Original Article

Socio-Economic Status as Predictor of College Readiness Among Alternative Learning System Students: A Descriptive-Correlational Study

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Abstract. The study aimed to determine whether the socio-economic status (SES) of Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners significantly predicted their level of college readiness. Using complete enumeration, 26 (n = 26) adult ALS learners, predominantly female and economically disadvantaged, with 92% classified as poor, participated in the study. Results showed that the overall level of college readiness was "moderate" (*M* = 3.23, *SD* = .58), indicating moderate yet uncertain confidence in academic skills, financial preparedness, social independence, and digital competency. Correlation analysis revealed no significant relationship between SES and college readiness (Spearman's rho = .12, p = .56), and simple linear regression confirmed that SES did not significantly predict readiness (β = .12, p = .56). These findings imply that factors beyond economic conditions, particularly motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience, may have a greater influence on ALS learners' preparedness for higher education. The study's primary limitation is its small sample size and limited SES variability, which may have reduced the ability to detect statistical effects. Future research may consider larger, more diverse samples, incorporate psychological and motivational predictors, and employ longitudinal designs to better understand how ALS learners transition into college over time.

Keywords: *ALS; College readiness; Socio-economic status; Quantitative; Davao del Sur, Philippines.*

Socioeconomic status continues to shape learners' educational opportunities and long-term academic outcomes. Global studies consistently show that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds have greater access to learning resources, demonstrate greater academic confidence, and achieve better performance than their low-income counterparts (Tan et al., 2023; Michael & Kyriakides, 2023). International evidence further indicates that socioeconomic conditions influence not only performance but also learners' motivation, decision-making confidence, and their aspirations for future careers (Thang & Trang, 2024). These findings highlight that poverty affects more than material access; it also shapes how young people view themselves as learners, an essential factor in preparing for college.

In the Philippines, the Constitution mandates the State to guarantee every citizen the right to quality education and to ensure that educational services respond to the needs of diverse communities. Despite this commitment,

many Filipino learners still face barriers, including limited financial resources, transportation challenges, and personal responsibilities that prevent regular school attendance (Tabanao, 2025). Research has shown that low household income can restrict students' access to books, digital devices, transportation, and consistent study environments. At the same time, some youth must work or care for family members, disrupting their schooling (Kim et al., 2019). To address these concerns, the government established the Alternative Learning System (ALS), a parallel learning system designed to provide a flexible educational pathway for out-of-school youth and adults who were unable to complete formal basic education. Studies have shown that ALS contributes to improved literacy and supports re-entry into education (Libo-On, 2025). However, challenges persist, particularly in resource availability, instructional quality, and the adequacy of support for learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Mahinay & Manla, 2025).

In the Davao Region, the institutionalization of ALS has helped expand educational opportunities for marginalized learners by reducing dropout rates and widening access. Local investigations highlight progress and ongoing challenges. For instance, increased technology integration among ALS teachers has been found to enhance program delivery in Davao de Oro (Salupan, 2025), while instructional practices of mobile teachers in Davao City have been associated with improved learner engagement (Musico, 2025). The Department of Education Region XI emphasizes that ALS serves as a viable alternative pathway for individuals unable to attend the formal school system, offering both non-formal and informal learning opportunities (Department of Education Region XI, 2025).

Within this local context, an increasing number of youth and adults continue to leave formal schooling to support family needs, making ALS their primary option for continuing their education. This situation highlights the critical issue of whether ALS learners are adequately prepared for higher education despite persistent socioeconomic challenges. The urgency of examining this concern lies in the growing population of learners who rely on ALS as their only pathway to academic progression. Understanding how socioeconomic status influences college readiness is essential for designing targeted interventions, strengthening implementation, and ensuring that disadvantaged learners receive the support they need for future academic success.

This study aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education, which advocates for inclusive and equitable learning opportunities. By investigating the socioeconomic factors that influence college readiness among ALS learners in Kiblawan, Davao del Sur, the study contributed to efforts to identify barriers to educational equity and to develop strategies that will ensure that no learner, regardless of background, is left behind.

Methodology
Research Design
This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design, which is appropriate for determining the relationship between variables without manipulating them (Siedlecki, 2020). Specifically, this design was used to examine whether socio-economic status predicts college readiness among ALS learners.

Participants and Sampling Technique
The study involved twenty-six (26) Grade 12 ALS students enrolled in the Academic Year 2025–2026. All respondents were officially enrolled in the ALS program, a flexible and non-formal pathway for out-of-school youth and adult learners to complete basic education equivalency (Department of Education, 2022). The inclusion criteria for the respondents were: (1) currently enrolled as Grade 12 ALS learners, (2) aged 18 years or older, and (3) willing to provide informed consent to participate in the study. Meanwhile, exclusion criteria included learners who were not yet officially enrolled in ALS, those with incomplete attendance records, or those unwilling to participate. ALS learners are typically composed of previously dropped-out students, working learners, late completers, or those from low-income households, making them suitable participants for research on socio-economic factors. The study was conducted at the only public secondary school in Barangay Balasiao, Municipality of Kiblawan, Province of Davao del Sur. This school serves both regular senior high school students and ALS learners from the barangay and nearby sitios, often becoming the primary learning center for ALS completers in the area. All twenty-six (26) Grade 12 ALS learners were included using complete enumeration, a sampling approach in which all individuals meeting the inclusion criteria are included in the study (Fraenkel et al., 2019). This method is appropriate for a relatively small population where the goal is to obtain comprehensive information from all members (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research Instrument

The study used an adopted research instrument to measure college readiness among ALS learners. The tool was taken from Tabanao (2025), titled *"Academic Resilience and Preparedness of ALS Students for Tertiary Education"*, which was designed explicitly for the ALS context. The instrument was considered appropriate for assessing readiness for college-level education. A 5-point Likert scale was employed following Pimentel (2010).

Table 1. *Interpretation of the College Readiness*

Likert Scale	Scale Range	Descriptive Interpretation	Descriptive Meaning
5	4.20 – 5.00	Very High	ALS students demonstrate *excellent college readiness*, showing strong academic skills, confidence, and preparedness for college-level demands.
4	3.40 – 4.19	High	ALS students often show *good readiness for college*, with adequate academic abilities and learning habits needed for tertiary education.
3	2.60 – 3.39	Moderate	ALS students show a *moderate level of college readiness*; they meet some expectations but still require support and improvement in academic skills.
2	1.80 – 2.59	Low	ALS students display *limited readiness for college*, struggling to meet the academic and learning requirements expected in higher education.
1	1.00 – 1.79	Very Low	ALS students show *very minimal readiness for college*, lacking essential skills needed to handle college-level tasks and expectations.

Adapted from Pimentel (2010)

Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection followed a three-step procedure and was conducted during the first semester of the Academic Year 2025–2026. First, the researchers obtained written permission from the school principal and informed consent from the respondents prior to conducting the study. Second, the adopted research instrument was prepared and subjected to content validation by three experts: the Senior High School Research Coordinator, the Senior High School Master Teacher, and the School Principal. The experts evaluated the instrument's clarity, relevance, and appropriateness for ALS learners to ensure alignment with the study objectives. Items with less than 80% agreement among validators were revised to enhance clarity and contextual relevance. Lastly, the survey was administered in a classroom setting using printed questionnaires, and respondents were given one hour to complete them. After completion, the questionnaires were collected, and the data tallied, collated, and entered into a spreadsheet for statistical analysis. This approach ensures reproducibility of the data collection process.

Data Analysis

To analyze the collected data, the following statistical tools were used. *Frequency and percentage* were employed to describe the socio-economic status of the Grade 12 ALS students. *Mean and standard deviation* were used to determine the level of college readiness among the respondents. *Spearman's rho* was applied to identify whether there is a significant relationship between socio-economic status and college readiness. Finally, *simple linear regression* was used to determine whether socio-economic status significantly predicts college readiness among ALS students.

Ethical Considerations

The study strictly adhered to ethical standards. The respondents were adequately informed of the research's purpose, objectives, and procedures, ensuring they clearly understood the study before participating. They were given the freedom to decide whether to join the study, and they were informed that they could withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Participation was voluntary, and their privacy and confidentiality were always protected. No identifying information was required in the survey; the collected data were kept secure, used only for academic purposes, and disposed of properly after the study was completed.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Economic Profile of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Students

Table 2 presents the demographic profile of ALS learners for the Academic Year 2025–2026. The participants were predominantly adults aged 18 and above (100%), predominantly female (65%), and primarily from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These characteristics provide essential context for interpreting subsequent findings in the study, as learners' backgrounds inevitably shape their educational experiences, stress levels, motivations,

and resilience within the ALS environment.

Table 2. *Profile Variables of ALS Students, S.Y. 2025-2026*

Profile Variable	Description	f	%
Age	18 and above	26	100%
Gender	Male	9	34.62%
	Female	17	65.38%
Socio-Economic Status	Poor (< PhP 12,030/month)	24	92.31%
	Low Income (12,030–24,060)	2	7.69%
	Other Categories	0	0%

The age distribution confirmed that ALS learners in this study are adult learners returning to education, consistent with prior studies showing that ALS enrollees often resume schooling due to earlier disengagement or life circumstances (Cagang, 2024; Parcon & Talimodao, 2024). Their maturity may influence learning motivations, readiness, and self-regulated learning behaviors. In terms of gender, the distribution showed a predominantly female population (65%), reflecting trends where women often participate in alternative learning programs due to caregiving responsibilities, early parenthood, or socio-economic constraints (Mahinay et al., 2024; Hero, 2022). The absence of "prefer not to say" responses indicated comfort in reporting gender identity, while variability across contexts demonstrates how gender participation shifts depending on setting (Labarrete & Tiopes, 2024).

Socio-economic data indicate that most learners (92%) are in the "poor" income bracket, highlighting the economic vulnerability of the ALS population. This aligns with previous studies emphasizing that low family income is a critical barrier to educational access and persistence (Albert et al., 2024; Batuampar & Basmayor, 2023). The minimal representation of low-income but not poor learners introduces slight variability but underscores that ALS remains a vital pathway for economically disadvantaged individuals.

Level of College Readiness Among ALS Students

Table 3 highlights the overall level of college readiness among ALS students, which was rated as "**moderate**" with a mean score of **3.23** (SD = 0.58). This indicates that the students are uncertain confidence in their preparedness for various aspects of college life, including academic skills, social independence, financial demands, and program competencies.

Table 3. *Level of College Readiness Among ALS Students*

Statements	Mean	SD	Qualitative Rating
1. I am prepared for respective college admission policies.	3.19	.57	Moderate
2. I am prepared to determine the course that suits my interests and abilities.	3.27	.60	Moderate
3. I am prepared for the financial demands of college life.	3.15	.54	Moderate
4. I am prepared in terms of the academic skills, knowledge, and capabilities demanded by college studies.	3.23	.59	Moderate
5. I am prepared in terms of the level of social independence.	3.23	.65	Moderate
6. I am prepared in terms of computer literacy and the skills required for college studies.	3.27	.60	Moderate
7. I am prepared in terms of my personal learning strategies and habits.	3.19	.57	Moderate
8. My study and thinking skills are enough for me to thrive in college life.	3.31	.62	Moderate
9. I am prepared to interact with new people I will meet during college.	3.27	.60	Moderate
10. I am prepared to meet the program's required competencies.	3.15	.54	Moderate
Overall	**3.23**	**.58**	**Moderate**

As shown in the table, among the individual indicators, the highest mean score was for the statement "My study and thinking skills are enough for me to thrive in college life" (M = 3.31). However, it still falls in the "Moderate" category. This suggests that students are uncertain towards college readiness in terms of their cognitive skills, such as critical thinking and problem-solving, which are essential for academic success. Similarly, students expressed a neutral stance on their ability to determine a course that suits their interests and abilities (M = 3.27) and their computer literacy skills (M = 3.27). These results are consistent with Mamba et al. (2020) findings, which emphasized the importance of self-awareness and digital readiness as key components of college readiness among Filipino learners. The only statement for which respondents showed agreement was their preparedness for their

respective college admission policies (M = 3.19). This suggests that students are relatively confident in understanding procedural and administrative requirements for college entry, possibly due to ALS programs' emphasis on guidance, counseling, and orientation activities.

Conversely, several indicators fell within the "Moderate" range, highlighting significant challenges. Preparedness for the financial demands of college life scored the lowest (M = 3.15), reflecting ongoing concerns about affordability and economic barriers. This finding echoes the conclusions of Pascual and Santos-Recto (2024), who noted that financial literacy and economic security remain major hurdles for Filipino students, especially those from low-income households transitioning to higher education. Given that ALS students predominantly come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, financial uncertainty may strongly influence their college enrollment decisions.

In addition, students reported uncertainty about the academic skills and knowledge required for college studies (M = 3.23), social independence (M = 3.23), personal learning strategies and habits (M = 3.19), and meeting program competencies (M = 3.15). These results point to a gap in academic preparedness and self-management skills necessary for college success. Cacnio (2024) further supports this by highlighting how financial behavior and preparedness among Filipino households impact educational outcomes and the ability to sustain higher education.

These findings imply that while ALS programs are moderately effective in fostering some aspects of college readiness, such as awareness of admissions requirements and self-awareness in course selection, there is a pressing need to enhance academic, financial, and social preparation. Integrating college transition workshops, financial literacy sessions, and academic bridging courses within the ALS curriculum could help address these gaps. Moreover, partnerships between ALS providers and higher education institutions may facilitate smoother transitions by aligning competencies and providing targeted support services.

Relationship Between SES and College Readiness

A Spearman's rho correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and college readiness of ALS learners. Table 4 shows the results of the analysis.

Table 4. *Relationship Between SES and College Readiness*

Variables	Spearman rho	*p*-value	Remark	Decision
SES and College Readiness	.12	.56	Not Significant	Failed to Reject H_0

The results indicate no statistically significant relationship between SES and college readiness (rho = 0.102, p = 0.560). Although SES is widely recognized as a factor influencing academic outcomes, the largely homogeneous economic background of the participants in this study (predominantly low-income) likely limited the variability necessary to detect a significant relationship. This finding suggests that college readiness among ALS learners may depend more on non-economic factors, such as motivation, self-efficacy, cognitive skills, and resilience, rather than SES alone. These findings align with research showing that students from low-SES backgrounds can demonstrate high academic resilience and preparedness when supported by psychosocial and cognitive protective factors (Yan & Gai, 2022; Kong, 2020). Consequently, while SES provides context for learners' experiences, it may not be the primary determinant of readiness for tertiary education in this cohort.

Analysis Predicting College Readiness Among ALS Learners

A simple linear regression was conducted to determine whether SES could predict overall college readiness among ALS learners. Table 5 presents the results of the regression analysis.

Table 5. *Linear Regression Analysis Predicting College Readiness Among ALS Learners*

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Intercept	3.24	.06	—	53.83	< .001
SES	.02	.05	.12	.58	.56

The regression results show that SES does not significantly predict college readiness (β = .12, p = .56). The small, non-significant beta coefficient indicates that variations in SES have minimal influence on learners' preparedness for college-level demands. This outcome aligned with previous studies that highlight the role of protective cognitive and psychosocial factors in mitigating the effects of low SES (Waters et al., 2020; Perry et al., 2018). ALS

learners may leverage personal motivation, resilience, and self-regulated learning strategies to compensate for financial disadvantages, explaining why SES alone was not a significant predictor in this context. While SES remains an important contextual factor, these findings suggest that interventions aiming to improve college readiness should focus on enhancing learners' cognitive, motivational, and social competencies, rather than solely addressing economic disparities. Future research should consider multi-factor models, including psychological, motivational, and academic variables, to better understand predictors of college readiness among ALS learners.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight that college readiness among ALS learners is influenced more by personal, motivational, and cognitive factors than by socio-economic status alone. This suggests that learners' resilience, self-efficacy, and adaptive learning strategies play a critical role in navigating educational challenges, particularly in contexts where economic hardship is uniform. The uniformity of low socio-economic status among participants limits the predictive power of economic variables, suggesting that interventions focused solely on financial support may not fully address gaps in college preparedness. Instead, readiness appears to emerge from a combination of learners' psychological resources, engagement with learning opportunities, and exposure to structured academic support, underscoring the multidimensional nature of preparation for higher education.

Given these insights, ALS implementers and educators need to adopt holistic approaches that integrate academic, digital, and psychosocial development. Targeted strategies such as mentoring, guidance, facilitation, and skills-building workshops can enhance learners' confidence, self-regulation, and adaptive capacities. At the same time, partnerships with higher education institutions can provide experiential exposure that reinforces readiness. Furthermore, addressing contextual challenges, including economic and logistical barriers, remains important, but efforts should be complemented by initiatives that strengthen motivation, resilience, and self-directed learning. Future research should prioritize psychosocial and cognitive determinants of college readiness, employ longitudinal designs to observe transitions into tertiary education, and explore interventions that leverage learners' strengths in overcoming systemic and personal obstacles.

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