

Academic Resilience and Preparedness of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Students for Tertiary Education

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Abstract. This study explored the academic resilience and college preparedness of senior high school students in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) to understand their transition challenges to tertiary education. Despite the growing importance of ALS as a second-chance education program, limited research has explored how resilient and prepared these learners are for tertiary education. The study employed a descriptive research design using total population sampling. All 29 ALS Senior High School students were included as participants, as they represented the entire enrolled population during the study. Data were gathered through a validated survey questionnaire measuring demographic profile, academic resilience, and preparedness, and analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and weighted means. Results show that most learners are non-traditional students: 83% are aged 21–40, predominantly female (90%), and from low-income families (55% earn less than ₱5,000 monthly). Many aspire to pursue tertiary education, particularly in Education (41%) and Criminology (24%). Findings further indicate a moderate to high level of academic resilience (overall mean = 3.68), with strengths in confidence, intuition, and emotional regulation, but weaknesses in crisis management and conflict resolution. Similarly, learners reported a moderate level of preparedness for college (overall mean = 3.51), demonstrating readiness in course selection, computer literacy, and social interaction, but uncertainty in academic skills, study habits, financial readiness, and admission requirements. The study concludes that ALS provides learners with essential resilience and soft skills but requires strengthened support in academic bridging, financial assistance, and socio-emotional development. These findings underscore the importance of enhancing ALS pedagogy, guidance services, and institutional linkages to facilitate smoother transitions to tertiary education for marginalized learners.

Keywords: Academic resilience; Alternative learning system; (ALS), Preparedness; Tertiary education

1.0 Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and a powerful driver of social and economic mobility. It equips individuals with the knowledge and skills needed for personal development, gainful employment, and active participation in society. However, for many learners, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, access to traditional formal schooling remains limited due to socio-economic, geographic, or personal barriers. To address this persistent challenge, the Philippine government institutionalized the Alternative Learning System (ALS), a non-formal and flexible education program designed to provide out-of-school youth and adults with second-chance opportunities to pursue and complete basic education. Through modular, context-based learning approaches, ALS learners can obtain certificates equivalent to formal elementary or secondary education, thereby expanding pathways to further education and improving their prospects for decent employment (Antipuesto et al., 2023; Vindigni, 2024).

The significance of ALS extends beyond national priorities, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which aims to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. ALS provides a vital mechanism for fostering lifelong learning, social inclusion, and reducing educational inequality. Studies have highlighted that ALS attracts learners from disadvantaged communities, many of whom face economic hardships, social stigma, or limited access to educational resources (World Bank Group, 2018; Pascual et al., 2022). While the program has successfully opened doors for learners to pursue vocational training or higher education, evidence suggests that ALS graduates often encounter greater difficulties transitioning to tertiary education than their peers from the formal school system (Antipuesto et al., 2023).

Despite the growing recognition of ALS as a transformative program, research has yet to adequately capture the lived realities of ALS Senior High School graduates, particularly in their readiness and resilience as they enter college. Igarashi (2018) previously identified systemic gaps in ALS implementation, including low participation and pass rates, limited skills training, insufficient funding, and heterogeneous learner backgrounds. More recent scholarship echoes these concerns, noting that ALS students frequently struggle with foundational academic competencies, irregular attendance, and financial challenges that hinder their educational progression (Abregoso & Dioso, 2024). Furthermore, Mortiz et al. (2023) emphasize the need for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to establish readiness assessments and bridging programs to address the cognitive and social preparedness gaps among students entering college, a recommendation particularly relevant for ALS graduates.

These studies underscore the critical importance of examining the extent to which ALS prepares its learners not only to complete secondary education but also to thrive in tertiary institutions. However, the literature remains limited in its focus on the academic resilience and preparedness of ALS Senior High School graduates, especially in the Philippine context. This lack of focused research creates a pressing gap in understanding the challenges and coping strategies of ALS learners as they navigate the transition to higher education.

Thus, this study seeks to investigate the academic resilience and preparedness of ALS Senior High School students for tertiary education. By exploring their experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms, this research aims to identify factors that either facilitate or hinder their successful transition into college. In doing so, it intends to provide evidence-based insights for educators, policymakers, and higher education institutions to strengthen support systems for ALS graduates, thereby advancing the goal of inclusive and equitable education under SDG 4.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive research design to assess the academic resilience and preparedness of ALS Senior High School students for tertiary education. This design is appropriate because it allows the researcher to describe students' levels of academic readiness systematically, the challenges they face, and the role of resilience in their transition to higher education.

2.2 Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants of this study are all 29 students enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Senior High School program. Given the limited number of enrolled students, the researcher opted to include the entire population of ALS Senior High School students rather than selecting a sample. This approach, known as total population sampling, ensures that all 29 eligible respondents are included in the study, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of their academic resilience and preparedness for tertiary education. By considering all students in the ALS Senior High School program, the study aims to capture a more accurate representation of their experiences, challenges, and readiness for higher education.

2.3 Research Instrument

The study employed a validated survey questionnaire as the primary data-gathering tool. The instrument covered three parts: demographic profile, level of academic resilience, and level of preparedness. Expert validation yielded a score of 4.3, indicating that the questionnaire was very valid. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which produced a value of 0.86, signifying good internal consistency. These results confirm that the instrument was both valid and reliable for the study.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection process involves distributing survey questionnaires to all ALS Senior High School students currently enrolled in the program. Due to the relatively small number of respondents, a total population sampling approach is employed to ensure that all eligible students are included in the study. The surveys are administered in person to facilitate convenience and clarity for the participants. Prior to data collection, the researcher prepares and sends a formal letter of request for approval to the Schools Division Superintendent and the Education Program Specialist for ALS. The study proceeds only after securing the necessary approvals from these key officials. Additionally, informed consent is obtained from all participants to uphold ethical research standards and ensure that participation is voluntary, confidential, and based on a clear understanding of the study's purpose.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data is analyzed using quantitative methods. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores are used to summarize responses on academic preparedness and resilience. The results are then interpreted to provide insights into the factors that influence students' readiness for tertiary education.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The study strictly followed ethical principles. The persons involved were provided with a thorough document outlining the study's specific approach and objectives. The researchers needed to ensure that the volunteers fully understood the study's goals and relevance, and that they had the option to choose whether to participate.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Profile of the ALS Senior High Students

The demographic profile of ALS senior high school students shows that most learners are older than the typical senior high school age, with the largest group aged 26-30. A significant majority are female (90%), and more than half come from low-income families earning less than ₱5,000 monthly. Despite these challenges, many students aspire to pursue tertiary education, particularly in Education, Criminology, and Business. These findings highlight the resilience of ALS learners and the importance of targeted support to address their diverse needs.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the ALS Senior High Students

Variable	Description	f	%
Age	17-20	5	17
	21-25	7	24
	26-30	11	38
	31-40	6	21
Sex	Female	26	90
	Male	3	10
Family Income	Less than 5,000	16	55
	6,000 – 10,000	9	31
	11,000 – 15,000	4	14
College Program for Future Enrollment	Education	12	41
	Criminology	7	24
	Business	5	17
	Nursing	3	10
	Agriculture	2	7

The demographic profile of Alternative Learning System (ALS) senior high school students offers significant insights into the unique needs and aspirations of this learner population. In terms of age distribution, the majority of the students fall outside the typical senior high school age range. Only 17% are between 17 and 20 years old, while a notable 83% are between 21 and 40, with the largest group (38%) falling in the 26–30 age bracket. This pattern highlights the non-linear educational trajectories of ALS learners, many of whom may have discontinued their formal education due to socio-economic constraints, early employment, or familial responsibilities. The age diversity suggests a need for a mature-learner-centered approach to teaching, flexible scheduling, and psychosocial support systems. Cagang (2024) affirms that adult learners in ALS often return with renewed motivation driven by employment goals or their roles as parents, thus requiring educational environments that are accommodating and inclusive of their life experiences.

In terms of sex, a significant gender imbalance is evident, with 90% of students being female and only 10% male. This disparity may reflect greater female availability or motivation to re-engage with formal education, potentially influenced by changing family dynamics or the desire to improve their socio-economic status. It also suggests that males may face unique barriers, such as societal expectations to prioritize income-generating work over education. Mahinay, Naranjo, Faciol, and Cena (2024) note that women's participation in ALS is often delayed by early marriage or childcare responsibilities. This gender trend calls for the implementation of gender-sensitive interventions and for further investigation into the challenges preventing male engagement in ALS programs.

Economically, the majority of ALS students come from low-income families: 55% earn less than ₱5,000 per month, and 86% earn less than ₱10,000 per month. These figures highlight the learners' financial vulnerability and the role of ALS as a vital platform for educational equity. Students in such economic conditions are likely to encounter additional barriers to learning, including limited access to materials, transportation difficulties, and food insecurity. Therefore, financial assistance, resource provision, and livelihood integration within the ALS framework are essential. The World Bank (2021) stresses that poverty remains one of the most significant impediments to educational access in the Philippines, and that ALS offers a necessary second-chance pathway. Regarding educational aspirations, the majority of students expressed interest in pursuing tertiary education, with 41% aiming to enroll in Education, followed by Criminology (24%), Business (17%), Nursing (10%), and Agriculture (7%). This trend suggests that many ALS students envision careers in sectors that offer stability and opportunities for community service. The preference for Education may indicate a desire to inspire others through teaching, possibly shaped by positive experiences with ALS teachers. Cagang (2024) observed that ALS graduates often choose professions perceived as stable and respected within their communities, such as teaching and law enforcement. These aspirations highlight the importance of strong career guidance and support services that can connect ALS learners with scholarship opportunities, vocational training, and clear pathways to higher education.

Overall, the profile of ALS senior high school students illustrates their resilience and commitment to transforming their lives through education despite considerable challenges. The data call for targeted, inclusive policy interventions that address age diversity, gender disparities, economic constraints, and future career pathways. Strengthening ALS with comprehensive support systems will not only enhance learner outcomes but also contribute significantly to inclusive national development.

3.2 Level of Academic Resilience

Table 2 shows that ALS senior high school students had a moderate to high level of academic resilience, with an overall weighted mean of 3.68 ("Agree"). They demonstrated strengths in confidence, emotional stability, and intuition but showed uncertainty in managing crises, solving problems immediately, and handling conflict, indicating areas where additional support is needed.

Table 2. *Level of Academic Resilience Among ALS Senior High School Students*

Variables	WX	Descriptive Interpretation
1. In a difficult spot, I turn at once to what can be done to put things right.	3.19	Neutral/Uncertain
2. I influence where I can, rather than worrying about what I cannot influence.	3.62	Agree
3. I do not take criticism personally.	4.42	Strongly agree
4. I generally manage to keep things in perspective.	3.53	Agree
5. I am calm in a crisis.	2.96	Neutral/Uncertain
6. I am good at solving problems.	3.78	Agree
7. I would not describe myself as an anxious person.	4.48	Strongly agree
8. I do not tend to avoid conflict.	3.09	Neutral/Uncertain
9. I try to control events rather than being a victim of circumstances.	4.02	Agree
10. I trust my intuition.	4.31	Strongly agree
11. I manage my stress levels well.	3.56	Agree
12. I feel confident and secure in my position.	3.20	Neutral/Uncertain
Total	3.68	Agree

The data on academic resilience among Alternative Learning System (ALS) senior high school students, presented in Table 2, provide insight into how these learners cope with academic challenges, emotional stress, and problem-solving in their educational journey. The overall weighted mean (WX) score of 3.68, with a descriptive interpretation of "Agree," indicates that ALS students generally demonstrate a moderate to high level of academic resilience. This suggests that despite the barriers they face—such as financial difficulties, delayed schooling, and familial responsibilities—they possess the capacity to adapt, recover, and persevere in the face of adversity.

A closer look at individual indicators reveals strengths and areas for growth. The highest-rated statements include “I would not describe myself as an anxious person” (WX = 4.48), “I do not take criticism personally” (WX = 4.42), and “I trust my intuition” (WX = 4.31)—all of which fall under the “Strongly Agree” category. These suggest that ALS learners possess a healthy level of emotional regulation, self-confidence, and inner guidance—essential traits for bouncing back from setbacks and maintaining focus on goals. According to Martin and Marsh (2006), such psychological traits are core components of academic resilience and are predictive of better academic outcomes and overall well-being.

Statements such as “I influence where I can, rather than worrying about what I cannot influence” (WX = 3.62) and “I try to control events rather than being a victim of circumstances” (WX = 4.02) indicate a proactive attitude and an internal locus of control. These traits reflect an empowered mindset, essential for learners navigating irregular educational paths. Bernard (2004) emphasized that the internal locus of control is a vital protective factor in resilience, enabling learners to take charge of their academic development.

However, specific indicators reflect uncertainty or areas needing support. These include “In a difficult spot, I turn at once to what can be done to put things right” (WX = 3.19), “I am calm in a crisis” (WX = 2.96), and “I do not tend to avoid conflict” (WX = 3.09). These responses fall within the “Neutral/Uncertain” range, suggesting that while ALS students show emotional strength in general, they may struggle with immediate problem-solving under pressure, emotional stability during crises, and confronting interpersonal conflicts. These areas may stem from their socio-emotional backgrounds, trauma experiences, or the stresses associated with balancing school and life responsibilities. According to Lindgren (2015), while resilience is a dynamic and developable quality, it can be hindered by chronic stress and lack of support systems. This data implies that while ALS learners display promising resilience traits, they would benefit from targeted interventions to strengthen their coping mechanisms in high-pressure situations.

3.3 Level of Preparedness

Table 3 shows that ALS senior high school students were moderately prepared for college, with an overall weighted mean of 3.51 (“Agree”). They were confident in their course selection, computer skills, and social interaction. However, they showed uncertainty about admission policies, financial readiness, and academic skills, indicating a need for additional support in these areas.

Table 3. *Level of Preparedness of ALS Senior High School Students*

Variables	WX	Descriptive Interpretation
1. I am prepared for respective college admission policies.	3.36	Neutral/Uncertain
2. I am prepared to determine the course that suits my interests and abilities.	4.51	Strongly Agree
3. I am prepared for the financial demands of college life.	3.08	Neutral/Uncertain
4. I am prepared in terms of the academic skills, knowledge, and capabilities demanded by college studies.	3.17	Neutral/Uncertain
5. I am prepared in terms of the level of social independence.	3.62	Agree
6. I am prepared in terms of computer literacy and the skills required for college studies.	4.12	Agree
7. I am prepared in terms of my personal learning strategies and habits.	3.43	Agree
8. My study and thinking skills are enough for me to thrive in college life.	2.71	Neutral/Uncertain
9. I am prepared to interact with new people I will meet during college.	4.03	Agree
10. I am prepared to meet the program's required competencies.	3.11	Neutral/Uncertain
Total	3.51	Agree

The data in Table 3 presents the level of preparedness among Alternative Learning System (ALS) senior high school students as they anticipate transitioning to college. The overall weighted mean (WX) of 3.51, interpreted as “Agree,” indicates that the students generally perceive themselves as moderately prepared for college. However, a deeper analysis of the individual items reveals notable variations in preparedness dimensions, with specific strengths and areas requiring further intervention.

The highest-rated indicator is “I am prepared about my ability to determine the course that suits my interests and abilities” with a WX of 4.51 (Strongly Agree). This suggests that students are confident in making career and academic choices that align with their personal goals and competencies. Similarly, students express confidence in

their computer literacy skills (WX = 4.12) and in their ability to interact with new people (WX = 4.03), both of which are critical for adapting to the college environment. These results highlight the effectiveness of ALS in fostering self-awareness, digital readiness, and social adaptability — traits that are increasingly essential in higher education. According to Lombardi, A. Et al. (2007), self-awareness in career decision-making and interpersonal adaptability are key components of college readiness and positively influence student retention and academic success.

Other areas where students reported relatively strong preparedness include personal learning strategies and habits (WX = 3.43) and social independence (WX = 3.62), suggesting that learners feel capable of managing their time, responsibilities, and social interactions independently. These findings are consistent with the nature of ALS, which often demands a high degree of self-direction and personal accountability from learners, many of whom balance education with work or family obligations.

However, several indicators reflect neutral or uncertain levels of preparedness, revealing significant gaps. These include preparedness for college admission policies (WX = 3.36), financial demands of college life (WX = 3.08), academic skills and knowledge (WX = 3.17), study and thinking skills (WX = 2.71), and meeting the competence required by the chosen program (WX = 3.11). These results suggest that while ALS students may be psychologically and socially ready, they lack sufficient support and exposure to the practical, academic, and financial realities of college.

The lowest score, study and thinking skills (WX = 2.71), is particularly concerning, as it suggests that students do not feel adequately equipped with the cognitive tools — such as critical thinking, analytical writing, and disciplined study habits — needed for academic success in college. This is supported by Lombardi, Seburn, and Conley (2012), who noted that non-traditional learners often experience challenges transitioning to more structured academic environments if foundational skills are not fully developed.

The uncertain financial preparedness rating points to economic barriers that could hinder students' ability to pursue or sustain higher education. Given that most ALS students come from low-income families (as revealed in the earlier demographic data), this highlights the urgent need for scholarship programs, financial literacy training, and government support. The Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2020) has emphasized that financial insecurity remains a significant hurdle for many Filipino students transitioning from secondary to tertiary education, especially for those in non-traditional systems like ALS.

The implication of these findings is twofold. First, while ALS is effective in developing soft skills, decision-making capacity, and digital literacy, there is a pressing need to enhance academic preparation and financial readiness. Second, the ALS curriculum and support services should integrate college orientation programs, academic bridging courses, and scholarship navigation assistance to bridge these gaps. Strengthening partnerships with higher education institutions could also help ensure smoother transitions for ALS graduates.

4.0 Conclusion

This study examined the demographic profile, academic resilience, and college preparedness of senior high school learners enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS). The findings reveal a learner population characterized by maturity, economic vulnerability, and strong motivation to pursue higher education, particularly in fields such as Education and Criminology. The majority of ALS students are aged 21 to 40 years, predominantly female, and come from low-income households. These socio-demographic factors significantly influence their educational trajectories, learning needs, and aspirations.

Notably, the study found that ALS learners possess moderate to high levels of academic resilience, with notable strengths in emotional regulation, confidence, and proactive problem-solving. However, there are areas of concern — particularly in crisis management, conflict resolution, and maintaining calm under pressure — that warrant targeted socio-emotional interventions. Similarly, while students feel confident in choosing courses aligned with their interests and demonstrate readiness in areas such as computer literacy and social interaction, they express uncertainty about their academic and financial preparedness, study skills, and knowledge of college admissions.

These findings underscore the critical role that ALS plays as a second-chance education system, especially for marginalized and non-traditional learners. The data affirm the importance of integrating adult pedagogy, gender-sensitive approaches, financial assistance, and academic bridging into ALS teaching practices. Teacher education programs must be reoriented to equip ALS instructors with competencies not only in instruction but also in mentoring, counseling, and advocacy. This ensures that teachers are better able to meet the holistic needs of learners navigating education alongside complex life circumstances.

For future research, longitudinal studies should be conducted to track ALS graduates' transitions into higher education and the workforce. Such research could examine how academic resilience and preparedness influence long-term academic success and socio-economic mobility. Additionally, comparative studies between ALS learners and those in the formal education system could offer deeper insights into systemic gaps and areas for policy development. Research focusing on the barriers to male participation in ALS, the effectiveness of socio-emotional learning programs, and the impact of financial aid on ALS student retention and progression would also significantly improve outcomes for this unique learner population.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The author contributed to the conceptualization, formal analysis, original draft writing, supervision, data curation, validation, review and editing of the writing, visualization, funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, and project administration of this study.

6.0 Funding

The author funds this research study.

7.0 Conflict of Interests

The author declares no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that might influence the work reported in this paper.

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