

# THE PATH OF RESILIENCE AND SUCCESS MINDSET: VOICES OF ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM LEARNERS IN VALENCIA CITY

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## ABSTRACT

*There are several reasons why many choose to drop out of school. Regardless, few made the decision to proceed despite challenges and the unfamiliarity of the new setup, which led to navigating new experiences in the Alternative Learning System (ALS). The study aimed to investigate how ALS students overcame challenges during their learning journey. There were six students at the ALS Learning Center in Valencia City, Bukidnon, who were currently enrolled in the ALS program at a secondary level, who participated in the study. The researcher employed a narrative inquiry design in storytelling and re-storying, utilizing a poetic interpretation of their journey as ALS learners. The data revealed the theme of resilience and a success mindset among ALS learners. Their experiences contained both positive and negative notes; however, they are worth uncovering. The participants in this study strived to finish the ALS program and participate in the ALS Accreditation and Equivalency Test (A&E Test). Their goal was to complete their current level and match their age with the appropriate grade level. The arising interpretation was that the learner was resilient enough to finish the degree equipped with a successful mindset to overcome challenges, leading them to a successful future. Ultimately, the study found that despite discrimination, low self-esteem, and a lack of support from their parents, they remain resilient and obtain the success mindset that they will conquer their dreams in the near future.*

**Keyword:** *Alternative Learning System, Resilience and Success Mindset*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is widely acknowledged as a powerful tool for personal growth and social mobility. However, not all learners experience a smooth educational journey, as many individuals discontinue formal schooling due to various challenges and circumstances. In the Philippines, many choose to drop out of school. According to Atilano et al. (2016), a learner who is not interested in what they are learning in school and becomes attracted to earnings from a certain employment result in dropping out. Despite progress in access to quality basic formal education, 11 percent of adolescents drop out even before finishing the last grade level (UNESCO Institute for Statistics [UIS], 2020). In 2017, 9 percent of the population aged 6 to 24 opted not to attend formal school, and 83 percent of those were 6 to 24 years old (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2017). Unfortunately, many of the dropouts end up either unemployed or in

menial jobs that pay low wages, offering little job stability.

For decades, the Philippines has been fighting against illiteracy, placing a high value on improving basic education as it is essential to the nation's growth and development. As a result, under the provisions of the Governance Act for Basic Education, otherwise known as Republic Act 9155, the Department of Education (DepEd) established the Alternative Learning System (ALS), which serves as a parallel learning pathway that provides out-of-school youth, out-of-school children, and illiterate adults with a comprehensive basic education depending on their situation and needs. This program aims to become an alternative to current formal education instruction by using informal sources of knowledge in a non-formal setting. It serves as a means for school dropouts to develop self-motivation to pursue their education amidst challenges and find work opportunities.

The belief that an opportunity will arise after completing the program is what keeps learners motivated to complete ALS (Valeza et al., 2017). In recent years, the ALS has made great progress toward its goals, but it only draws a small portion of the country's large out-of-school population, making it one of the challenges that the system faces.

Despite the program's flexible learning modalities and learner-centered approach, ALS students often encounter persistent challenges. These realities suggest that providing access alone is not sufficient; understanding how learners respond to and overcome these adversities is equally important. In times like these, resilience becomes a crucial factor in sustaining their educational journey. Resilience is defined as the capacity to adapt successfully to significant challenges (Masten, 2018). This means that through resiliency, an individual can maintain a stable level of functioning and well-being despite difficult situations. Alongside resilience, a success mindset—characterized by determination, goal orientation, self-belief, and a commitment to self-improvement—plays a significant role in shaping their ability to transform difficulties into opportunities for growth. According to Chesbrough (2023), a success mindset is the belief that a person has control over their own learning and development and that intelligence is not innate. It emphasizes that learners' abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication, hard work, and strategies, viewing challenges as opportunities for success. Zhao et al. (2021) stressed that a success mindset can enhance an individual's resilience and persistence when facing challenges or difficulties, as they are more able to adopt effort-oriented strategies in their efforts to achieve their goals.

After the learners finish the ALS self-instructional learning modules in their Individual Learning Agreements (ILA's) while continuously consulting with their facilitators, they can take the A&E Test (Accreditation and Equivalency). If they pass, they will receive a government certificate that is a substitute for a school diploma in the formal education system, allowing them to return to formal schooling (World Bank, 2018). Considering the opportunity the program offered, it becomes essential to understand the experiences of ALS learners and how their participation in the program contributes to their resilience and

success mindset. This leads the researcher to determine the stories of learners in the Alternative Learning System.

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTION

The researcher examined the lived experiences of learners in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in Valencia City, Bukidnon. Specifically, it will endeavor to respond to the question:

1. What experiences do learners in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) have?
2. What challenges do ALS learners face?
3. How do ALS learners overcome these challenges?

## 3. REVIEW OF TECHNICAL LITERATURE

Connelly and Clandinin first employed the narrative inquiry. In view of that, narrative is the study of experience derived from and from real stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) advocated narrative inquiry, in which storytelling was recognized as an excellent tool for reflection on what particular practical knowledge teachers have and how such knowledge is communicated. Connelly and Clandinin highlighted the importance of context and the interconnectedness of personal and cultural narratives in shaping human lives and identities. In addition, the author indicates that narrative inquiry allows opportunity for personal and social growth for both the participants and the researcher as they each go through the reflective and generative process of constructing narrative experience as told, learned, and written (Costantino, 2001)

### 3.1. Basic Principle of Narrative Inquiry

In a study utilizing narrative inquiry, the central principle is to examine and understand human experiences and perspectives through storytelling and personal narratives. According to Chan (2017), narrative serves as a tool for reflection, and a new understanding of teaching and learning is met by analyzing storied experiences about the practice setting. Researchers collect qualitative data, like interviews or personal stories, to identify themes, patterns, and perceptions relevant to the research question. The emphasis is on how the individual interprets and organizes their experiences into coherent stories, emphasizing the function of narrative in constructing understanding, identity, and meaning. Hence, this narrative work intends to

present unheard or unwritten stories that run counter to dominant or master narratives (Wolgemuth & Agosto, 2019).

### **3.2. Basic Principle of Narrative Inquiry**

These methods for conducting narrative research came from Creswell (2006) after reviewing Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) general procedural guide.

#### **3.2.1. Determine Research Problem or Question**

Clearly determine the research question or topic of interest that the narrative research will best meet. This method is most effective in understanding the in-depth stories or life experiences of a single life or the lives of a select number of individuals (Creswell, 2006). This could be linked to understanding individuals' experiences, perspectives, or establishing an identity based on their narratives. Creswell and Poth (2018) assert that research problems convey stories of individual experiences.

#### **3.2.2. Select Participants**

Select and classify participants whose stories align with the research question. This may involve purposive sampling to ensure that participants can offer rich and insightful narratives regarding the research topic. Find one or more number of individuals who have stories or life experiences to tell, and spend a considerable period of time with them gathering their stories using various types of information (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

#### **3.2.3. Collect Narrative Data**

To collect data, employ qualitative methods like interviews, storytelling, diaries, or personal narratives. Additionally, researchers may also collect letters sent by the individuals; organize stories about the individuals from family members; collect documents like memos or official correspondence about the individuals; or acquire photographs, memory boxes (collections of items that trigger memories), and other personal-family-social artifacts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a result, participants will be given a chance to share their experiences, perspectives, and stories in their own words.

#### **3.2.4. Analyze Participants Story**

Analyze the participants' narrative to identify themes, categories, or patterns, and rewrite it to arrange it chronologically. The researcher may have an active part and re-story the narratives within a sensible framework. Restorying is the process of rearranging the stories into some overall type of context. (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

#### **3.2.5. Collaborative Analysis and Reflection**

Engage in collaborative analysis and reflection with participants or colleagues to validate interpretations, gain deeper insights, and guarantee rigor, validity, and reliability in the narrative inquiry process. According to Clandinin & Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience; it involves collaboration between research and participants over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interactions with milieus.

#### **3.2.6. Present and Communicate Findings**

Present the results of the narrative study in a clear and captivating manner, using participants' narratives to highlight important key themes, insights, and interpretations. Examine how the findings contribute to existing literature, theory, and understanding of narrative and human experiences.

## **4. METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative data approach, narrative inquiry, with poetic interpretations. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) emphasized that a narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience; it is a collaboration between research and participants over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interactions with milieus. Butina (2015) pointed out that narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research in which the stories themselves become the raw data. Poetic interpretation (poetry) can be utilized in research data analysis and presentation of findings, and can be used in the research process (Fitzpatrick & Fitzpatrick, 2020).

The study was carried out in an ALS Learning Center in Valencia City, Bukidnon, Philippines. The ALS school schedule is Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. The ALS center was situated at Valencia City Central, serving as a key place to meet for learners who seek non-formal educational opportunities. This center provides information about the particular experiences that

learners with ALS face. Purposive sampling was utilized to choose the eight participants. The selection of participants was in accordance with specific criteria. First, they were students from Valencia City. Second, they were currently participating in ALS initiatives. Third, they had ALS at the secondary stage. Finally, they participate voluntarily.

**Table 1: Participants' Profiles**

Participants (Code Name)	Age
Erin	16 years old
Tata	15 years old
Nate	19 years old
John	32 years old
Shane	18 years old
Tara	25 years old
Carlo	16 years old
Sitti	36 years old

Rich and detailed narratives were gathered from participants through in-depth interviews. The researcher utilized thematic analysis to systematically examine the data and to identify patterns, themes, and meaningful insights within the data of the narratives provided by participants. To gain a deep understanding of the participants' experiences and stories, the analysis process involved familiarization, where the researcher immersed themselves in the narratives. After that, initial codes were created to further emphasize key ideas, events, and emotions conveyed by the ALS learners. These codes were then grouped into comprehensive themes and categories, capturing the similarities and differences in the participants' experiences within the ALS program. Through an iterative process of data coding and interpretation, themes were polished and reviewed, making sure of the accuracy and credibility of the results. Thematic saturation was observed as the collection of data increased to include narratives from additional participants, indicating an inclusive coverage of developing themes. Naeem et.al. (2024) defined saturation as the point at which no new data or themes are emerging from the data set, indicating that the data have been fully explored. To validate the interpretations and make sure that the participants' voices were precisely represented, member checking was carried out. The results of the data analysis provided a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the experiences of ALS learners in Valencia City, Bukidnon, emphasizing

the transformative effect of the program to their resiliency and successful mindset. The researcher obtained the informed consent of ALS learners before allowing them to participate in the study. The researcher safely secured and anonymized the data, preserving participants' privacy and confidentiality. The researcher adheres to the ethical standards that guarantee the rights and welfare of ALS learners during the research process. A poetic representation of the themes and participants' verifications was generated through interpretation

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The researcher heard the narrative stories of every participant and organized them into poetic interpretations.

The study was categorized into the theme of resilience and the success mindset of the ALS learners. All the participants in this study affirmed that their experiences with ALS learning shaped who they are today. These stories are worth uncovering and fighting for. This would shape them into becoming a better version of themselves.

This is the story of Erin, who experienced financial struggles from a young age, which had an impact on her perspective on money as well as how she handled resources. She also experienced challenges that tested her resilience and achieving one's goal.

I never had the chance to choose my way,  
 Or live a life I dreamed of every day.  
 Toys and new clothes were things unknown to me,  
 For in our world, they cost a high degree.

The only dream I held was going to school,  
 To wear a uniform and follow every rule.  
 To greet my teacher with a hopeful smile,  
 And learn with friends, even just for a while.

I wished to stay until the lessons end,  
 And spend each day with every cherished friend.  
 But fate decided I must step aside,  
 And slowly watch my dreams begin to hide.

Each year we moved from place to place again,  
 With relatives who helped us now and then.  
 We lived each day just trying to survive,  
 Unsure if dreams within us would revive.

Then ALS appeared before my eyes,

A door of hope, a path to a new sunrise.  
My dreams, once lost, were burning bright once more,  
And school became a dream worth striving for.

Now I can learn without a heavy strain,  
No longer bound by limits caused by pain.  
Through ALS, a future I can see—  
A life of hope and learning set me free.

### ***Theme: Resilience and Success Mindset***

According to Masten (2018), resilience is defined as the capacity to adapt successfully to significant challenges. On the other hand, the term success mindset refers to our core belief that we can improve our skills with practice, which may have an impact on our thoughts and behaviors. The researcher found out that participants are fueled to pursue learning in the ALS program with resilience and a success mindset. Like Sitti, a mother and a student, people doubt and question why she still pursues her studies when she already has a daughter, and why not just focus on taking care of her instead? Sitti realized that she was alone in fighting for her dreams. Despite people trying to shape the boxes she needed to fill in, she neglected those because her education is a key to a brighter future, and for people not to discriminate against her. Most of the participants consider learning in ALS a bridge to their dream of finishing their studies and having a better life ahead. Despite the struggles they are facing, they keep on grinding for hope in their dreams.

### ***Experiences in ALS***

In their compelling narratives, participants recounted their diverse experiences within the Alternative Learning System (ALS) program. Participants shed light on their experiences as ALS learners, their motivation to learn, their realizations in life, and the memorable moments that marked their educational journeys. All these stories collectively show the significant influence of ALS on shaping their paths and strengthening their aspirations.

Erin stated that "That time when we had a task, I thought it was too difficult, but the moment I finished doing it, I realized that I could do it" (Katong naa me buhaton nga task bitaw tas abi nakog lisod kayo abi nakog di nako kaya unya katong nahuman nako na narealize dayon nako nga kaya man diay nako diay). Shane stated that "If I already stop all of these from the very

beginning, it's really difficult; I walk already a longer mile, so why would I stop now?" (kung undangan ko ni sa akong naagian katong pag sugod palang, lisod gyud kaayo.. dako na kaayo kog gibaklay diri unya undangan lang?) Nate explained, "That is what I also thought—to stop studying; however, I won't be able to achieve my dreams. That's why I will continue my study so I can achieve something" (Mao pud na akong mga.. gahuna-huna pud ko pag moundang ko... wala man pud koy maabot. Pero magpadayun ko, naa koy ma kab-ot). The insights of the participants from their experiences illustrate that enduring and overcoming obstacles is vital for reaching goals and fulfilling one's potential. The participants portray a success mindset and resilience to strive amidst adversity. Zhao et al. (2021) stressed that a success mindset can enhance an individual's resilience and persistence when facing challenges or difficulties, as they are more able to adopt effort-oriented strategies in their efforts to achieve their goals.

### ***Challenges ALS Learners Encounter***

The journey of Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners is marked by challenges. The challenges learners encountered while studying in ALS were evident from their responses. Some of the challenges were low self-esteem, a lack of support, and the discrimination they got from the people around them.

Tata shared that "Sometimes I lost interest to pursue especially if I don't know what to do" (usahay kay mawad-an kag gana samot na og galisod kog sabot sa lesson). Sitti stated that "I am the only one supporting myself" (ako ra bayay naggasto sa akong kuan kaugalingon.) Tara shared that "Despite the hardships, I still continue to avoid people looking down at me and in ALS" (Kanang bisan lisod na kay padayon ang gihapon ka kay daghan kayo mga tao nga e look-down ka ug dika kahuman.) Tata's loss of interest due to difficulty of the lesson, Sitti's struggle with self-reliance, and Tara's perseverance despite difficulties and social stigma all underscore the positive mindset, resilience and determination required to succeed in ALS. Research supports that mindset can affect one's motivation, which in turn can affect academic resilience and performance (Tao et. al, 2022). Moreover, problems from the academe negatively impacts learners' resilience, as it can disrupt emotional

balance and reduce their ability to cope effectively with challenges (Suud & Na 'imah, 2023).

### ***How ALS Learners Overcome Challenges***

ALS learners often face significant challenges as they strive to achieve their educational goals. However, they enable us to devise effective strategies to overcome these adversities. Their stories not only shed light on the struggles inherent in the ALS pathway but also showcase the inspiring ways in which they surmount these obstacles, paving the way for a more promising future.

Nate stated, "Proving myself to those people that I can do it." (Oo, ginatagaan gyud naku ug kusog nga makaya gyud naku, nga gusto pud naku ug kanang ipa prove gyud sa ilaha nga kuan ba, kanang gikaya kay kaya gyud naku). Tata shared that "Have a positive mindset and continue learning the lesson" (Dapat kay positive lang ka maghunahuna unya magpadayon lang gyud bisan nagkalisod na sa pagswela. Magtoon lang tapos 20 studyhan and lessons). Shane stated that "I will continue my study because if I'll be able to finish my study, I can find a better job and no one can discriminate against me. It is difficult to look for a job if you did not finish schooling; that's why I really continue my studying to finish it despite difficulties." (Magpadayon gyud ug skwela kay ug makahuman ko mas makapangita ko ug tsada nga trabaho dayon walay mang look down sa akua. Lisod pud mangita ug trabaho kung wala kay nahuman maong ga skwela gyud ko bisan galisod ko). The participants illustrated the resilience and determination of ALS learners in overcoming challenges by proving their capabilities to others, maintaining a success mindset despite difficulties, and aiming to secure better job opportunities. Students with a success mindset who are resilient are more capable of adapting to and taking on significant challenges and persisting through challenges by trying new strategies or increasing effort to achieve greater academic success (Smiley et al., 2016; Masten, 2018).

Below is a poetic interpretation of Sitti's paths of resilience and success mindset. Amidst a world with walls of stone, she stands still to fight for a brighter future.

People say, "Why do you go to school?  
Focus on your baby; that's your role."  
Yes, I am a mother yet also wanting more  
Maybe that's something they don't know for sure.

Here I am, pursuing my dream to study,  
Because for me, it's the only key  
To stand against people's discrimination  
And build a life with a brighter foundation.

I feel like I'm pounding a wall made of stone  
my learning journey, I'm often alone.  
But I stand here strong with my own guiding light,  
In the face of their doubts, I am ready to fight.

For I am a mother, and a student as well,  
In both of these roles, I am trying to excel.  
Yes, I struggled but my resolve only grows  
In fighting for this dream, resilience grows.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***5.1. Conclusions***

The study focused on the lived experiences of ALS learners. It was evident that they were shaped by these three things: experiences, challenges, and how to overcome them. The participants, Erin, Tata, Nate, John, Shane, Tara, Carlo, and Sitti, narrate unique stories based on their journeys as ALS learners. Their story serves as a reminder that the ALS program offers out-of-school youth a huge opportunity. They were given a chance to continue their studies through alternative form of learning. This offered the participant hope and felt assured that they were not deprived of their rights in education because the program took care of them. Based on the narratives, ALS learners were able to continue their studies. Their experiences proved that they never lived smoothly, but life threw tons of baggage and a mile full of challenges. This study concluded with a theme based on the findings from the participants' narratives: resiliency and a success mindset. Despite discrimination, low self-esteem, and a lack of support from their parents, they remain resilient and obtain the success mindset that they will conquer their dreams in the near future. Learners are resilient enough to finish their ALS journey and stand up for themselves and their families. Definitely, their voices have been heard and showcased in this study, offering a better understanding of what they have gone through and how they have overcome them.

### ***5.2. Recommendations***

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations are proposed for future research and practical implementation.

1. Additional life skills training should be integrated into the ALS program to enable learners to generate supplementary income, thereby alleviating some of their financial challenges.
2. The ALS program should be promoted and expanded, especially in remote and underserved areas, to ensure wider accessibility and the provision of a more supportive and conducive learning environment.
3. ALS learners should be given provision of educational grants or cash-for-work opportunities to help address their financial constraints.
4. ALS learners are encouraged to participate in seminars, trainings, and symposiums that aim to foster personal development and strengthen their skills.
5. Further research is encouraged to conduct more in-depth studies focusing on the lived experiences and perspectives of ALS learners to further enrich existing literature in this area.

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