

Challenges of ALS and Volunteer Teachers

IVY Y. SAWATANG

Abstract — This study used a basic qualitative research methodology to investigate the difficulties faced by volunteer teachers in the Alternative Learning System (ALS), using a phenomenological technique to obtain detailed information about their experiences. The results showed that ALS teachers frequently use their personal motorcycles or walk great distances—up to one hour—to get to their students. Some even stay with family members to stay near their teaching locations. Given that their learning centers were housed in barangay halls, the majority of teachers felt secure; nonetheless, some expressed feeling exposed because of the long commutes. The financial difficulties of the volunteer instructors' job were further highlighted by the fact that half of them received no financial support. The commitment of ALS teachers is highlighted by this study, as is the necessity of more assistance to continue their work in educating marginalized areas.

Keywords — *Alternative Learning System (ALS), challenges, volunteer teachers'*

I. Introduction

Background of the Study

The Department of Education is implementing two significant ALS programs through the Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS). The Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Continuing Education Program is the other, while the Basic Literacy Program is the first. Both programs offer flexibility and modularity. According to the convenience and availability of the learners, learning can therefore occur anywhere and at any time.

Because of the large number of classes like multi-grades, to help the permanent teachers to reduce their workload, volunteer teachers can support permanent teacher in their efforts to give their students a high-quality education.

Some of the unemployed teachers wants to volunteer in their locality just to have teaching experience. For future career chances and personal development, not only out of kindness.

Under the guidance of the permanent teachers, volunteer teachers follow the government curriculum in teaching. It is anticipated that volunteer teachers dedicate some time each day to class preparation and assistance from the local staff is provided.

With the assistance of the coordinators, volunteer Teachers can engage in a variety of activities and impart knowledge outside of the prescribed school curriculum. For instance, they might teach children about sports, their nation, dance, sing, or do arts and crafts or paint.

The best moment as a volunteer teacher is that helping the pupils in many ways. Pupils were doing really well, volunteer teachers felt so good because it is their passion to teach children and encourage the learners to study well. People genuinely just want to help even the salary is small and some are none. They gained so much more from forming bonds with the children, staff, and other volunteers.

In the Philippines, the Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a parallel education program that offers a useful substitute for the current official education system. ALS is an alternative or substitute for formal education when it is not available or cannot be accessed in schools. Both informal and non-formal sources of information and expertise are included in ALS.

Many Filipinos are unable to enrol in and complete their official basic education (Grades 1-6 and Years 1-4). While some people live in communities without access to education, others drop out from school. Since every Filipino is entitled to free basic education, the government created ALS to give everyone the opportunity to get access to and finish basic education in a way that best suits their individual requirements and circumstances.

Other than formal education, non-formal education is recognized and encouraged by the 1987 Philippine Constitution. A comprehensive, adequate, and integrated education system that is relevant to the needs of the people and society must be established, maintained, and supported by the State, according to Article XIV, Section 2, Paragraph 1. Paragraph 4 succinctly supports non-formal, informal, and indigenous learning systems as well as self-learning, independent, and after-school study programs, especially those that address community needs.

In order for the ALS program to be successful, PBED and other education stakeholders must see that it has to be supported by appropriate and pertinent training for ALS teachers and ALS implementers. Although ALS has been implemented, the ALS Roadmap recognizes there haven't been many "ALS experts" for more than 20 years, and very few teachers get the ability to teach the six ALS learning strands (life lessons plus K–12 curriculum content) abilities to a wide range of students in a multi-grade (K–12) setting. The recently passed ALS Act (Republic Act 11510) stipulates those students with ALS, who were previously young people and grownups) now comprise kids. The Teacher Education Task Force recommended "To produce graduates that are more prepared to implement ALS," according to institutions (TEI), the advocacy is shown in the ALS Act, passed while this report was being written. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) was instructed under the ALS Act to "create a ALS curriculum for a specialized degree in ALS training has been defined and standardized.

Education stakeholders, including PBED, recognize that the ALS program needs to be in conjunction with appropriate and pertinent training for ALS implementers and teachers. ALS Roadmap notes that although while ALS has been in use for more than 20 years, there are still there aren't many "ALS experts," and not many teachers become proficient in teaching the ALS six learning strands—K–12 academic content combined with life skills—to a wide range of

students in a multi-grade (K–12) configuration. According to the recently enacted ALS Act (Republic Act 11510), ALS students—who were previously youngsters and adults) now comprise kids. The Task Force on ALS recommended that Teacher Education Such lobbying aims "to produce graduates that are more prepared to implement ALS" at institutions (TEI). The goal of PBE's policy-oriented research is to offer DepEd, CHED, and other ALS-related organizations insights and suggestions. The report will concentrate on potential teacher candidates' recruitment, deployment, and certification as high-quality Alternative Learning System providers.

I conducted this research because there hasn't been much research about challenges of ALS and Volunteer Teachers and also I wanted to interview and write all the challenges of being an ALS and Volunteer teachers.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to determine the challenges experience by ALS and Volunteer teachers towards the development of a propose policy for improvements of their conditions.

1. What are the challenges experience by ALS teachers?
2. What are the strategies to cope with the challenges experience by ALS teachers?
3. What proposed policy will be proposed to Improve of the condition of ALS teachers?

II. Methodology

Research Design

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher utilized Basic qualitative design method of research in order to assess the challenges of ALS and Volunteer teachers.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were two groups. The first group was the ALS and the second group was the Volunteer teachers in the District of Tinglayan.

Instrumentation

The Interview Guide was served as guide in gathering the necessary information for the study. The guide was gathered from the ALS and Volunteer teachers from the District of Tinglayan.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher asked the school principal to allow the Volunteer teachers to participate in the study. A written consent of researcher was sought to ensure their willingness to participate in the study. The researcher conducted the interview during their most convenient time.

Data Gathering Procedures

A one-on one interview was done and results were tape recorded. The researcher transcribed the interviews to translation.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen to interpret the data information from the study's respondents using the narrative analysis in the interpretation of data and information from the respondents of the study.

III. Results and Discussion

Challenges Experiences as a Volunteer ALS Teacher

A volunteer teaching position in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) presents its participants with a distinct set of problems and experiences that are distinct from those that are often encountered in a classroom setting. When working with students who may have experienced a break in their education or who are confronted with socio-economic challenges, ALS teachers are frequently burdened with the responsibility of bridging major educational gaps while simultaneously providing learning opportunities that are flexible and inclusive. In order to be successful in this profession, you need to be flexible, patient, and deeply committed to ensuring that education is available to everyone. During this conversation, we will address the difficulties that are encountered in this capacity, such as limited resources and the need to strike a balance between the various requirements of learners, as well as the ways in which these experiences influence both personal and professional development.

Theme 1. Transportation and Mobility

The mountainous terrain of Tinglayan has created a problem on the mobility of the teachers. They encounter difficulty of reaching their clients because they need to walk.

TO1. Osa gway napachasa' as Volunteer teacher got inachajun nan usgwilaan. Kailanga' manadchayan as chugwa km asiyaot maachanun san usgwilaan kapu ta achaju nan ikaw mi gway barangay san mansuyuwak gway usgwilaan. Janan osa hos gway napachasaot nan maidku signal san agwachan mi usgwilaan. (One of the challenges I experienced as a volunteer teacher is that the distance of the school where I was teaching. I need to walk 2 km before I reach the school.)

TO2- Oha gwey napachaha' gwey volunteer ket nan kinaachajun nan uhvilaan. kailangak gwey manadcharan ahiyaot manlukan ah 30 minutes ahiya' maachakuh han usvilaan gwey manhuruwa'. (*"One of the difficulties I face is that it takes me thirty minutes to travel from our house to the school where I volunteer as a teacher and the school does not have a signal."*)

TO3- Osay napachasak ket nan achayun nan usvilaan han foroy ni maunger tay manadchadcharan. (*"The distance between our residence and the school was one of the problems I faced. Before I can get to the school where I work, I have to walk."*)

TO4- Nan osa gway likat nan osa ta gway bolunteer got masasapa ta gway humangon ta masapa ta hos gway lumigawat. Ja achaju nan machadchayan ad asitawot michakus san manlukanan gway umoy mansuyuwan. Nan osa hosot maidkun signal. (One of the challenges of being a volunteer is that you need to wake up early so that

Maysa nga challenge kanyak ket masasapa ak bumangon ta masapa nak bumaba, pagnaek 1km sakbay nak makadanun t highway nga pagluganak nga mapan agsuro. Maysa pai ket kaawan ngai t signal t maysa nga challenge kinyami as teacher. (*"I have to wake up early in the morning so I have to walk before I reach the highway where I have to ride before I reach the school where I am teaching. And return again to our place after the school hours. Since there is no signal to the school I am teaching I also considered this as one of the challenge I faced."*)

The distance that separated the teachers' home and the school where they taught was one of the most significant problems that they faced. They were required to walk around two kilometers each day in order to get to the school because it was situated in a somewhat rural place. Because of the variable weather conditions, this daily trek added a physical strain to their obligations, which was especially difficult to manage. They made a commitment to assist the youngsters in this impoverished area, and although it was exhausting when they first started, it eventually became a part of their routine. A further challenge that they encountered was the amount of time it took for them to go from my house to the school, in addition to the distance that separated them. Due to the fact that the trip typically took approximately thirty (30) minutes is a large amount of time, They have to leave their house rather early in the morning. There was no mobile signal in the area, which was another factor that made it difficult to accomplish. The physical distance was not the only factor that made it difficult. As cited by Bontoyon (2016), The mobile teachers pass through squatter areas or deprived barangays, walk through rough and muddy roads, trek uncharted mountains river and swamps to bring basic education to the marginalized sectors of our society .

According to Jacob, as cited by Helplineph (2022), an ALS teacher in Albay who is now trending on social media just because she convinced a whole family to learn again. Her main goal as an ALS Teacher was to help the family to learn again the basics in life. She traveled at least 30 minutes via motorcycle (habal-habal). Not only that, after 30 minutes motorcycle, she walked 30 minutes again to the house of her students. She also said that she did not have any difficulty in teaching them since they are all willing to learn.

Because of this lack of connectivity, it was more difficult to contact with coworkers and parents, as well as to access internet materials, which are essential for contemporary education that are essential.

The pattern consisted of them getting up early every day and walking a kilometer only to get to the highway before they could even begin the actual travel to the school.

After I had finished my responsibilities at school, they would make the same drive back, frequently fatigued but content with the work they had accomplished that day. During the hours when they were in school, they were cut off from the rest of the world since there was no signal. This made it even more difficult for them to coordinate their lessons and maintain communication with anyone. Volunteering was an experience that was extremely fulfilling, despite the difficulties that were encountered. The delight of assisting kids in their educational and personal development more than compensated for the effort that was required to get to school each day. Even though there were challenges to overcome in terms of both physical and logistical aspects, the opportunity to make a difference in a community that was struggling made every step worthwhile.

Theme 2: No Network (Signal)/Lack of Communication)

The problem of internet connection is another challenge the teachers encountered. Because of this they could not access their lessons easily nor communicate with the learners and parents. They have these statements:

TO6-Owon, tan nu maid signal maid ininon gway mansearch nu agwad kailangan gway isearch san internet. Osa hos ket achik kun macontact nan chugwa gway anak u janan nan pamilyak ta kapu ta achaju nan barangay gway mansuyuwak ket ad kailangak gway manbording. (*“Yes it is, because without network (signal) we cannot search for our needed in teaching. Also we can’t communicate with our love ones especially to my children. Since it was far, I needed to rent a room to stay during the school days.”*)

TO2- on tan had nu maid hignal ahita maakwa ha noon ta karo nan terfahu ad usvilaan. Ihun hos nan achita macontact nan pamilya ta, wen ta nu awan signal ket hanta maaramid t trabaho ta ken maysa pai hanta makicommunicate iti pamilya karo t anak ko. (*“Yes, it is, since we are unable to find what we need for instruction without a network (signal). Additionally, we are unable to contact with our loved ones, particularly my kids. I had to rent a room during the school days because it was far.*

TO5- wen oha nan hignal han problema me han isgwilaan, achita makaterfahu hana nu maid hignal karo hana achita makwa nan kailangan wey koon. (*“Indeed, the issue at our school is signal. We now require the internet in order to complete our school reports.”*)

TO7- asapuran talagan signal ta nalaka tauy macontact nan pamilya tayo nu awad emergency ja asapuran metlang han terfahu mangwa agaramid han reports ta anna chachay online

wey maisubmit. (“yes it is, signal is so important. We need it in doing our reports especially that there are online submissions. Also we need it to communicate with our love ones.”)

The lack of network signal in the school is a problem especially in relation to teaching and communication. In today’s educational environment, having access to the internet is essential for teachers. Without a reliable signal, it was difficult to search for teaching materials or instructional resources that could enhance lessons. The absence of connectivity limited my ability to access up-to-date educational content, making lesson planning more time-consuming and less dynamic. In many cases, teachers rely on online resources to adapt their instruction to the needs of their students, and the inability to access these resources hindered my effectiveness in the classroom. Beyond its impact on teaching, the lack of network signal also affected their personal life. Being far from home and family, especially one’s children, meant that they could not easily communicate with them during school days. This disconnect added a layer of emotional difficulty to the job, as I often found myself missing important moments or updates from home. The distance between the school and my residence required me to rent a room near the school during the weekdays, further emphasizing the need for communication.

Moreover, the lack of network also affected their administrative responsibilities as teachers. Many school reports and submissions are required to be done online, and without signal, completing these tasks became a major challenge. We had to wait until we were in areas with better connectivity to submit our reports, which often led to delays and additional stress. The absence of a network hindered their efficiency and added unnecessary complications to what should be straightforward administrative duties. In essence, the lack of signal impacted both their professional and personal lives. It made it difficult to provide high-quality instruction, maintain communication with loved ones, and complete necessary school reports. Addressing this issue would not only improve the teaching environment but also support the well-being of teachers who, like me, work in remote areas far from their families. Based from the results of this study, seven (7) mobile teachers mentioned that they were safe or secured in their CLCs located near or within their barangays unlike in the past studies that the mobile teachers assigned in Surigao del Sur had problems on the availability of classrooms. They always transfer from one place to another every class session. They also lack the support from the local officials who did not provide them with permanent room (Arpilleda, 2018).

Theme3. Renumeration of Services Benefits

The volunteer and ALS teachers are not paid regularly by the DepEd or the local government units. Many times, they spend available resources at home to finance their needs.

TO9-Province nan mangatod san sugwilchu mi. 380 nan per day me ad achi kun umanay as ilauk as usayon nan ananak u naiwhakak ad kanad gway ana nan chugwa anak u. umanay lang nan sugwilchuk as usayok san whinikat. Chuwak manhuyud as ipulitik gway umoy mangusgwila. (“I am under the Provincial Local School Board (PLSB). The province pays as per day which is

380. *It is not enough to provide my family needs since I mention that I have 2 children. It is only enough for my personal expenses. There are many times I needed to barrow money for my older sister and to my co-teacher for my transportation since I am pursuing my Master's degree."*)

T10- Province nan mangatod san sahod me. 380 nan atchon cha per day me sunga achi umanay ngay pang support u san kailangan nan anak ko ihun nan iti infakak ad kanad wey osaak wey single mother. Umanay lang as para han inarkaw wey us usarok. Namin achuwak nafulod han manang janan kakadwak tapn0 lang agwad pamasahok wey umoy maneskwela san Masteral u. (*"The Provincial Local School Board is in charge of me (PLSB). The province makes daily payments of 380. Given that I am a single mother, it is insufficient to meet my child's needs. It's simply sufficient to cover my personal costs. Since I am pursuing a master's degree, I have frequently required to borrow money for my co-teacher's transportation as well as for my older sister."*)

TO8- achi pun umanay nan suvilchuk. Umanay lang as usaro' ipulitik ya' ilakok as ano'. (*"No, it is insufficient. Our wage is meagre, and it barely covers our personal expenses like food and transportation, not enough to support our family's necessities."*)

TO4- achi pun tan annan anak ko. Umanay lang as usarok wey umumoy mansuru. Ipulitik ya ilakok as anak. (*"It is not enough since I have children to feed. It is only enough for my transportation and for my foods."*)

As a volunteer teacher under the Provincial Local School Board (PLSB), one of the significant challenges the volunteer teachers face is the inadequacy of their salary. An amount of 380 pesos (P380.00) per day, while helpful for covering personal expenses such as food and transportation, is not enough to meet the needs of the family. It only provides for their immediate personal costs, leaving little to address the demands of raising children. This financial strain is compounded by the cost of transportation and daily living expenses, making it difficult to save or plan for the future. Being a single mother adds another layer of complexity to this situation. Not only do they have to ensure that their children are fed and cared for, but they also have to balance their role as both a provider and a caregiver. Thus, they had to use their own money to buy learning materials and their travel and food expenses for the whole duration of their service, similar to the past studies that there were teachers in the most far flung communities, who spent their own money to buy learning materials and even buy food for their hungry learners (Olimboyong,2019; Cortez, 2019), but the respondents of this study did not experience buying foods for their learners.

It is a reminder that volunteer teachers, especially those under PLSB, face significant economic hardships that make it difficult to provide for their families and pursue personal and professional growth simultaneously. In the study of Arpilleda (2018), there are four common problems among the six mobile teachers: Lack of instructional materials, delayed release of allowance, absence of permanent learning center and other facilities and irregular attendance of ALS students. The mobile Teachers also complained on the delay of their allowances. Some of them disclosed that they could have provided their students with sufficient number of copies of

modules. On the other hand, they also have problems on the availability of classrooms. They always transfer from one place to another every class session. They also lack the support from the local officials .

They need to persevere their difficulties with the hope that they will gain experiences that will be considered for a permanent teaching position, particularly in the Register of Qualified Applicants (RQA). In the current competitive educational landscape, teaching experience is highly valued, and volunteering offers them the chance to accumulate the points needed to qualify for a more secure and long-term teaching position. The RQA system, which many aspiring teachers rely on to secure positions, places significant weight on hands-on teaching experience. Those with volunteer teaching experience are given additional points during the application process, increasing their chances of being hired for permanent roles. In this way, volunteering serves as a stepping stone toward my long-term goal of becoming a regular teacher. The more time I spend in the classroom, the more experience I gain, and the better my chances are of meeting the requirements set by the Department of Education for a teaching position.

Strategies Employed to Cope the Challenges

As volunteers and ALS teachers, there is a need to cope with those difficulties they encountered.

T15-Anusan ta lang nan terwasu janan ajaton ta nan terwasu ja maahuyun ta san whyu nan apanunutana. Ibudget gway ustu nan aitan gway sugwilchu iananay ta umanay. Sad nu sawhachu makibonding san anak ja manmuya as nateng san garden san paraangan. (*"I need to be always positive, be patient and I have to budget well my salary to be enough with my every day needs. During my free time I set time for my family, bonding with my family. Plants vegetables in my garden."*)

T12- Anuhan ta lang nan terfahu janan ajaton ta nan tervahu. Ibudget way ustu nan aitan way suvilchu iyananay ta umanay. (*"Remain patient and optimistic at all times. Never fail to enjoy your teaching days. To ensure that my pay covers my daily expenses, I must carefully budget my income. I make time in my leisure time to spend quality time with my family."*)

T3-Losan way iwaar ot nalikat. Maid pun nalaka as iwaar. Iyan anay tan akit wey sweldo ken makibonding han pamilya nu awad free time. (*"PO3- Always have patience and optimism on your side. Enjoy every minute of your teaching career. I have to carefully budget my money to make sure that my daily costs are covered by my wages. I schedule quality time with my family during my free time."*)

T4- Ajaton ta nan terwasu janan anusan ta. (*"we have to love our work and be patients."*)

Coping with the challenges of being a volunteer teacher requires a combination of patience, positivity, and resourcefulness. One of the key strategies they use is maintaining a positive mindset,

no matter how difficult the situation may be. Volunteering, especially in remote areas with limited resources, can be exhausting, but staying optimistic helps me push through the tough days. They remind themselves that the love for teaching and the opportunity to make a difference in students' lives. By focusing on the rewarding aspects of teaching, they are able to enjoy every day in the classroom, even when faced with challenges like low pay or difficult working conditions. As a volunteer, there are many aspects of the job that can be frustrating, whether it's the long walks to school, lack of resources, or limited pay. However, the teachers learned that patience is key to managing these difficulties. Understanding that teaching, especially in a volunteer capacity, is a long-term commitment has allowed me to approach each day with a sense of purpose. By taking things one day at a time and embracing the process they opined that they are able to grow both personally and professionally, making the experience more fulfilling.

The affiliate nature of the trend-and-befriend pattern has inherent stress management benefits. Whether among men or women, social support is a powerful buffer against the ravages of high external stress in many contexts (e.g., recent contributions to huge literature include: Chang, Wang, Chang, Yu, & Lee, 2018; Coburn, Gonzales, Goggins, Poppendeck, & Kripalani, 2016; Faw, 2018; Fingerhut, 2018; Wiesmaierova et al., 2019).

Financial challenges are a constant concern, so budgeting is another essential strategy. Since my salary is limited, they have learned to carefully allocate my income to ensure that it covers their daily needs, such as transportation, food, and other basic expenses. They prioritize necessities and avoid unnecessary spending, allowing them to make the most out of what they learned. By being mindful of their financial situation, they believe they can reduce stress and focus more on my responsibilities as a teacher.

Additionally, they claimed that they make time for their family during their free time, which helps them maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Lastly, one of the most important strategies is cultivating a love for teaching. When you genuinely enjoy what you do, it becomes easier to overcome obstacles. By finding joy in their interactions with learners, I can stay motivated and committed. Teaching is not just a job; it's a passion. Loving one's work allows them to stay patient and positive, even on the most difficult days. These strategies—positivity, patience, budgeting, family time, and love for teaching—helped them faced the challenges of being a volunteer teacher and keep them focused on my long-term goals. Perhaps because the body is attuned to expect conditions that require psychological readiness to adapt to stressful conditions. It may come to expect a need for greater alertness, sensitivity to cues for danger, and physiological preparation for behavioural mobilization as well as the need to cope physiologically with injury. It is possible that these characteristics can be transmitted intergenerationally, either from in utero learning or epigenetic changes (Fogelman & Canli, 2019).

Proposed Policy Volunteer and ALS teachers

Bill no. 8525, An act creating plantita positions in the department of education for volunteers and ALS teachers. volunteer teachers with at least Five(5) years of continuous service in the public school system and appropriating funds. Be put into law by the law makers.

Meantime, that the bill is not yet effective, local government unit should standardize the benefits of the

IV. Conclusion

ALS and volunteer teachers sacrifice personally and financially to educate impoverished communities. Although they lack transportation and financial aid, these teachers show amazing dedication by walking long distances or living with family to be close to their learning venues. This resilience emphasizes their dedication to education accessibility and inclusivity and the critical need for Department of Education and local government help.

V. Recommendations

To enhance the Alternative Learning System (ALS), LGUs should prioritize the permanent employment of ALS mobile instructors in each barangay school.

LGUs must also allocate funding to provide salaries or allowances for the volunteer teachers who currently receive no compensation. This recognition of their service will motivate them and ensure the sustainability of the ALS program in underserved areas.

The Local Government Unit (LGU) and the Department of Education should work together to allocate funds to schools in remote areas for the procurement of learning related materials so they can connect to the internet more easily and stay informed about DepEd's activities.

The Department of Education should give preference to ALS and service-oriented volunteer teachers when employing Teacher 1.

The Department of Education (DepEd) should also ensure that barangay learning centers are provided with sufficient and updated learning materials. This includes textbooks, modules, and digital tools to meet the diverse needs of ALS students and support their academic success.

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