

The Last, The Least, And The Lost: Lived Experiences Of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Pioneers In Building Self-Efficacy

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Abstract — In Davao del Norte Division, nurturing the self-efficacy of Alternative Learning System (ALS) students is not just important; it is life-changing. This study explored the lived experiences of Alternative Learning System (ALS) in building self-efficacy by means of phenomenological approach among six participants using individualized interview and focused-group discussion. I crafted four major themes that best describe their experiences which were: surviving through struggles with the help of a strong support system, drawing strength from inner drive, empowerment through accessible learning environments and resilience in the face of adversity. In addition, the coping mechanisms of these were geared toward three major themes namely: drawing strength from relationships, reclaiming stability through rest and resilience rooted in purpose. Further, the insights of these participants geared towards to three major themes which is being motivated to keep up with the latest trend: empowerment through educational opportunity, bridging learning and livelihood through flexible education and nurturing safe spaces. Future research should explore how ALS affects students' lives in the long term, especially how building self-efficacy in ALS influences their future success. Studies should also look at how emotional safety and strong relationships contribute to students' belief in themselves.

Keywords — *Alternative Learning System (ALS), pioneers, building Self-efficacy, phenomenology, IDI, FGD, Davao del Norte*

I. Introduction

Nurturing self-efficacy among Alternative Learning System (ALS) students is vital and transformative. Many face barriers such as poverty, stigma, and emotional stress, which undermine their confidence and persistence. I have witnessed how learners with strong self-belief develop the resilience to overcome challenges and succeed. Research confirms that self-efficacy significantly influences academic achievement, personal growth, and career readiness (Pajares, 2020; Bandura, 2022). However, ALS students often struggle due to lack of role models, weak support systems, and ineffective teaching methods (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2021). These factors lower their motivation and academic performance. Global studies also show that classroom dynamics and exposure to diverse learning experiences, including abroad programs, boost both teacher and student self-efficacy (Fackler et al., 2021; Arghode et al., 2021). In countries like India and the Philippines, learners face additional hurdles like limited resources, digital divide, and socio-economic constraints, particularly in rural and indigenous communities (Rao & Karanth, 2017;

Panergayo & Mansujeto, 2022; Yapo et al., 2021). In the Davao Region, levels of self-efficacy vary by province. While Davao de Oro benefits from strong local support, areas like Davao Oriental and remote mining communities still struggle with isolation and livelihood pressures, affecting learners' motivation. To address these challenges, localized interventions—such as mentorship, hands-on learning, and community support—are essential. By fostering a supportive environment, stakeholders in Davao del Norte can empower ALS students to believe in themselves, rise above their circumstances, and achieve lifelong success.

Theoretical Lens

I rely on Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory in which he describes the self-efficacy theory. He introduced this in 1977. This theory elaborates on how cognitive, behavioral, and environmental components govern human functioning. The practice of pioneers with ALS was very vivid in demonstrating how mastering challenges leads to enhancing one's self-efficacy. When they had success while working on challenging tasks, witnessing their peers' accomplishments, and receiving positive feedback from mentors, self-confidence in their abilities emerged. These also pushed them into working and instilled in them the conviction to bring about success in whatever things they do. Moreover, the stress-reducing ability of the leaders to mitigate negative feelings also enables them to create more self-confidence because, as Bandura says, building trust originates from emotional strength. From all these successful experiences and supports, pioneers became even more resistant and better able to face whatever challenges could come their way in terms of education and life thereafter.

Another theory that can also explain self-efficacy is the Rotter's Locus of Control Theory in 1954 by Julian Rotter which explains how individual perceive control over events in their lives. This also refers to an individual's belief about the degree to which they have control over the outcomes of events in their lives. In the context of this study, it is seen as individuals are more likely to have high self-efficacy, as they believe their success is determined by their actions, skills, and efforts. A student with high level of self-efficacy might believe that their academic success depends on studying hard and managing their time efficiently.

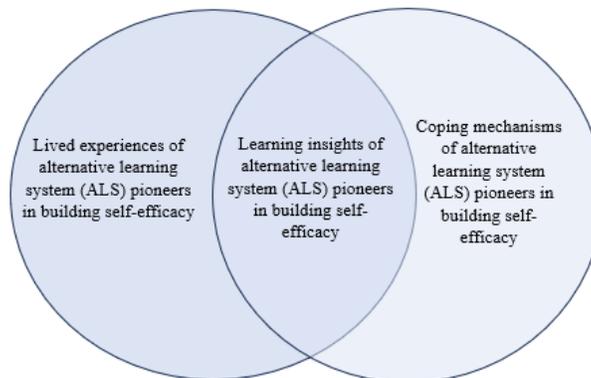


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

This study explored the lived experiences of pioneering ALS workers as they sought to foster learner self-efficacy. By delving into their personal struggles, successes, and encounters within the unique framework of the ALS program, it aimed to draw out broader implications for similar educational initiatives. The research sought to deconstruct the distinct perspectives of these pioneering ALS members to provide a comprehensive understanding of how deeply committed individuals offered support to "The Last, The Least, and The Lost"—those who struggled to thrive within the conventional educational system.

Self-Efficacy. Huang (2016) underscores that higher self-efficacy, or the belief in one's capabilities, is a key predictor of academic achievement, as it enhances student motivation and persistence, especially when faced with difficult tasks. This confidence drives students to engage more actively with learning materials and maintain effort despite setbacks. Wang et al. (2022) extend these findings by focusing on online learning environments, where students with higher self-efficacy tend to interact more consistently with digital content, participate in online discussions, and approach challenges with a more positive mindset. This proactive engagement, in turn, leads to better academic outcomes. These studies suggest that fostering self-efficacy in students by supporting their belief in their ability to succeed could significantly improve motivation, persistence, and academic performance, especially in virtual learning settings where self-direction is key to success.

A study by Zulueta et al. (2021) assessed ALS learners' acquisition of 21st-century skills and their sense of self-efficacy. The findings revealed a moderate acquisition of these skills and a high level of self-efficacy among participants. Notably, the learners' 21st-century skills and their self-efficacy, suggesting that as learners develop modern competencies, their confidence in their abilities also increases. The study recommends that ALS educators incorporate activities that enhance both skills sets and self-belief to foster holistic development.

Bermudo and Moleño (2021) focused on single mothers enrolled in the ALS program, exploring their interests, coping mechanisms, and learning achievements. The research highlighted that despite facing economic hardships and balancing parental responsibilities, these learners demonstrated a strong determination to complete their education. Effective coping strategies identified included time management, perseverance, and seeking support from peers and family. The study underscores the importance of tailored support systems within ALS to address the unique challenges faced by single mothers.

Ucab (2023) investigated the lived experiences of ALS completers, emphasizing the role of faith and self-confidence in overcoming educational challenges. Participants attributed their success to a strong belief in God, self-determination, and maintaining a positive mindset. The study suggests that fostering an environment that supports spiritual and personal growth can be beneficial for ALS learners.

In the context of the "new normal" brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, Alviso and Tacadena (2023) explored the experiences of ALS volunteer teachers in Davao de Oro. The study revealed that educators had to exert extra effort, manage mixed emotions, and navigate limited resources to continue delivering education. Coping mechanisms included a strong commitment to teaching, drawing inspiration from students' determination, and collaborating with others. These findings highlight the resilience and adaptability required by ALS educators to maintain educational quality during unprecedented times.

Collectively, these studies provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of ALS learners and educators, emphasizing the critical role of self-efficacy, effective coping mechanisms, and supportive learning environments in achieving educational success within the ALS framework.

Research indicates that ALS learners often face significant challenges, including economic hardships, limited resources, and balancing educational pursuits with familial responsibilities. A study by Ucab (2023) highlighted that many ALS learners, particularly mothers, demonstrated resilience by persevering in their studies despite these obstacles. Their faith in God and self-confidence were pivotal in overcoming difficulties, with participants emphasizing the importance of determination and a positive mindset in completing the ALS program. Similarly, So et al., (2022), elaborate on this concept by looking at how warmth and structure, two of the fundamental aspects of supportive parenting, explain the child's emotional well-being. The results imply that the emotional well-being of children is encouraged by supportive parenting regardless of the concrete parenting style being followed. Each of these studies has pointed to multiple effects of parent support on academic achievements as well as emotional development, showing that nurture and consistent involvement from parents played an important role in creating well-rounded students.

II. Methodology

The methodology of this study followed a phenomenological research design, as articulated by Creswell, focusing on capturing and describing the lived experiences of individuals who had undergone a significant phenomenon—in this case, the journey of ALS pioneers in building self-efficacy. This approach was appropriate for exploring the depth, complexity, and essence of participants' experiences in a way that honored their voices and perspectives.

The study employed in-depth, semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions as the primary data collection methods to allow participants to narrate their personal stories freely and reflectively. Through bracketing, the researcher set aside preconceived notions to engage fully with participants' accounts, ensuring the authenticity of the data. The collected narratives were analyzed using phenomenological reduction and thematic analysis, identifying core meanings and patterns that revealed the essence of the shared experience. This methodology supported the

study's aim of providing rich, textured insights into how marginalized learners developed self-belief and agency within the Alternative Learning System.

Philosophical Assumptions of the Study

Philosophical assumptions, while crucial, were fundamental to the qualitative nature of the research. These assumptions influenced the selection of methodology, methods, research questions, and anticipated outcomes (Mohammed et al., 2021). The ontological assumption, which addressed the nature of existence and its attributes, played a central role in the study. It focused on the perspectives of the students, exploring their views and discussing the methodologies and observations related to the lived experiences of ALS pioneers in developing self-efficacy. Additionally, the study reflected an epistemological assumption, as it gathered subjective evidence from the individual perspectives of the participants.

In terms of axiological inference, the researcher collected quotations from participants, which were substantiated by a thorough analysis to capture values, preconceptions, and the value-laden aspects of the field data. The researcher, aware that valuable information should not be dismissed during the research process, strived to avoid bias. Therefore, technique became the fourth aspect of the study, which involved explaining the procedures that took place throughout the research process. This chapter described the methodology that guided the study in reaching its conclusions.

Design and Procedure

In this study, the researcher employed a qualitative research design to explore how pioneers of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) attributed significance to particular social and human issues. The intent was to understand the social processes and mechanisms underlying human behavior through the investigation of non-numerical data. The researcher utilized two primary qualitative research methods: in-depth interviewing and Focus Group Discussion (FGD), as outlined by Nihan (2019).

The research was conducted in the natural settings of the participants, following an inductive approach that allowed for the emergence of themes. My interpretations, as the researcher, were inherently part of the analytical process. This approach was guided by a recognition of the diverse ways in which individuals and groups perceive reality, highlighting the complexity and richness of qualitative inquiry.

To delve deeply into the lived experiences of ALS pioneers, the researcher adopted a phenomenological methodology. The researcher also acknowledged that, fully detaching from own presuppositions is not good. Unlike positivist paradigms, this approach valued the conscious beliefs and subjective experiences both of participants and of myself as the researcher. The core objective was to understand participants' perspectives on the development of their self-efficacy.

III. Results and Discussion

Lived Experiences of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Pioneers in Building Self-efficacy

Figure 3 presents the lived experiences of alternative learning system pioneers in building self-efficacy. During the interview, I crafted four major themes that best describe their experiences which were: surviving through struggles with the help of a strong support system, drawing strength from inner drive, empowerment through accessible learning environments and resilience in the face of adversity.

This chapter explores the lived experiences of ALS pioneers as they build self-efficacy amidst multiple challenges. Using Creswell’s content analysis approach, four major themes emerged from participant interviews: surviving through struggles with a strong support system, drawing strength from inner drive, empowerment through accessible learning environments, and resilience in the face of adversity. To ensure confidentiality, participant responses were anonymized (P1 to P6). During the interview, I crafted four major themes that best describe their experiences

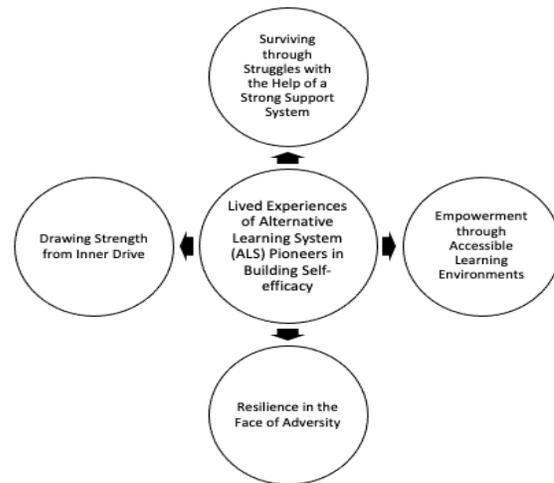


Figure 3. Emerging Themes of The Lived Experiences of Alternative Learning System Pioneers in Building Self-Efficacy

which were: surviving through struggles with the help of a strong support system, drawing strength from inner drive, empowerment through accessible learning environment and resilience in the face of adversity. To protect the identities of the participants and follow ethical guidelines, their responses were labeled with simple codes (P1 to P6), allowing the focus to remain on what they shared rather than who shared it. These codes are clearly shown in the interview transcripts found in the Appendices. As a teacher with meaningful experience, I listened to powerful stories filled with thoughts, emotions, and challenges that teachers encountered while teaching face-to-face. From these conversations, three key themes emerged.

Coping mechanisms of Pioneers on the Challenges in Building Self-efficacy

Figure 4 showed the coping mechanisms of pioneers on the challenges in building Self-efficacy. The coping mechanisms of these were geared toward three major themes namely: drawing strength from relationships, reclaiming stability through rest and resilience rooted in purpose.

For many ALS pioneers, wearing multiple hats and facing financial struggles is simply part of their daily life. They are not just teachers, they are also mentors, community leaders, and often the main providers for their families. Balancing all these responsibilities can be exhausting, especially when resources are stretched thin and support is limited. Yet, instead of backing down, they rise to the challenge. Every obstacle they push through strengthens their sense of purpose and belief in their own ability. Just showing up, day in and day out, is already a powerful act of resilience and self-efficacy.

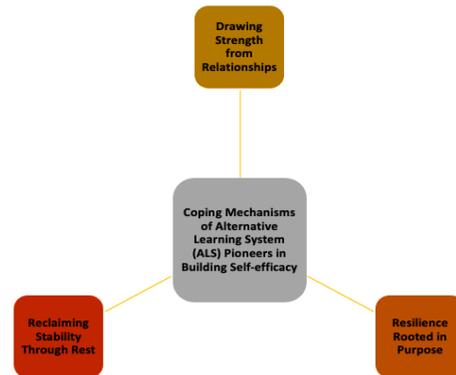


Figure 4. Emerging Themes of Coping Mechanisms on The Challenges on Pioneers in Building Self-Efficacy

As someone who had the privilege to listen to their stories, I saw firsthand the quiet strength and deep commitment these educators carry. Their eyes lit up when they talked about the lives they've touched, even as they shared their struggles. What stood out most was their unwavering pride in their mission despite all odds. One thing that clearly stood out in their journey was the role of family. The love, encouragement, and simple reminders from home gave them the strength to carry on. In moments of doubt or fatigue, it was often a supportive word or gesture from a loved one that kept them grounded. That emotional backing not only renewed their energy but also reminded them that they're never alone in their work. It's this balance of inner strength and outside support that fuels their drive to keep going for their learners, and for themselves.

As I listened to the stories of ALS pioneers, I felt a deep sense of admiration and empathy. Their self-efficacy wasn't innate it was built through hardship, hope, and the steady presence of support systems. What struck me most was how their strength came not just from within, but from the love and encouragement of family, friends, and mentors who believed in them when they struggled to believe in themselves. Hearing how they were inspired by others' success reminded me that sometimes, the confidence to keep going is sparked by someone else's story. Their resilience, shaped by community and shared hope, left a lasting impression on me as a researcher. Through their voices, it became clear that self-efficacy was not just an academic concept it was a lived, emotional reality. Their growth was woven from the threads of support, inspiration, and personal grit, making their journey not only educational but profoundly human. The coping

mechanisms of these were geared toward three major themes namely: drawing strength from relationships, reclaiming stability through rest and resilience rooted in purpose.

Insights drawn from the Alternative Learning System Pioneers on Building Self-efficacy

Figure 5 showed the educational insights that were drawn from the alternative learning system pioneers on building self-efficacy. The insights of these participants geared towards to three major themes which is being motivated to keep up with the latest trend: empowerment through educational opportunity, bridging learning and livelihood through flexible education and nurturing safe spaces.

During the discussion, as a teacher with sufficient service experience, I heard anecdotes, sentiments, feelings, and emotions regarding the educational insights of teachers during in-person interview of the participant.

The following three themes emerged from the result of the study.

In my journey as a researcher, I have come to deeply appreciate how personal experiences shape the development of self-efficacy, especially when one is navigating through seasons of doubt, emotional struggle, and adversity. I have seen both in the lives of participants and in my own that spirituality and family often become lifelines in these moments. For many, including myself, spiritual practices offer a grounding sense of meaning and peace, acting as a compass when direction feels lost. Similarly, the presence of family whether by blood or chosen provides not only practical support but also emotional reassurance that we are not alone in our battles. I have found that expressing emotions openly, especially in trusted relationships, can be incredibly healing; it creates a space where vulnerability is met with compassion, allowing inner strength to grow. These relational dynamics like honest conversations, shared burdens, quiet moments of support—are not just abstract concepts in my research; they are lived realities that continue to inspire my understanding of how self-efficacy is built and sustained through connection, faith, and emotional courage.

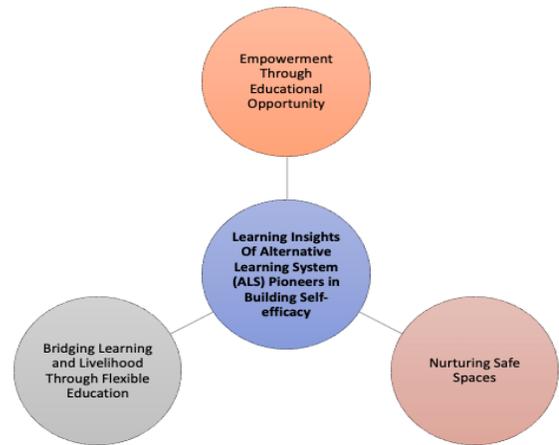


Figure 5. Emerging Themes on Learning Insights of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Pioneers in Building Self-Efficacy

IV. Conclusion

As a researcher, listening to the stories of Alternative Learning System (ALS) pioneers was a deeply humbling experience to each journey a quiet testament to courage, persistence, and hope. What stood out to me was how self-efficacy did not just emerge out of achievement; it was nurtured

in the everyday moments of struggle, support, and self-discovery. I saw how the presence of a strong support system, whether a parent, a teacher, or a peer and became a lifeline, offering not just guidance but genuine belief in their potential. Their inner drive moved me deeply; it was quiet but unwavering, shaped by dreams they refused to give up on. When they were placed in accessible, flexible learning environments that respected their pace and honored their stories, they did not just participate but they thrived. And even when life threw challenge after challenging their way, they showed up with resilience, proving that setbacks didn't define them. These four themes: support, inner drive, access, and resilience; are not just findings to me; they are reminders that education, when done with compassion and understanding, can transform lives from the inside out.

Further, listening to the lived experiences of Alternative Learning System (ALS) pioneers gave me a more personal and heartfelt understanding of what it truly means to cope, survive, and grow through life's challenges. Their stories revealed three deeply meaningful themes that shaped their ability to keep going: drawing strength from relationships, reclaiming stability through rest, and resilience rooted in purpose. I saw up close how relationships—whether with family, friends, or mentors; offered more than just help. They became sources of hope and reassurance, reminding learners that someone cared, that they mattered. I also began to see rest in a new light. It was not just about sleep or stepping away, but about making space to breathe, to reflect, and to find calm in the middle of chaos. These moments of stillness helped them regain their footing. What moved me the most was their strong sense of purpose. Even when things were difficult, they held on to their dreams with quiet strength. Their goals were not just ideas; they were lifelines, tied to healing and the belief that their future could be different. These experiences taught me that education must go beyond lessons and books. It must create spaces that care for the whole person, where relationships are nurtured, rest is valued, and purpose is kept alive.

Furthermore, the experiences shared by pioneers of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) offer valuable insights into how self-efficacy can be nurtured through empowerment, flexibility, and emotional safety. First, empowerment through educational opportunity highlights the transformative power of education, especially for those who have been marginalized by traditional systems. Many ALS learners described how access to education gave them a renewed sense of purpose and capability, proving that an inclusive approach to learning can truly change lives. Next, bridging learning and livelihood through flexible education emphasizes the importance of programs that connect academic progress with practical, real-world applications. Many ALS learners juggle education with family or work commitments, so when their studies align with skills that directly relate to their future careers, it fuels both their motivation and confidence. Finally, nurturing safe spaces emerges as a key foundation for learning. Pioneers consistently pointed out how essential it was to feel accepted and emotionally secure in their learning environments. When learners feel safe enough to make mistakes, express themselves, and be understood, their self-efficacy grows stronger.

Finally, the stories of ALS pioneers reflect Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. This theory explains how what we believe about ourselves, how we act, and the environment we're in all work together to shape who we become. Many of these learners have faced tough circumstances, but with the help of supportive mentors, safe learning spaces, and real-world challenges, they have slowly built confidence in their abilities. Their self-belief does not come from academics alone, it is also sparked by seeing others succeed, hearing words of encouragement, and recognizing their own progress.

Future Directions

For ALS Pioneers. ALS students should take an active role in their education by setting goals, asking for help when needed, and staying determined through challenges. Building self-efficacy means recognizing their own potential and celebrating small successes along the way. Students should embrace the idea that learning is a process, and setbacks are just chances to learn and grow. Finding mentors in both peers and teachers can help students stay motivated and confident in their abilities.

For ALS Teachers. ALS teachers should continue to adapt their teaching to support the wide range of student needs. Personalizing lessons to focus on practical skills, emotional support, and encouragement can help students feel more confident in their abilities. Teachers should keep learning new strategies to improve their teaching and to build students' self-confidence. A safe and supportive classroom where students feel free to express themselves will help them grow in both knowledge and self-efficacy.

For Future Researchers. Future research should explore how ALS affects students' lives in the long term, especially how building self-efficacy in ALS influences their future success. Studies should also look at how emotional safety and strong relationships contribute to students' belief in themselves. Additionally, research on using technology and new teaching methods in ALS could uncover effective ways to support self-efficacy. Lastly, future studies should investigate how different personal challenges, like socio-economic status or gender, shape a student's confidence, helping to create targeted interventions.

For DepEd Officials. Moving forward, DepEd should focus on making education more inclusive, especially for ALS learners. This means increasing access to resources, providing better teacher training, and using technology to meet diverse learning needs. It's also important to create systems that support students by offering regular feedback and monitoring their progress. Policies that take care of learners' emotional well-being, such as mental health support, should also be part of the plan to help build their confidence and success.

For School Administrators. School leaders should create an environment that empowers and includes all learners, with a focus on learner-centered approaches. This involves offering flexible schedules and course formats to meet the unique needs of ALS students. Administrators should also encourage collaboration between traditional and alternative education systems, so that

both can learn from each other. It's essential to provide teachers with professional development that focuses on strategies to boost students' confidence and emotional safety.

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