

Against All Odds: The Experiences of ALS Adult Learners in Pursuing Technical Vocational and Livelihood (TVL) Education

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Abstract: This study explored the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of Alternative Learning System (ALS) adult learners in pursuing Technical Vocational and Livelihood (TVL) education. It provided insights and recommendations aimed at strengthening support systems to empower ALS learners in achieving their educational and livelihood goals. Using a phenomenological research design, twelve (12) ALS adult learners from three different senior high schools in the Sto. Tomas East District were purposively selected as participants. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and analyzed using Thematic Content Analysis. The findings revealed that ALS adult learners faced several challenges in pursuing TVL education, including Role Conflict and Socio-Economic Constraints, Inadequate Learning Resources, and Financial Struggles. Despite these obstacles, learners demonstrated resilience through coping strategies such as Active Responsibility Management, Resourcefulness and Initiative, and Perseverance through Financial Planning. These strategies highlighted the learners' determination to balance family responsibilities, work demands, and academic requirements while continuing their education. From these experiences and coping mechanisms, two key insights emerged to strengthen ALS learners' resilience: providing sustainable financial support mechanisms and enhancing access to learning resources and facilities. The study underscored the importance of institutional and policy support in complementing learners' personal resilience, thereby promoting equitable access, sustained participation, and successful completion of TVL education among ALS adult learners.

Keywords: *Against All Odds, ALS Adult Learners, Experiences, Technical Vocational and Livelihood (TVL) Education.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Adult learners in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) show a strong sense of perseverance to finish Senior High School despite many personal and economic challenges. For many of these learners, the motivation is to improve their living conditions and have more stable prospects in the future. The study aims to shed light on how resilience is built in the school environment by analyzing students' real experiences and their coping with challenges, and to examine the implications of these findings for improving the country's educational programs.

Globally, Koutlas and Papanikitas (2025) state that adult learners have different features while pursuing their educational goals, and these could be influenced by a wide range of factors. Education is a fundamental human right. Everybody should

have an education. Governments also have to give basic education programs to their citizens (Parker, 2021). We need to focus more on adult education, especially for those who were denied this right in their youth. Adult education programs sponsored by the government offer people a way to continue their education later in life.

Additionally, Gambia, Keita, and Lee (2022) found in their study that adult learners faced challenges in accessing basic education programs include uncomfortable teaching-learning environment, unavailability of learning materials, personal duties, transportation, and basic requirements. Most adult learners engage in second chance education in order to exercise their right to participate in mainstream basic education, and to obtain the basic information and skills that are needed for employability.

Besides, Lukáč and Lukáčová (2024) point to the fact that one of the reasons for low-educated adults' limited engagement in Slovakia is the lack of second-chance education (SCE) principles in the vocational education and training of adult learners. Implementation of aspects of the second-chance education (SCE) concept in TVET would have enhanced participation and success of the most vulnerable groups of people with the lowest levels of education and socio-economic status.

Meanwhile, a study by Archery (2023) in the United States points to the need for tools that support learners' developmental needs, which will directly affect their ability to successfully manage their life situations. The success of the established programs can help adult learners improve their socioeconomic condition. Moreover, many adult learners worldwide want to complete vocational and livelihood programs with systematic support, despite the hurdles.

The senior high school program allows adult learners in the Philippines' Alternative Learning System to access Technical Vocational and Livelihood (TVL) Education. According to Dresser and Vacalares (2023), the Department of Education (DepEd) mandated the inclusion of the SHS level in the ALS Program through DepEd Order 13, Series 2019, in 2019. This gives the adult learners the chance to obtain practical and functional skills to be used for a job and livelihood.

Cochada and Abing (2025) found that the graduates of the Alternative Learning System who finished the Technical-Vocational Education and Training (TVET) program in Manila had more employment chances than those who were not trained. The current findings are comparable with the findings of a 2021 study by the Asian Development Bank which also found that participation in TVET programmes increases learners' chances of getting a job.

Another study of Hero (2022) in Bulacan reveals that ALS in Senior high School pupils had intermediate level of development of 21st-century abilities. Specifically, ALS SHS learners in a stand-alone public senior high school have a moderate level of skills in some areas such as collaboration skills, local and global connections, use of technology in learning, critical thinking, self-direction skills, creativity and creation skills, and communication skills. This means that in the pursuit of TVL education would be a challenge to ALS adult learners with 21st century abilities at modest level.

In the regional spectrum, Gempesaw and Escote (2024), in Davao de Oro, note that the common problems that adult learners face are related to the financial aspects, time management skills, and computer-related skills as they are the product of the old curriculum. Most of them have difficulty integrating modern technology into the current technological landscape. In addition to their burden, there is the financial aspect: since most of them are full-time students, they are required to have an extra income to cover their daily expenses.

The ALS adult learners who are studying Senior High School in the context Santo Tomas East District, Division of Davao del Norte, face several problems. These problems are often defined by their personal, social and economic situations, as many learners manage work, family and school duties. Moreover, the availability of resources, learning facilities, and instructional assistance may also affect their involvement and engagement in the program. The complex reality of ALS adult learners in their quest for education.

As an ALS teacher, I have witnessed the great drive of adult learners to acquire skills through the Technical Vocational and Livelihood (TVL) curriculum. Many learners, though with different problems, are nonetheless engaged in gaining abilities such as cuisine, Agricultural Crops Production (ACP) and Shielded Metal Arc Welding (SMAW). Life experiences, maturity and responsibilities as married individuals seem to affect their learning commitment. In many cases, they are motivated by the desire to complete their education, get jobs and improve their livelihoods.

While these factors are present, there is no research that specifically explores the lived experiences and coping techniques of ALS adult learners in this local environment. Research on TVL education in general or formal senior high school have been conducted, but there are not many researches that focus on ALS adult learners who have different problems in their situations and learning environment. This gap underlines the need for a more in-depth examination into their experiences to give meaningful insights that could drive policies, programs and support systems to improve their access, participation and success in TVL education.

II. METHOD

This qualitative study was done using a phenomenological research design, which is a type of naturalistic inquiry as expounded by Creswell (1998). Phenomenology is focused on understanding the lived experiences of participants and the meaning they ascribe to their lived experiences. Phenomenology, unlike other qualitative approaches, is primarily concerned with the description and analysis of individuals' perceptions through systematic coding and thematic interpretation to arrive at the essence of a phenomenon. As Lester (1999) puts it, phenomenological inquiry is concerned with personal experiences and points of view; hence, it is suitable in exploring the experiences and coping mechanism of Alternative Learning System (ALS) adult learners taking Technical Vocational and Livelihood (TVL) education.

Moreover, in this phenomenological inquiry, participants are selected for their lived experience richness and applicability rather than for statistical representativeness. The present study purposively selected Adult Learners of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) with direct experience in pursuing Technical-Vocational and Livelihood (TVL) education. A small sample

purposively selected allows for better understanding of these realities. Hence, twelve (12) ALS adult learners enrolled in the Technical Vocational and Livelihood (TVL) track from selected senior high schools in the Santo Tomas East District, Division of Davao del Norte were selected. The participants of this study were aged from 19 to 33 years old and were married which means that the participants do not have the ability to take on responsibilities that affect their educational experiences.

Meanwhile, using open-ended questions as instrument, the study allowed the participants to share their views and life experiences and probing questions were used to clarify the answers and get deeper insights. The interview guide was informed by the study questions and the relevant literature and theoretical frameworks on adult learning and resilience. The instrument was validated by the thesis advisor and research experts.

Further, on the data analysis, the initial phase involved the organization and preparation of the data obtained from in-depth interviews. The audio-recorded responses were transcribed word-for-word, and the researcher immersed in the data through repeated reading to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' lived experiences. This familiarization process enabled the identification of initial ideas and patterns relevant to the study. First-cycle coding was then conducted, wherein meaningful segments of data were labeled and categorized. During this stage, the constant comparative method was applied to systematically compare responses across participants, allowing the refinement of codes and identification of emerging patterns (Glaser, 2008).

Following the initial coding, a second round of coding was undertaken to examine the underlying meanings, relationships, and explanations behind the participants' experiences. Similar codes were grouped into broader categories or themes through axial or hierarchical coding, which helped organize the data into meaningful conceptual clusters (Benaquisto, 2008). This process aimed to understand the how and why of the experiences and coping mechanisms of adult learners with ALS. Through critical and interpretive analysis, significant themes were identified, representing the participants' challenges, coping strategies, and resilience, which ultimately formed the basis for the study's findings and conclusions.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Exploring on the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of Alternative Learning System (ALS) adult learners in pursuing Technical Vocational and Livelihood (TVL) education, the following themes, drawn from their narratives of participants, highlighting the Lived Experiences of ALS Adult Learners in Pursuing TVL Education.

A. Role Conflict and Socio-Economic Constraints

Role Conflict and Socio-Economic Constraints is the main theme for research question number one which states that ALS adult learners who are pursuing TVE education are continuously performing various roles as parents, spouses, workers and students which lead to competing demands on their time and energy. The several roles they are performing often lead to difficulty in scheduling their time as they struggle to meet family obligations, work expectations and academic requirements at the same time. As ALS adult learners, they are facing role conflict and socio-economic limitations in their journey for TVL education. This is consistent with literature showing ALS learners are often faced with conflicting duties, time-constraints and financial limitations (Catyong, et.al, 2023).

➤ *Struggling with Financial Limitations*

The sub-theme struggling with financial limitations shows that economic hardship is a key barrier to the continuation of education. Participants expressed that "lack of money" prevents them from continuing their schooling particularly those with children and home obligations. These results are consistent with the study by Catyon, et.al (2023) that financial constraints were the most common obstacle among ALS learners.

➤ *Juggling Family, Work, and Studies*

The sub-theme juggling family, works and studies represents the lived experiences of the participants in handling numerous commitments at the same time. Such experiences are congruent with Catyong, et.al (2023) who underlined that ALS learners are faced with competing duties and time restrictions. Furthermore, Ucab and Luzano (2023) characterized ALS as a flexible system for learners with different living circumstances; yet, these data show that flexibility does not ease the burden of role conflict. Participants' narratives reveal that ALS provides access.

➤ *Feeling Exhausted and Discouraged*

The sub-theme feeling exhausted and discouraged illustrates the mental and physical burden that adult learners with ALS carry. These emotional experiences are backed up by Archey (2023) who quoted Yarborough and Welch (2020) that adult learners often experience anxiety and psychological duress due to academic and life pressures.

B. Inadequate Learning Resources

Another main theme is Inadequate Learning Resources. This became one of the main themes emerged in the study because the participants said that they have limited access to instructional materials, tools, equipment, and permanent learning spaces for effective TVL training. The lack of these things affected their hands-on practice and practice of skills and added financial and logistical burdens that affected their overall learning experience in the ALS program. ALS learners are not always lucky to have dedicated and well-resourced classrooms to promote effective learning.

➤ *Lack of Adequate Learning Spaces*

This sub-theme illustrates that there is no particular classroom for ALS learners and some mentioned that learning environments were not presentable or suitable for their needs. Unfortunately, ALS learners are not always lucky to have dedicated and well-resourced classrooms to promote effective learning. This is in accordance with the findings of Alvarez (2024) that although the ALS program is flexible and inclusive, it often uses makeshift or shared learning spaces that may not be the optimum environment for adult learners. The lack of specialized classrooms generates a sense of instability and may affect learners' focus and participation, especially in TVL courses where experiential learning is crucial.

➤ *Insufficient Equipment and Instructional Materials*

The second sub-theme, Insufficient Equipment and Instructional Materials, highlights that TVL adult learners are having difficulty in getting the necessary equipment, resources and materials for their TVL education. The theme can be referred to in the study of Mendoza et al. (2023), on how schools with ALS learners often lack the necessary equipment for practical activities, and in the study by De La Vega and Gilbas (2024), which reported that limited access to materials negatively affects learners' academic performance and skills development.

Meanwhile, the second research question focuses on the Coping Mechanisms of ALS Adult Learners' on the Challenges of Pursuing TVL Education. Below are the main themes and their respective sub-themes:

C. *Active Responsibility Management*

The theme Active Responsibility Management highlights how ALS adult learners handle the different duties of learning TVL while balancing family, work, and self- This coping method directly tackles the role conflict and time management problems that ALS learners confront. Adult learners in the Alternative Learning System have several problems such as family, employment, and financial needs that require a high level of self-motivation and strategic planning (Archey, 2023; Ucab & Luzano, 2023).

➤ *Effective Time Management*

Adult learners used deliberate tactics to balance time between school, work, and family duties. This is similar to the findings of Mendoza et al. (2023) who showed that ALS students are good at time management skills to balance their academic and personal responsibilities. The development of time management skills can help learners to manage their academic responsibilities vis-à-vis the socio-economic constraints faced by ALS adult learners. This suggests that time management is not a mere coping skill but a basic skill that enables ALS adult learners to continue with their education despite any circumstance.

➤ *Task Prioritization*

ALS adult learners highlighted that setting priorities, goals and organizing activities to meet the demands of education, family and employment. These comments show that prioritizing tasks is a coping strategy that enables learners to attend to what is most essential. This theme is further supported by the study of Archey (2023) who found adult learners utilize structured ways to deal with competing responsibilities.

➤ *Managing Multiple Roles*

The sub-theme Managing Multiple Roles stresses the simultaneous management of personal, family and academic responsibilities by ALS learners. This demonstrates the learners' capability to juggle multiple roles in a structured and goal-oriented manner. This is consistent with Ucab and Luzano (2023) who found that ALS adult learners are highly self-motivated and can adjust their routines to fit personal and educational requirements. Managing multiple roles thus emerges as a key coping strategy that enables learners to persist in achieving their TVL education goals despite life's challenges.

D. *Resourcefulness and Initiative*

The second main theme addresses the problem of the unavailability of learning materials in learners' experiences and provides a direct answer. It shows how adult learners with ALS try to pursue their education despite a lack of materials, facilities, and institutional support. This theme underscores their sense of responsibility, ingenuity, and dedication to maintaining their learning progress despite limited resources. The participants displayed an extraordinary ability to find solutions and take action to continue their learning despite the current financial constraints, lack of resources and other challenges.

➤ *Supplementing Materials*

Under the sub-theme Supplementing Materials, participants indicated that they took practical measures to obtain or supply missing learning materials apart from what the ALS program provided. For instance, P2 said, "When there are no materials to use, I try to provide them myself so I can stay focused on my learning activities," while P3 elaborated, "The challenges I have faced in the ALS learning environment, especially in Cookery, are the added expenses as we have to buy some of the ingredients because not everything is provided by the school for free." These statements support the findings of Mendoza et al. (2023) and Catyong, Luchavez, & Garciano (2023) that adult learners often lack educational resources but pursue their education through their motivation and innovative solutions.

➤ *Adapting to Situations*

This sub-theme discloses the learners' flexibility in adjusting their schedules, strategies, and approaches to maximize learning despite constraints. Participants show that pragmatic adjustments are made to balance time management with skill acquisition. These ideas can be connected with the

existing literature from Bok (2021) and Kumpa, Canda & Rodriguez (2024), which state that adult learners engage in self-directed learning and educational responsibilities by employing flexible strategies. These adaptations not only support the continuous learning but also reveal the proactive stance of the ALS adult learners in their journey through the complexities of TVL education

E. Perseverance through Financial Planning.

This main theme emerges as a direct response to the financial constraints faced by ALS learners, who remain determined to continue their TVL education despite these hardships. This highlights the theme of Perseverance and Practical Financial Planning. The theme reveals the coping mechanisms of the adult learners in the pursuit of their educational endeavor in the face of economic hardships highlighting the need for resilience, goal-setting and effective management of financial resources to break through learning barriers.

➤ *Proper Resource Allocation*

The theme highlights the purposeful efforts of the learners in handling the limited money resources for their academics and home necessities. The participants shared their experiences budgeting their household income, prioritizing their spending and finding strategies to meet their school-related expenses such as purchasing materials or paying for TVL courses. These findings are in congruent with the study of Catyon, Luchavez & Garciano (2023); De La Vega & Gilbas, (2024) that report that financial restrictions are a key determinant of adult learners' involvement and academic achievement in ALS programs.

➤ *Strong Determination*

The sub-theme Strong Determination is a testimony of the exemplary perseverance of the learners to seek education despite economic constraints. Participants stated that their motivation is driven by their responsibilities to themselves, their family, and personal goals. This is in line with the study from Archey (2023); Ucab & Luzano (2023) that depicts adult ALS learners as highly self-motivated and resilient, motivated by the urge to improve their life situations and acquire skills to get a job. The learners' resolve and meticulous financial planning show a proactive approach to overcoming economic hurdles. This is related to the idea that persistence in education is a cognitive and behavioral activity.

Furthermore, on the third research question focusing on the Policy Framework and Recommendations to Support ALS Learners' Resilience in Education, the following themes emerged:

F. Provide Sustainable Financial Support Mechanisms

The theme demonstrates how ALS learners can enhance their resilience in education when the institutional systems are responsive to them. Despite the participants persisting despite low incomes, the study shows that resilience is more sustainable

with structured financial mechanisms. Also, the support from the school creates the capacity for the learner to cope with different stressors that impact their educational journey that may increase their risk of dropping out (Kumpa, Canda, and Rodriguez, 2024).

So, it is recommended to provide sustainable financial support mechanisms is based not only on the participants' struggles and coping strategies but is also directly aligned with their policy proposals and supported by existing literature. It is a practical, system-level response to the realities ALS adult learners face as they pursue TVL education. Therefore, it is recommended that DepEd and local government units implement sustainable funding programs, including free or subsidized NC II certification and financial assistance for ALS learners.

G. Enhance Access to Learning Resources and Facilities

This recommendation means that schools and decision-makers must improve access to learning resources and facilities like stable, adequate, and appropriate physical spaces, tools and instructional materials that are favorable for successful teaching and hands-on skills training in the TVL strand. This subject emphasizes that great education is not only about the delivery of the curriculum, but also about the provision of permanent classrooms, working equipment, and suitable learning materials that are needed for the development of competencies. This theme as a finding from the lived experiences of ALS adult learners is in accordance with the realization that meaningful learning is achieved when the educational environment is structured and supplied with resources for the acquisition of skills.

The results of the study support the concept that effectiveness of alternative learning programs, particularly in skills-based courses, is dependent on the availability of instructional resources and facilities (Catyong et al., 2023). Similarly, a study conducted by Archey (2023) indicated that support from schools such as sufficient materials and facilities can improve students' completion rate. With that, the important role of functional and accessible learning environments is emphasized. Hence, this issue, "Enhance Access to Learning Resources and Facilities" is a manifestation of the problems faced by the participants and a research-based recommendation to improve the general quality, equity and sustainability of ALS TVL education. This means that schools need to think about providing instructional materials and facilities for the successful implementation of TVL education.

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