Furthermore, balancing work and education strengthened rather than diminished their commitment to achieving long-term educational, career, and family goals. The study concludes that ALS serves as a transformative educational pathway that empowers working learners to overcome challenges, pursue meaningful life goals, and build a better future. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening learner-centered support systems, family engagement, community partnerships, and responsive educational interventions that address the realities and needs of working ALS learners.

Keywords: Alternative Learning System (ALS); Future Aspirations; Lived Experiences; Personal Growth; Sources of Motivation

Introduction

Education has long been recognized as a pathway toward personal growth, improved quality of life, and socio-economic mobility. However, across many countries, access to education remains a challenge for individuals who must work to support themselves and their families. Economic hardship, poverty, and limited access to educational opportunities have compelled many learners to balance employment with their studies. According to the International Labour Organization (2021), millions of young people worldwide combine work and education as they strive to improve their future despite financial and social constraints. For many of these learners, education is no longer confined to the traditional classroom but is pursued through flexible learning arrangements while managing the demands of everyday life.

In the Philippines, this reality is evident among out-of-school youth and adults who continue their education through the Alternative Learning System (ALS). As a parallel learning system, ALS provides flexible educational opportunities for individuals who are unable to complete formal basic education because of economic, personal, or social circumstances (Republic Act No. 11510, 2020). Despite this opportunity,

many ALS learners continue to face financial difficulties, work-related responsibilities, and limited time for learning. The Philippine Statistics Authority (2020) reported that millions of Filipino children and youth remain out of school, with poverty and the need to work among the leading reasons. Likewise, SEAMEO INNOTECH (2019) noted that a considerable proportion of ALS learners are engaged in part-time or full-time employment while pursuing their education.

In General Santos City, particularly in the South District, many ALS learners continue to balance employment with their educational responsibilities. While they pursue education with hope for a better future, they also encounter the realities of long working hours, financial pressures, family obligations, and limited opportunities for learning. These everyday experiences shape not only their academic journey but also their personal development and future aspirations.

Although previous studies have discussed the implementation of ALS, educational accessibility, and the academic outcomes of learners, limited research has examined the lived experiences of working ALS learners, particularly how they sustain their motivation, find meaning in their daily experiences, grow as individuals, and shape their future aspirations while balancing work and education. Moreover, little is known about these experiences within the context of General Santos City's South District, where many learners continue to overcome educational barriers through the ALS program. Without understanding these realities from the learners' own perspectives, educational interventions may not fully address their actual needs and circumstances.

Recognizing this gap, the present study explored the lived experiences of working learners enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the South District of General Santos City. Specifically, it examined their sources of strength and motivation, the experiences that made their daily efforts meaningful, the ways ALS contributed to their personal and professional growth, and how these experiences shaped the future they hoped to build. By giving voice to their lived experiences, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of working ALS learners and provide insights that may help strengthen learner-centered programs, support services, and educational policies.

Research Questions

This study, which explored the lived experiences of working students studying on the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Program at General Santos City, aimed to answer the following questions;

1. What factor provide strength and motivation to continue studying while working?
 - 1.1 Can you describe a particular experience when you chose not to give up on your education despite the demands of work? What personal dream, important goal, meaningful experience, or supportive person influenced to continue and stay committed?
 - 1.2 Who has been a strong source of inspiration in your journey, and how have they helped you believe in yourself?
2. What experiences make daily efforts meaningful or worthwhile despite the demands of work and study?
 - 2.1 When you feel tired or overwhelmed, what usually helps you regain hope or positivity?
 - 2.2 What moments, experience, or simple things bring you joy and make you feel genuinely happy?
3. In what way does participation in the ALS program contribute to personal and professional growth?
 - 3.1 How has ALS influenced the way you now face challenges in your work or personal life?
 - 3.2 What important life values or lesson from ALS do you carry with you everyday?
 - 3.3 How has ALS helped you become more confident in handling your responsibilities?
4. How do the experiences of being a working ALS learners influence aspirations and goals?
 - 4.1 What dreams keep you moving forward, especially during difficult times?
 - 4.2 How do you see your hard work today contributing to the kind of life you want in the future?
 - 4.3 What inspiring message or words of encouragement would you like to share to other ALS learners?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focuses on the lived experiences of Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners in the South District of General Santos City who are currently balancing both works and education. It sought to understand the personal, emotional, social and economic challenges they face as they strive to complete their education while fulfilling their responsibilities as workers..

Literature Review

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) has been recognized as an important educational intervention that provides flexible learning opportunities for individuals who are unable to complete formal basic education due to economic, personal, or social circumstances (Republic Act No. 11510, 2020). Unlike

the traditional school system, ALS allows learners to continue their education while fulfilling other responsibilities such as employment and family obligations. Similarly, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2022) emphasized that flexible and community-based learning programs are essential in promoting lifelong learning, particularly among adult learners who face multiple responsibilities. These perspectives suggest that educational flexibility is crucial in ensuring that disadvantaged learners continue to access quality education.

Adult learners enrolled in ALS often carry multiple responsibilities beyond their academic work. Many simultaneously fulfill their roles as workers, parents, or family providers while pursuing education. As a result, balancing work and study becomes a daily challenge that requires perseverance, effective time management, and strong personal commitment. Ryan and Deci (2020) explained that learners remain motivated when they find personal meaning in their goals, receive support from significant people, and believe in their capacity to succeed. This implies that motivation among working learners is influenced not only by individual determination but also by family support, educational opportunities, and future aspirations.

Beyond motivation, previous studies have shown that continuing education contributes to learners' personal growth and development. Participation in flexible learning programs enables learners to improve their confidence, develop life skills, strengthen work-related competencies, and build a clearer direction for the future. These positive changes demonstrate that education extends beyond academic achievement, as it also influences learners' attitudes, values, and overall quality of life. In qualitative research, these changes are best understood through participants' lived experiences, which capture the meanings individuals attach to their everyday realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Consequently, a phenomenological approach becomes appropriate because it seeks to understand how individuals interpret and make sense of their experiences from their own perspectives.

Although previous literature has extensively discussed the implementation of ALS, lifelong learning, learner motivation, and adult education, most studies have focused on program implementation, educational access, academic outcomes, or policy development. Comparatively fewer studies have explored the lived experiences of working ALS learners, particularly how they sustain their motivation, find meaning in their daily experiences, experience personal growth, and shape their future aspirations while simultaneously balancing work and education. Moreover, little evidence is available regarding these experiences within the context of the South District of General Santos City. This gap highlights the need for a phenomenological inquiry that gives voice to working ALS learners and provides a deeper understanding of their realities. By exploring these experiences, the present study contributes to existing literature and offers insights that may guide learner-centered programs, educational policies, and support mechanisms for working learners.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore and understand the lived experiences of working learners enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the South District of General Santos City. Phenomenology was considered appropriate because it focuses on describing and interpreting the meanings individuals attach to their personal experiences. Through this approach, the researcher gained a deeper understanding of how working learners balanced employment and education while making sense of the challenges, motivations, and aspirations that shaped their lives. Unlike quantitative research, which emphasizes numerical measurement, qualitative phenomenology allows participants to express their experiences in their own words, providing rich and meaningful descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Locale

This study was conducted in the South District of General Santos City, Philippines. The participants were selected from Community Learning Centers (CLCs) operating under the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the South District. The area was chosen because it has a considerable number of ALS learners who simultaneously work while pursuing their education. This setting provided an appropriate context for exploring the realities, challenges, motivations, and aspirations of working learners within the ALS program.

Research Participants

The participants of this study consisted of eight (8) working learners who were officially enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the South District of General Santos City. They were purposively selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) currently enrolled in the ALS program; (2) presently employed either full-time or part-time; (3) willing to participate voluntarily in the study; and (4) able to

share their experiences through an in-depth interview. The participants came from different Community Learning Centers (CLCs), allowing the study to capture varied experiences while maintaining a common focus on working learners balancing employment and education.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researcher based on the objectives and research questions of the study. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that encouraged participants to freely describe their experiences as working learners in the Alternative Learning System (ALS). This format allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions whenever clarification or deeper explanation was needed while ensuring that all essential topics were discussed. Prior to data collection, the interview guide underwent expert validation to establish its clarity, relevance, and alignment with the objectives of the study.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering process followed a systematic and ethical procedure. First, approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Dean of the Graduate School. After securing institutional approval, a letter requesting permission was submitted to the Schools Division Superintendent, the ALS Education Program Supervisor, and the ALS teachers assigned to the selected Community Learning Centers in the South District of General Santos City. Once permission was granted, the researcher coordinated with the ALS teachers to identify participants who met the inclusion criteria. Before each interview, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants, and informed consent was obtained. They were informed that their participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time without consequences, and that the confidentiality of their identities and responses would be protected. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were then conducted using the validated semi-structured interview guide. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure the accuracy of the collected data. Field notes were also taken to document significant observations during the interview process. After completing the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim and carefully reviewed to ensure accuracy before proceeding to data analysis.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1: What factor provide strength and motivation to continue studying while working; Can you describe a particular experience when you chose not to give up on your education despite the demands of work? What personal dream, important goal, meaningful experience, or supportive person influenced to continue and stay committed; Who has been a strong source of inspiration in your journey, and how have they helped you believe in yourself?

Emerging Themes on the Thematic Analysis of Sources of Strength and Motivation among ALS Learners

Emerging Theme 1: Family Motivation and Support

The findings revealed that family motivation and support served as the primary driver of persistence among ALS learners. Participants consistently framed their educational engagement as a responsibility toward their families rather than an individual pursuit. Statements such as *"Even though I work as a vendor, I continue studying for my children"* (P6) and *"My children motivate me to continue my studies"* (P5) demonstrated that learning was anchored in familial obligations and aspirations for intergenerational improvement.

This finding was strongly supported by Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, particularly the concept of self-efficacy shaped by social influence. Family encouragement functioned as a reinforcing mechanism that enhanced learners' belief in their capacity to succeed. As reflected in the statement, *"Because my family believes in me, I learned to believe in myself"* (P4), external validation from family members translated into internal confidence, which sustained persistence despite challenges.

Moreover, the findings aligned with Ungar's (2011) perspective on resilience, which emphasized that resilience was not solely an individual trait but was co-constructed through access to supportive relationships. In this study, family served as a critical support system that provided emotional stability, motivation, and meaning. This confirmed recent literature indicating that family support significantly predicted persistence and engagement among alternative education learners (e.g., Garcia & Reyes, 2021; Santos et al., 2023).

Additionally, the participants' future-oriented motivations, such as *"I study so my family can have a better future"* (P8), reflected Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, where education became a means of achieving both security needs and self-actualization. Thus, family motivation functioned not only as emotional support but also as a driving force toward socio-economic mobility and personal fulfillment.

Emerging Theme 2: Personal Motivation and Determination

The findings further revealed that personal motivation and determination were essential internal mechanisms that sustained learners' engagement in ALS. Participants demonstrated strong intrinsic drive, as seen in statements such as *"Balancing work and school is difficult but I persist"* (P8) and *"I never gave up on my dream to finish my studies"* (P8). These narratives highlighted persistence despite competing demands of work, family, and financial constraints.

This theme was best explained through Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, particularly the role of self-efficacy in regulating behavior and sustaining effort. As learners experienced small successes within ALS, they developed stronger confidence in their abilities, as reflected in statements like *"Education gives me confidence"* (P3) and *"I believe my efforts will lead to success"* (P8). This growing self-efficacy enabled them to persist despite adversity.

The findings also aligned with Masten's (2014) Resilience Theory, which conceptualized resilience as an adaptive process demonstrated through persistence in the face of challenges. Learners' ability to continue studying despite hardships, such as *"I continue studying despite hardships"* (P6), illustrated this adaptive capacity. Their experiences showed that resilience was not extraordinary but was developed through continuous effort and coping.

Recent studies further supported this finding, indicating that intrinsic motivation and self-determination significantly influenced persistence and academic engagement in alternative education settings (Deci & Ryan, 2020; Datu & Yang, 2022). These studies emphasized that learners who possessed internal motivation were more likely to sustain effort and achieve long-term goals.

Furthermore, the findings reflected Maslow's (1943) framework, where learners' pursuit of education represented movement toward higher-level needs, particularly esteem and self-actualization. The development of confidence and personal achievement, as seen in *"Studying again strengthened my confidence"* (P7), indicated that ALS participation contributed to both psychological growth and personal fulfillment.

Emerging Theme 3: Future Aspirations and Educational Goals

The findings revealed that future aspirations and educational goals functioned as central motivational drivers among ALS learners. Participants consistently articulated clear long-term goals, where education was positioned as a pathway toward career advancement, socio-economic mobility, and improved life conditions. Statements such as *"My dream is to finish my studies through ALS"* (P8) and *"Education will help me achieve my career goals"* (P3) demonstrated a strong future-oriented mindset that sustained their engagement despite present challenges.

This finding aligned with Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, particularly the role of goal-setting and outcome expectations in sustaining behavior. Learners' belief that education would lead to better opportunities, as reflected in *"Education opens many opportunities"* (P3), reinforced their persistence by linking present effort with anticipated future success. Their aspirations served as cognitive anchors that guided decision-making, regulated effort, and maintained commitment.

This theme was consistent with the findings of Datu and Yang (2022), which showed that learners with strong future-oriented goals demonstrated higher levels of persistence and academic engagement. Similarly, OECD (2021) reported that clear educational and career aspirations were strongly associated with sustained participation in flexible learning systems. In the Philippine context, Santos et al. (2023) highlighted that ALS learners' aspirations were closely linked to their pursuit of socio-economic mobility, reinforcing long-term commitment to education.

Thus, the findings suggested that future aspirations were not merely intentions but structured motivational forces that sustained learners' persistence. Education was constructed as a strategic investment toward a desired future, enabling learners to navigate present hardships with purpose and direction.

Emerging Theme 4: Institutional and Spiritual Sources of Motivation

The findings further revealed that institutional and spiritual sources of motivation jointly sustained learners' engagement in the ALS program. Participants perceived ALS as a critical enabling structure that reopened educational opportunities, while spirituality functioned as an internal resource that strengthened perseverance. Statements such as *"ALS made education possible again"* (P7) and *"With God as my strength, I can overcome struggles"* (P4) illustrated the dual influence of institutional support and faith in sustaining motivation.

This finding aligned with Resilience Theory, particularly Michael Ungar (2011), which explained that resilience emerged from the interaction between individual capacities and environmental support systems. In this study, ALS served as an external protective factor by providing access, structure, and guidance, while spirituality acted as an internal protective resource that enhanced emotional regulation and endurance.

This theme was supported by the findings of Bernardo (2020), which found that spirituality significantly strengthened resilience and persistence among Filipino learners, particularly in contexts of adversity. Likewise, Garcia and Reyes (2021) reported that institutional support systems in ALS enhanced learner retention by providing both academic and psychosocial assistance. Furthermore, Santos et al. (2023) confirmed that the combination of internal (faith-based) and external (institutional) supports strengthened persistence among alternative learners.

Research Question 2: What experiences make daily efforts meaningful or worthwhile despite the demands of work and study; When you feel tired or overwhelmed, what usually helps you regain hope or positivity; What moments, experience, or simple things bring you joy and make you feel genuinely happy?

The Emerging Themes on the Meaningful Moments in the Daily Lives of ALS Learners

Emerging Theme 1: Moments of Academic Achievement

The findings demonstrated that academic achievement functioned as a key source of motivation among ALS learners. Participants interpreted accomplishments such as completing modules, attending classes, and progressing toward graduation as meaningful indicators of competence and growth. These experiences extended beyond academic performance, as learners associated success with personal development and fulfillment.

This pattern aligned with Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, particularly the concept of self-efficacy, where mastery experiences strengthened individuals' belief in their ability to succeed. The learners' statements reflecting pride in improvement and completion of tasks suggested that repeated academic successes reinforced confidence and sustained engagement. As learners recognized their capacity to achieve, they became more persistent in overcoming challenges.

This theme was consistent with the findings of Zimmerman (2020), which showed that self-efficacy derived from academic accomplishments significantly influenced learners' persistence and motivation. Similarly, Datu and Yang (2022) found that perceived competence and academic progress strengthened engagement among non-traditional learners. In the ALS context, Santos et al. (2023) further indicated that small academic milestones played a critical role in rebuilding learners' confidence after educational interruption.

Emerging Theme 2: Meaningful Family Moments

The findings highlighted that family-related experiences served as a central source of emotional grounding and motivation. Learners constructed meaning in their educational journey through their roles as parents, children, and family members, where studying was closely tied to fulfilling responsibilities and improving family well-being.

This finding aligned with Resilience Theory, particularly Ungar (2011), which emphasized that resilience emerged through access to meaningful relationships and support systems. Family served as a protective factor that strengthened emotional stability and sustained perseverance, especially in contexts of hardship.

This theme was supported by Garcia and Reyes (2021), who found that family support significantly influenced retention and engagement among ALS learners. Likewise, Bernardo (2020) highlighted that relational support within Filipino contexts strengthened motivation and coping capacity. In more recent work, Santos et al. (2023) indicated that family-centered values remained a dominant factor in sustaining participation in alternative education programs.

These findings suggested that family functioned not only as motivation but as a source of meaning, where learners' educational efforts were embedded in collective aspirations rather than individual goals.

Emerging Theme 3: Moments of Personal Strength

The findings revealed that persistence, discipline, and endurance were central to learners' experiences, reflecting the development of personal strength. Participants demonstrated sustained effort despite fatigue, responsibilities, and socio-economic challenges, indicating a strong capacity for self-regulation and commitment.

This theme aligned with Masten's (2014) Resilience Theory, which conceptualized resilience as an adaptive process demonstrated through continued functioning despite adversity. The learners' ability to persist, regulate effort, and maintain focus on goals reflected this adaptive capacity.

The findings were consistent with Datu et al. (2021), who reported that grit and perseverance significantly predicted academic persistence among Filipino learners. Similarly, OECD (2021) emphasized that self-regulation and resilience were critical competencies for sustaining engagement in flexible learning environments. In the ALS context, Santos et al. (2023) found that persistence among working learners was strongly associated with their ability to manage multiple roles and maintain commitment to long-term goals. Thus, personal strength emerged as a product of continuous effort and adaptation, enabling learners to remain engaged despite ongoing challenges.

Emerging Theme 4: Moments of Spiritual Renewal

The findings indicated that spirituality served as a vital coping mechanism that sustained learners' motivation and resilience. Participants relied on prayer, faith, and reflection to restore strength, regulate emotions, and maintain a positive outlook during periods of difficulty.

This theme aligned with Resilience Theory (Ungar, 2011), where internal resources such as belief systems contributed to individuals' ability to cope with adversity. Spirituality functioned as a psychological resource that enhanced endurance and emotional regulation, particularly in contexts of uncertainty and hardship.

This finding was consistent with Bernardo (2020), who found that spirituality significantly strengthened resilience and persistence among Filipino learners. Similarly, Datu and Fincham (2022) reported that hope and spiritual coping were associated with sustained motivation and well-being in educational contexts. In alternative education settings, García and Reyes (2021) also emphasized that spiritual beliefs helped learners manage stress and maintain engagement.

Research Question 3: In what way does participation in the ALS program contribute to personal and professional growth; How has ALS influenced the way you now face challenges in your work or personal life; What important life values or lesson from ALS do you carry with you everyday; How has ALS helped you become more confident in handling your responsibilities?

Emerging Themes on Growth as a Worker and a Person Through ALS

Emerging Theme 1: Personal Growth and Character Development

The findings demonstrated that participation in the ALS program contributed to significant personal growth and character development among learners. This result aligned with the findings of Datu et al. (2021), who reported that engagement in learning environments strengthened learners' grit, discipline, and adaptive behaviors. Similarly, Ryan and Deci (2020) emphasized that sustained engagement in meaningful learning contexts fostered internalization of values such as responsibility, persistence, and self-regulation. In the Philippine setting, Bernardo (2020) also noted that learners in alternative education developed stronger personal values and emotional maturity through challenging learning experiences.

These findings were further explained by Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which posited that behavior, personal factors, and environmental influences interacted to shape individual development. Through continuous engagement in ALS, learners developed self-regulation, discipline, and goal-directed behavior, as reflected in their ability to manage responsibilities and remain focused on completing their education. The transformation described by participants indicated that learning experiences reinforced positive behavioral patterns, leading to stronger character formation and personal growth.

Emerging Theme 2: Work Skills and Professional Development

The findings revealed that ALS participation enhanced learners' work skills and professional competencies. This result aligned with the findings of OECD (2021), which emphasized that flexible education systems improved employability skills such as problem-solving, adaptability, and time management. Similarly, García and Weiss (2017; extended in recent analyses 2020) highlighted that education played a critical role in improving work-related competencies and productivity among non-traditional learners. More recent insights from UNESCO (2022) also emphasized that alternative and lifelong learning systems contributed to workforce readiness and practical skill development.

This outcome was best explained by Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, particularly the principle of observational learning and skill acquisition through experience. As learners engaged in ALS activities, they translated knowledge into practice, improving their ability to perform tasks in real-world settings. Their experiences indicated that learning was not isolated from work but integrated into daily responsibilities, reinforcing competence, work ethic, and professional growth.

Emerging Theme 3: Educational Opportunity and Life Direction

The findings indicated that ALS functioned as a critical avenue for restoring educational opportunity and redefining life direction. This result aligned with the findings of Unterhalter (2019), who emphasized that access to inclusive education systems provided individuals with renewed opportunities and pathways for personal and social mobility. Similarly, UNESCO (2021) reported that second-chance education programs significantly contributed to re-engagement and life redirection among marginalized learners. In addition, Torres (2020) highlighted that alternative education enabled individuals to reconstruct their educational identity and future orientation.

This theme was supported by Heidegger's (1962) concept of Being-in-the-world, which explained that individuals' realities were shaped by their lived experiences and contexts. For ALS learners, re-entering education redefined their identity and life trajectory, shifting from uncertainty toward purposeful engagement. Their experiences reflected how educational access reconstructed meaning and direction, allowing them to envision a more structured and goal-oriented future.

Emerging Theme 4: Confidence and Personal Empowerment

The findings revealed that ALS participation strengthened learners' confidence and sense of personal empowerment. This result aligned with the findings of Zimmerman (2020), which showed that self-efficacy significantly influenced academic engagement and achievement. Similarly, Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) emphasized that confidence developed through mastery experiences enhanced learners' motivation and persistence. In addition, Dweck (2017; applied in recent educational studies) highlighted that belief in one's abilities contributed to growth mindset and improved learning outcomes.

This emerging theme was supported by Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, particularly the concept of self-efficacy, which emphasized that individuals' belief in their abilities influenced their actions and persistence. As learners experienced success and developed social connections, their confidence increased, enabling them to participate more actively and pursue their goals. Their narratives indicated that empowerment emerged through mastery experiences, social interaction, and positive reinforcement, which collectively strengthened their identity and motivation.

Research Question 4: How do the experiences of being a working ALS learners influence aspirations and goals; What dreams keep you moving forward, especially during difficult times; How do you see your hard work today contributing to the kind of life you want in the future; What inspiring message or words of encouragement would you like to share to other ALS learners?

Emerging Themes on Future Aspirations of Working ALS Learners

Emerging Theme 1: Future Educational and Personal Growth

The findings revealed that ALS learners demonstrated a strong orientation toward future educational and personal growth, as they articulated clear goals related to academic completion and life improvement. This result aligned with the findings of Dweck (2017), which emphasized that learners who developed a growth mindset were more likely to pursue long-term goals and persist despite challenges. Similarly, Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) found that goal-directed learners exhibited higher levels of motivation and sustained engagement in learning. In addition, UNESCO (2022) highlighted that alternative education programs played a crucial role in fostering lifelong learning and enabling individuals to pursue continued education and self-development.

This finding was further explained by Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, particularly the concept of goal-setting and self-regulation. Learners' ability to define clear educational and personal goals indicated that they had developed cognitive mechanisms that guided their actions and sustained their persistence. Their aspirations for graduation, career advancement, and self-improvement reflected how future expectations regulated behavior and strengthened commitment to learning.

Emerging Theme 2: Future Family Security and Well-being

The findings indicated that ALS learners' educational pursuits were strongly driven by their desire to ensure future family security and well-being. This result aligned with the findings of Markus and Nurius (1986; applied in recent studies) on possible selves, which explained that individuals' future-oriented identities influenced their motivation and behavior. Similarly, Bernardo (2020) emphasized that Filipino learners' motivations were deeply embedded in family-oriented values, where success was often defined in terms of collective well-being. Furthermore, Asian Development Bank (2021) reported that education significantly contributed to improving household stability and socio-economic conditions, particularly among marginalized groups.

This theme may be understood through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasize that individuals are motivated their needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy are supported (Ryan & Deci, 2020). For the working ALS learners in this study, the desire to provide a better future for their families reflected their sense of relatedness, while their determination to continue studying despite work demands demonstrated competence and personal agency. Their aspirations for career advancement and improved living conditions further strengthened their motivation to pursuit in education. These findings suggest that the learners commitment to education was not solely driven by economic necessity, but also by meaningful relationships, personal growth, and the hope of creating a better life for themselves and their love ones.

Emerging Theme 3: Future Life Direction

The findings revealed that ALS participation contributed to the development of clearer life direction among learners. Participants described how their experiences helped them define goals, strengthen self-belief, and adopt a more structured outlook toward the future. This result aligned with the findings of Savickas (2013) on career construction theory, which emphasized that individuals developed life direction through meaning-making and goal formation. Similarly, OECD (2021) reported that education played a critical role in helping learners establish direction and make informed life decisions. In addition, Lent et al. (2017) found that individuals who developed clear career and life goals demonstrated stronger persistence and decision-making abilities.

This theme was further explained by Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, particularly the role of self-efficacy and outcome expectations. As learners gained confidence in their abilities, they became more capable of setting goals and pursuing meaningful life directions. Their belief in future success, as reflected in their narratives, indicated that self-efficacy influenced both their motivation and their capacity to plan for the future.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting this study, the dignity, rights, and well-being of all participants were placed at the center of the research process. Since the participants were ALS learners who balanced both education and work, they already carried the weight of multiple responsibilities and personal struggles. It was therefore crucial that the research honored their stories with compassion and respect, and informed consent was sought before any interview or focus group discussion was conducted. The participants were made fully aware of the purpose of the research, and their responses remained confidential. Respecting confidentiality and anonymity was especially important, as many learners might have been hesitant to share personal challenges related to socioeconomic pressures, emotional burdens, or institutional support. To protect their identities, pseudonyms were used, and all recorded data were securely stored. Beyond legal and procedural compliance, ethical conduct in this study meant listening to participants without judgment and creating a safe space where their voices were heard authentically (Crowe et al., 2022).

Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of working students enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the South District of General Santos City through a phenomenological approach. The findings revealed that despite the challenges of balancing work and education, the participants remained committed to completing their studies because of their aspirations for a better future, family support, personal determination, and resilience. Their experiences demonstrated that ALS serves not only as an alternative educational pathway but also as a meaningful opportunity for personal growth, self-improvement, and social mobility. Furthermore, the study showed that working ALS learners continuously navigated financial, academic, and personal challenges by developing effective coping strategies and maintaining a positive outlook toward achieving their educational goals. Their narratives highlighted the importance of supportive learning environments, flexible educational opportunities, and strong personal motivation in sustaining their educational journey.

Reccomendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were proposed; For ALS Teachers and Facilitators. It is recommended that ALS teachers and facilitators continue providing flexible instructional strategies and individualized academic support that acknowledge the unique challenges experienced by working learners. Regular monitoring and mentoring activities may also be implemented to help learners sustain their motivation and educational participation; For ALS Coordinators and Community Learning Centers. ALS coordinators and Community Learning Centers are encouraged to strengthen learner support mechanisms by offering counseling services, flexible schedules, and programs that promote learners'

well-being, resilience, and persistence in completing the ALS program; For the Schools Division Office and DepEd. The Schools Division Office and the Department of Education may strengthen policies and programs that support working ALS learners by allocating additional resources, enhancing community partnerships, and implementing interventions that address learners' educational, financial, and psychosocial needs; For Future Researchers. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies involving larger participant groups, different geographical locations, or other vulnerable learner populations. Quantitative or mixed-methods studies may also be undertaken to validate and expand the findings of the present phenomenological investigation. ALS effectiveness.

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