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Learning Beyond Barriers: Learners' Academic Experiences in Alternative Learning System

¹ Diane Anne P Abad, ² Anna Liza A Benitez, ³ Glenn M Brigoli, ⁴ Maria Nancy Quinco-Cadosales
^{1, 2, 3, 4} College of Teacher Education - Graduate School, Cebu Normal University, Cebu City, Philippines

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Corresponding Author: **Glenn M Brigoli**

Abstract

Despite free public education in the Philippines, many Filipinos remain unable to attend school due to poverty, early pregnancy, family dysfunction, geographic isolation, and institutional barriers. The Alternative Learning System (ALS) emerged as a pathway for these marginalized learners, yet a comprehensive synthesis of their academic experiences across diverse populations and contexts remains absent in the literature. This qualitative meta-synthesis addresses that gap by integrating findings from eleven peer-reviewed studies on ALS learners' academic experiences at the secondary level, published between 2021 and 2025.

Using Noblit and Hare's (1988) ^[17] meta-ethnographic framework and the CASP Qualitative Checklist, the study produced one unifying meta-theme — Resilience Amid Barriers — and three overarching themes: (1) Navigating Structural and Personal Adversity; (2) The Transformative Power of Flexible Pedagogy; and (3) The Role of Support Systems in Sustaining Academic Engagement. From these patterns, the **Resilient Recovery Framework** emerged, proposing that ALS functions best as a humanized recovery ecosystem where survival, re-entry, and transformative agency work together to make learning sustainable.

Keywords: Alternative Learning System, ALS Learners, Academic Experiences, Meta-Synthesis, Flexible Pedagogy

1. Introduction

In 2001, under the Republic Act 9155, the Alternative Learning System (ALS) was established. This stands as the Philippine government's primary non-formal education mechanism for out-of-school youth and adults. Significantly strengthened by Republic Act 11510 in 2020, ALS operates through Community Learning Centers distributed across the country, offering flexible, contextualized, and accessible education to those whom the conventional classroom failed to accommodate — providing face-to-face, modular, and online learning pathways that can be fitted around work, childcare, and other responsibilities (Mahinay & Manla, 2025) ^[15]. Rogers (2004) ^[22] described non-formal education as dynamic and learner-centered by design, a characterization that remains an apt description of ALS's structural intent. The program offers two main learning pathways: the Basic Literacy Program, for those who missed foundational schooling and wish to develop reading and writing skills, and the Continuing Education Program, for those aiming to earn credentials equivalent to elementary or high school completion, culminating in the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) examination. In 2019, Department Order No. 12 further formalized implementation by clarifying the roles, funding structures, and delivery mechanisms of the ALS K–12 curriculum.

The scale and diversity of ALS participation reveal the depth of educational exclusion in the Philippines. Each year, approximately 750,000 individuals enroll — among them street children, indigenous peoples, teenage parents, working adults, older citizens, former rebels, and incarcerated individuals (Department of Education, 2016) ^[10]. UNESCO (2015) ^[28] highlighted inclusive non-formal education as a vital means of reaching those outside formal schooling, situating ALS within a broader international commitment to educational equity. Doronila (1997) ^[12] traced the historical roots of non-formal education in the Philippines, emphasizing its critical role in closing the literacy gap among marginalized communities — a function ALS continues to serve, now with a wider and more clearly defined set of responsibilities. For learners who carry the weight of having left school, ALS represents not merely a second chance to earn a diploma, but a second chance at an entirely different life trajectory (Pimienta-Mendoza, 2024) ^[21].

Yet the existence of ALS must be understood against the broader landscape of why so many Filipinos find themselves outside formal education in the first place. Education has long been regarded as a reliable pathway out of poverty, yet for many

Filipinos, that journey remains arduous, if not impossible. The Department of Education (2019) ^[11] identified financial difficulty and social instability as the leading causes of school dropout, while the National Economic and Development Authority (2014) ^[16] and UNICEF (2018) ^[29] documented how severe socioeconomic inequality has consistently pulled down educational completion rates, particularly in rural and conflict-affected regions. Students leave school not because they choose to, but because the system cannot accommodate the demands of their circumstances — poverty that makes free education not entirely free of costs, early pregnancy that abruptly redirects life plans, geographic distance that renders daily attendance physically exhausting, and family crises that reframe survival as a more immediate priority than learning. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) ^[6] theorized, educational systems reproduce inequality by structuring access around economic and cultural capital that marginalized populations are systematically denied. The reasons for leaving school differ from person to person, but the outcome is the same: dropout, and with it the foreclosure of credentials, employment prospects, and social mobility.

Despite these persistent structural barriers, research on ALS has grown considerably in recent years, offering a more personal and nuanced understanding of what learners actually experience. Qualitative studies have followed former rebels reintegrating into society through ALS (Saplagio & Ibanez, 2023), documented adult learners in Laguna juggling work and family responsibilities (Pascual, Virtudez, & Cambia, 2022) ^[19], and captured the struggles of out-of-school youth in urban Manila navigating enrollment barriers (Alvarez, 2024) ^[2]. Others have examined learner persistence and resilience (Ucab & Luzano, 2023 ^[27]; Magsayo & Galibo, 2025), the relationship between resilience and academic performance (Calo & Salvana, 2024) ^[8], and the inspiring trajectories of learners who proceed to college or secure employment after completing ALS (Pimienta-Mendoza, 2024) ^[21]. Studies have also attended to the social and emotional dimensions of learning — how peer relationships sustain engagement (Omollo & Yambo, 2017) ^[18], how negative school experiences contribute to dropout (Sahin *et al.*, 2016) ^[23], and how family disruption affects learner motivation and self-esteem (Felisilda & Torreón, 2020) ^[13]. Yet despite this growing body of work, a significant gap remains. No study has systematically integrated findings across qualitative ALS research to produce a unified understanding of learners' experiences. Arzadon and Nato (2015) ^[3] noted that much existing ALS research centers on structure and metrics, often overlooking the meaning learners themselves assign to their educational journeys. Individual studies offer valuable but incomplete accounts — each illuminating one part of a larger picture without connecting it to the whole.

What is missing is a coherent interpretation of how structural exclusion, survival-level barriers, relational support, personal resilience, identity transformation, and systemic failure interact to shape ALS participation and outcomes across different populations and contexts. This meta-synthesis addresses that gap by drawing on eleven qualitative studies published between 2021 and 2025. It aims to provide a comprehensive view of ALS learners' academic experiences and to develop an integrative framework that illustrates how different factors enable

learners to persist — and ultimately transform — despite the weight of life's challenges.

2. Methods

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative meta-synthesis approach to systematically analyze and combine findings from multiple research studies about ALS learners' experiences. Meta-synthesis, as explained by Noblit and Hare (1988) ^[17] and further developed by Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) ^[24], is a careful interpretive approach that goes beyond simply aggregating findings to generate new understanding and higher-order insights. Unlike quantitative meta-analysis, which combines numbers statistically, qualitative meta-synthesis involves the interpretive integration of qualitative findings to identify themes, patterns, contradictions, and relationships across studies. This approach is fitting for the present research because ALS learners' experiences have been examined through numerous qualitative studies across diverse contexts, yet these findings remain scattered. Meta-synthesis makes the construction of a more complete and theoretically coherent understanding than any single study can provide.

Search Strategy

Data for this meta-synthesis consists of published qualitative research studies examining ALS learners' experiences at the high school level in the Philippines. Studies were identified through conducting online searches in different websites including Google Scholar, ERIC, ResearchGate, and Philippine education journals. Search terms included 'Alternative Learning System,' 'ALS Philippines,' 'ALS learners,' 'ALS experiences,' 'out-of-school youth,' and 'second-chance education Philippines.' Studies were included if they: were published between 2021 and 2025; employed mixed or qualitative research methods such as phenomenology, case study, or narrative inquiry; focused on ALS learner's experiences at the high school level; were conducted in the Philippines; reported sufficient methodological detail about participants and findings; and were published in peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, or graduate theses from recognized institutions. Assessing the studies, there was one study included under mix method, but the researchers employed only to use the qualitative part of the study in order to meet the needed requirement of using only the qualitative part in making the synthesis. Based on these criteria, eleven primary studies were selected for inclusion, representing different geographic locations across the Philippines, diverse ALS learner populations, and varied research approaches.

Search Result

The identification and selection of studies followed the PRISMA 2020 flow process (shown in Figure 1) to ensure transparency and rigor in the literature search and screening procedure. An initial search of CrossRef and Google Scholar databases, supplemented by register searches, yielded a total of 1,500 records. Prior to screening, 1,050 records were removed — 500 identified as duplicates, 300 flagged as ineligible by automation tools, and 250 removed for other reasons — leaving 450 records for screening.

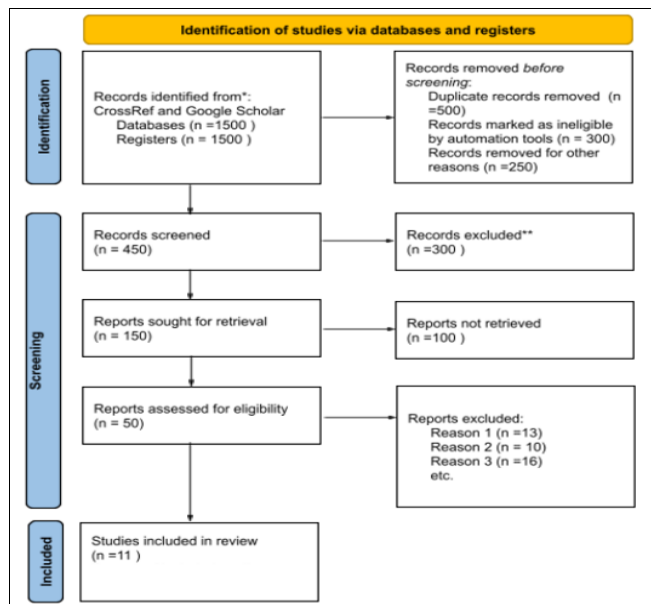


Fig 1: The Flow Diagram of the Study Utilizing PRISMA 2020

During the screening phase, the 450 records were evaluated based on titles and abstracts against the study's inclusion criteria. Of these, 300 were excluded for failing to meet the criteria, including studies not conducted in the Philippines, not focused on ALS learners at the secondary level, not employing qualitative or mixed methods, or published outside the 2021–2025 timeframe. This reduced the pool to 150 reports sought for retrieval, of which 100 could not be retrieved due to inaccessibility or unavailability of full-text versions, leaving 50 reports assessed for full eligibility review.

Of these 50 reports, 39 were excluded upon full-text assessment — 13 were excluded due to duplication, 10

deleted due to ineligibility, and 16 deleted by automation, studies not based on learners' academic experience — based on further refinements concerning methodological quality, relevance of focus, and sufficiency of reported findings. The remaining 11 studies were confirmed for final inclusion. This sample meets the minimum requirement of 10 to 12 studies considered sufficient for a rigorous qualitative meta-synthesis of Sandelowski *et al.* (1997) [25], Paterson *et al.* (2001) [20], and Bondas & Hall (2007) [5], ensuring that the integrated findings rest on an adequately broad and methodologically sound evidence base. Table 1 shows the 11 remaining studies confirmed for final inclusion.

Quality Assessment

Careful selection of the studies was evaluated for methodological quality using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Qualitative Checklist (2018). The assessment of the studies using CASP was verified by the researchers themselves. This checklist assesses studies across ten dimensions: clarity of research aims, appropriateness of methodology, research design, recruitment strategy, data collection methods, researcher-participant relationship, ethical considerations, rigor of analysis, clarity of findings, and research value. The selection of these studies was based on the keywords used to generate related studies. These studies were rated as high, moderate, or low quality. Only studies rated as moderate or high quality were retained for synthesis, ensuring that the integrated findings rest on a methodologically sound evidence base. In addition to ensuring quality assessment, there are numerous member-checking consultations that were conducted online as a way of verification and consultation of the meta-synthesis studies conducted. Table 1 shows the Studies included in the Meta-synthesis.

Table 1: Studies Included in the Meta-Synthesis

No.	Author/s & Year	Setting	Design	# of Participants	Study Focus	Salient Findings
S1	Saplagio & Ibañez (2025) [26]	Davao del Sur	Qualitative	8	Role of Education in the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of PDL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Education as Transformation ▪ Multi-Agency Support System ▪ Twin Challenges: Time and Academics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Four-Pronged Coping ▪ Education as Reintegration Capital ▪ ALS as Rehabilitation Vehicle
S2	Javillonar & Elma (2021) [14]	Palawan	Qualitative	Not indicated in the study	Impact of ALS on the Socioeconomic Mobility & Life Outcomes of OSYAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Poverty and Aspiration as Enrollment Drivers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ALS as a Social Mobility Ladder ▪ Program as a Dream Enabler ▪ Higher Education and Career Breakthroughs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proven Success, Calls for Expansion
S3	Bometivo, Hermosilla, Palero & Selario (2024) [4]	Metro Manila	Qualitative	8	Lived Experiences, Coping Mechanisms, and Sense of Meaning and Identity of ALS Completers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Triple Burden of Work, Family, and School ▪ Exhaustion as a Constant Companion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Uneven Learning Transitions ▪ Divided Financial Realities ▪ Active Problem-Solving as Primary Coping ▪ Emotional Release as a Survival Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Three-Layered Support Network ▪ College as a Confidence Catalyst ▪ Active Embrace of College Culture ▪ Belonging Beyond Age Barriers ▪ Faith, Family, and Self-Driven Motivation
S4	Cagang (2024) [7]	General Santos	Mixed	115	Effectiveness of ALS implementation in the development of 21 st Century Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All Seven Parameters Rated High ▪ Learning Assessment as Strongest Parameter ▪ Stakeholder Partnership as Weakest Parameter ▪ Overall High Effectiveness Rating

					Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Life and Career Skills as Top-Rated Dimension ▪ Strong Positive Link Between ALS Implementation and Life Skills Development ▪ Subject Specialization as Essential Deployment Strategy ▪ Multi-Grade Teaching Practiced Across All Levels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong Teacher Sense of Responsibility ▪ Inclusive Education Extended to PDLs ▪ Staff Overloading as a Pressing Concern ▪ Blended Modalities Used During the Pandemic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Schedule Flexibility as ALS's Best Feature ▪ Career Path and Promotion as Teacher Concern ▪ Communication Skills Built Through Practical Writing Outputs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of Financial Support Limits Post-Training Application ▪ Contextualization Through Local Dialects Aided Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continuous Adaptation of Learning Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inadequate Facilities for TVL Tracks ▪ Teacher Mismatch and Lack of NCII Qualifications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Digital Divide Among Learners ▪ Immersion Barriers for BJMP-Confined Learners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ TESDA-DepEd Competency Alignment Needed ▪ Hardship Allowances and Recognition for ALS Teachers ▪ Funding Gaps for Materials, Equipment, and Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stronger Industry and LGU Partnerships Required ▪ Expansion of ALS SHS Pilot Schools Recommended
S5	Abregoso & Dioso (2024) ^[1]	Davao de Oro	Qualitative	6	Motivation, Barriers, Coping Strategies, and Psychological Experiences of ALS Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Family, Self-Realization, and Ambition as Enrollment Motivators ▪ Financial Hardship and Domestic Burden as Major Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academic Adjustment Difficulties from Long Schooling Gaps ▪ Internet, Prayer, and Peer Collaboration as Key Coping Strategies ▪ Community Stigma as a Psychological Barrier to Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resilience and Diploma-Driven Determination Despite Adversity ▪ Need for Targeted Support Systems and Anti-Stigma Campaigns
S6	Ucab & Luzano (2023) ^[27]	Cagayan de Oro	Qualitative	14	Profile, Motivation, Challenges, and Coping Mechanisms of ALS Completers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student Mothers as the Dominant Completer Profile ▪ Family, Teacher Encouragement, and Opposition as Motivation Fuel ▪ Financial Instability, Multiple Roles, Digital Gaps, and Distance as Core Challenges ▪ Faith, Time Management, Peer Collaboration, and ALS Flexibility as Coping Mechanisms ▪ Extrinsic Motivation Outweighs Intrinsic but Both Sustain Engagement ▪ Need for Psychological Support, Time Management Training, and Free Digital Access in Rural Areas
S7	Pascual, Virtudez & Cambia (2022) ^[19]	Laguna	Qualitative	6	Motivations, Transformative Experiences, Challenges, and Post-ALS Educational Outcomes of ALS Completers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unfinished Schooling, Family Obligations, and Life Goals as Entry Motivators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Time Management as the Most Essential Skill Developed in ALS ▪ From Low Self-Esteem to Renewed Confidence Post-ALS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Insecurities, Academic Pressure, and Fear of Bullying Overcome Through Determination ▪ Time, Finances, and Academic Adjustment as Major College-Level Obstacles ▪ All Six Participants Earned Baccalaureate Degrees, Validating ALS as a College Pathway
S8	Mahinay & Manla (2025) ^[15]	Cagayan de Oro	Qualitative	9	Evaluation of ALS Framework in the Philippines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Andragogy Recognized as ALS's Core and Most Appropriate Philosophy ▪ RA 11510 Seen as Inclusive but Hampered by Slow Implementation and Insufficient Funding ▪ ALS Curriculum Aligned with K-12 but Lacking Vocational and Digital Literacy Content ▪ Flexible Modalities Praised but Technology Gaps

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persist in Rural Areas CLCs Vital Yet Understaffed, Underfunded, and Inadequately Equipped Post-Program Pathways Promising but Lacking Career and Industry Support ALS Strong in Flexibility and Inclusivity but Weak in Resources, Policy, and Technology Access
S9	Alvarez (2024) ^[2]	Tondo, Manila	Qualitative	8	Root Causes of School Dropout and the Role of ALS as Second-Chance Educational Pathway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Breakdown — Parental Separation, Loss, Incarceration, and Teenage Pregnancy as Primary Dropout Drivers Bullying, Grade Repetition, and Peer Pressure as Personal Dropout Triggers Hidden Costs of "Free" Education as a Persistent Financial Barrier Lack of Birth Certificate as an Institutional Enrollment Barrier for Marginalized Learners ALS as a Second-Chance Pathway for Involuntary Dropouts Dropout Rooted in Poverty, Family Dysfunction, and Systemic Barriers — Not Lack of Will Need for Home Visitation, Financial Subsidies, and Removal of Administrative Enrollment Barriers
S10	Pimienta-Mendoza (2024) ^[21]	Ilocos Sur	Qualitative	7 ALS Graduates	Teaching Challenges, Coping Strategies, Graduate Outcomes, and the Relational Dynamics Between Teachers and Learners in the ALS Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graduates Become Active Community Advocates for ALS ALS Enables Lifelong Learning Regardless of Age or Obligation ALS as a Platform for Second Chance, Redemption, and Restored Self-Worth Geographical Barriers Make Travel to Remote CLCs Dangerous Public Misrecognition and Learner Disengagement as Work Environment Challenges Negative Perception of ALS Hinders Learner Recruitment Fluctuating Learner Engagement Undermines Teaching Effectiveness Lack of Dedicated CLCs Forces Teachers to Borrow or Rent Spaces Insufficient LGU Support Limits Resources and Sustainability Patience and Perseverance as Core Teacher Survival Strategies Effective Communication as Key to Maintaining Engagement Stakeholder Collaboration Fills Resource and Support Gaps Teacher Adaptability and Flexibility as Program Strengths Family-Driven Self-Motivation Fuels Graduate Resilience and Transition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ALS Opens Doors to Employment, Entrepreneurship, and Higher Education Graduates Develop Future-Oriented Mindset, Confidence, and Agency Teacher-Graduate Bond Built on Mutual Respect and Shared Goal of Basic Education Completion
S11	Vismanos <i>et al.</i> (2024) ^[30]	Cebu	Qualitative	3	Opportunities, Challenges, and Cross-Case Patterns of ALS Completers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desire for Financial, Relational, and Professional Stability as Primary Motivator ALS as a Transformative Stepping Stone to College Completion and Licensure Family Support as a Critical Enabler Across All Cases Dedication Proven to Overcome Socioeconomic Disadvantage and Educational Gaps Academic Recognition Reinforced Motivation and Sense of Belonging Financial Constraints as the Most Significant Barrier to Sustained Schooling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balancing Household and Academic Responsibilities as a Major Time Management Challenge

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Past Mistakes and Poor Decisions as Sources of Educational Disruption ▪ Initial Lack of Direction Leading to Delays in Pursuing Formal Education ▪ Disengagement and Distraction Causing Multi-Year Schooling Gaps ▪ Personal Circumstances — Not Capability — Drive Both Challenges and Motivations ▪ All Three Cases Successfully Bridged Non-Formal and Tertiary Education Through ALS ▪ Family, Mentors, and Institutional Flexibility as Consistent Success Factors ▪ Individually Tailored Support Essential for ALS Graduates Transitioning to Higher Education
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Data Analysis Process

Analysis followed Noblit and Hare’s (1988) [17] meta-ethnographic framework across six phases. In the first phase, each study was read repeatedly to achieve deep familiarity with its content, context, findings, and interpretive claims, with notes taken on initial impressions and emergent cross-study patterns. In the second phase, major themes and concepts were identified from each study, capturing both participant language and researcher interpretation. In the third phase, studies were compared to identify convergences, contradictions, and complementary perspectives. In the fourth phase, key concepts from each study were systematically compared with those from other studies through constant comparison and iterative refinement. In the fifth phase, translated concepts were synthesized into higher-order meta-themes representing integrated understandings that transcend any individual study. Finally, an integrative framework was developed to illustrate the interconnected factors shaping ALS learners’ experiences and outcomes.

3. Results and Discussion

The results and discussions presented below align to the objectives established for this study. The meta-synthesis of eleven selected studies on the academic experiences of learners in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) of the Philippines produced a unifying meta-theme and three overarching themes. The overarching meta-theme identified is: Resilience Amid Barriers: The Academic Struggles and Transformations of ALS Learners. Three themes subsequently emerged, namely: (1) Navigating Structural and Personal Adversity; (2) The Transformative Power of Flexible Pedagogy; and (3) The Role of Support Systems in Sustaining Academic Engagement. Moreover, seven sub-themes have also emerged from these three overarching themes.

This meta-theme captures the central and unifying insight across all eleven studies: ALS learners are individuals who, despite facing different challenges varying from structural, personal, to socio-economic adversities, show remarkable academic resilience and undergo meaningful educational transformation through the flexible and inclusive design of the ALS program. Their academic experiences are not merely stories of struggle — they are stories of their determination to pursue education against odds, and of how having access to a second-chance and flexible learning system can bring profound change in their life. The meta-theme is defined by three inseparable dimensions: (1) the real and pervasive barriers that disrupt, delay, or threaten the academic engagement of ALS learners; (2) the

transformative and empowering outcomes that emerge when a pedagogy sensitive to their circumstances is made available; and (3) the relational and social support systems — from teachers and family to peers and community — that sustain learners’ will to persist. Together, these dimensions reveal that the ALS experience is fundamentally characterized by the tension between adversity and transformation, made navigable through the web of support that surrounds each learner.

Theme 1: Navigating Structural and Personal Adversity

This theme captures the multifaceted adversities — both systemic and personal — that ALS learners encounter in their academic journeys. Studies consistently reveal that ALS learners are not out of school by choice, but are compelled by circumstances including poverty, family dysfunction, social stigma, and institutional barriers. As Alvarez (2024) [2] pointedly noted, out-of-school youth and adults (OSYA) learners were victims of life hardships — they dropped out not because they wanted to, but because they had to. Their academic experiences are marked by constant negotiation between the demands of life and the pursuit of education. Two sub-themes were identified under this overarching theme.

Sub-theme 1.1: Structural Barriers to Academic Access

The academic journey of ALS learners was persistently hindered by varying obstacles including financial hardship, geographical distance from learning centers, inadequate learning materials, and administrative requirements that excluded the most marginalized. These systemic barriers prevented regular attendance and impaired their ability to participate meaningfully with their studies.

Of all the obstacles documented, financial hardship was the most consistently cited across the eleven studies reviewed. Ucab and Luzano (2023) [27] found that financial difficulties were among the most prominent challenges faced by ALS learners, Abregoso and Dioso (2024) [1] similarly identified financial hardships as a central challenge, and Cagang (2024) [7] took this further, noting that even after training, the absence of startup capital prevented learners from applying what they had learned. This shows that Education is not free cost despite being offered free by our government. When one came from a family that barely eats three times a day, school allowances and other school materials could lessen the meal they will have for a day, if not, for a week.

Geography and technology made things harder still. Abregoso and Dioso (2024) [1] emphasized that physical distance from school significantly affects students,

particularly adult learners who carry additional responsibilities outside of academics. Walking a long distance, students become already physically exhausted which could make them want to rest when they get to school. When the pandemic hit, they were saved from walking a long distance, however, a new challenge emerged when online learning modality was implemented. Ucab and Luzano (2023) [27] found that inadequate gadgets and poor internet connections were common challenges among ALS learners in connecting with their teachers and completing their modules — a reminder that "distance learning" assumes a kind of access that many ALS learners simply do not have. Even when cellphone and internet are very common to students now a days, there are still some who are struggling to own one.

Even at the level of paperwork, the system created walls. Alvarez (2024) [2] pointed to a particularly telling example: the requirement of a birth certificate for enrollment. It sounds routine — but for learners in disadvantaged situations, it functions as a classical barrier, one that quietly turns away the very people the program is meant to serve. This is consistent with Alvarez's (2024) [2] broader observation that ALS learners are individuals who left the formal education system because of family problems, personal conflicts, financial concerns, and accessibility issues — making clear that their departure from school was not a personal failing but a structural outcome.

Sub-theme 1.2: Personal and Socio-Emotional Adversities Affecting Academic Engagement

Beyond the practical difficulties, ALS learners also had to carry a heavier kind of burden — the kind that hits you emotionally and personally. Low self-confidence, being looked down on, bullying, family problems, and the pressure of juggling too many roles at once all chipped away at their ability to focus and stay committed to their studies.

This shows how the fear of being judged followed ALS learners even after they had already passed and moved on to college. Pascual *et al.* (2022) [19] documented learners who entered college already dreading what their classmates might think of them — that they were lazy, or that they had simply given up on school at some point. And that fear, sadly, was not entirely unfounded. Some of them actually experienced being belittled because of their ALS background (Pascual *et al.*, 2022) [19]. I think this reflects something deeper — that the stigma around ALS is not just a personal insecurity, but a social reality that these learners had to face head-on. When the community already holds a low opinion of ALS graduates, it becomes almost impossible for learners to hold a high opinion of themselves. As Abregoso and Dioso (2024) [1] pointed out, these negative perceptions added to the emotional weight that ALS learners were already carrying.

Then there is the matter of wearing too many hats at the same time. Bometivo *et al.* (2024) [4] found that managing work, family, and schooling all at once was the most common struggle among their participants — many of whom were mothers still responsible for their children and household while trying to keep up with their classes. I can only imagine how exhausting that must be. Studying is already difficult enough on its own, and doing it while also being a full-time parent and provider seems almost unfair. Ucab and Luzano (2023) [27] similarly noted that a large portion of their ALS learners were student mothers,

constantly torn between their role as a parent and their role as a student.

What makes all of this more difficult is that when ALS passers eventually enter college, they quickly realize that their ALS experience did not quite equip them for what awaited them. Bometivo *et al.* (2024) [4] found that many struggled because what ALS taught them did not align well with what college courses required, and most of their prior learning was modular in nature — which is very different from how tertiary education works. Abregoso and Dioso (2024) [1] also noted that learners had a hard time with technology, multitasking, and English — particularly those who had been out of school for a long period. This might mean that passing the ALS accreditation is only half the battle. The real test comes after, when learners are expected to compete in an environment that was not built with their experiences in mind.

Theme 2: The Transformative Power of Flexible Pedagogy

This theme highlights how the ALS program's inherent flexibility in delivery, scheduling, and curriculum design serves as the primary mechanism through which learners experience academic empowerment and transformation. Despite the barriers captured in Theme 1, ALS learners who persist through the program demonstrate significant gains — academically, personally, and socially. The flexible pedagogy of ALS is what makes these transformations possible. Two sub-themes were identified under this theme.

Sub-theme 2.1: Flexible Learning Modalities as Academic Enablers

Studies show how ALS learners appreciate the program's flexibility the most — and honestly, it makes complete sense. For many of these learners, rigid school schedules are not just inconvenient; they are impossible. It was not very surprising when Cagang (2024) [7] pointed out that flexible class schedules stood out as the program's best feature. The flexibility of the ALS actually unlocks the chance to learn at all.

Ucab and Luzano (2023) [27] described ALS as a program that allows learners to finish basic education in a way that fits their own situation — learning happening anytime, anywhere. This shows that it centers the learner, not the institution. That is rarely how education is designed. And this is precisely why ALS works for people who have otherwise been left behind.

The blended online learning approach, in particular, seemed to work well because it combined the benefits of live interaction and self-paced study (Cagang, 2024) [7]. This also reveals how teachers adapted: extending deadlines, simplifying lessons, and using the local dialect to make content more accessible (Cagang, 2024) [7]. This shows that flexibility in ALS is not just structural — it is also relational. Teachers meeting learners where they are, linguistically and emotionally, is just as important as giving them a choice of when and where to study. Without that human layer, even the most flexible system can still feel like a wall.

Sub-theme 2.2: Transformative Academic Outcomes and Learner Empowerment

ALS is not just that it exists as an alternative — it is that it actually works. Learners did not just receive a certificate

and stop there. Javillonar and Elma (2021) ^[14] found that ALS completers in Palawan were able to pursue higher education, take vocational courses, and find meaningful employment — some even working abroad. Vismanos *et al.* (2024) ^[30] further showed that ALS served as a genuine stepping stone, bringing learners from non-formal education all the way to finishing college and passing board exams. That trajectory is remarkable when you consider where many of these learners started.

More than the opportunity to have a career, ALS even pave a way for these learners to be changed inside. Before ALS, many learners carried with them a quiet sense of having no future — and that kind of feeling is harder to overcome than any academic gap. Pascual *et al.* (2022) ^[19] noted that completing the program shifted that entirely: learners felt more confident and began to see life differently. Bometivo *et al.* (2024) ^[4] echoed this, finding that entering college after ALS brought with it a real sense of self-worth and the belief that they were only at the beginning of something bigger. That shift in self-perception matters just as much as any diploma, because no credential means much if the person holding it still does not believe in themselves.

ALS also equipped learners with practical, real-world skills — the kind that actually matter beyond the classroom (Cagang, 2024) ^[7]. Across all the literature reviewed, one thing is consistently clear: ALS functions as a second chance in the truest sense. It gives back what circumstances — poverty, early marriage, the need to work — had taken away. And more than that, it gives learners a path that is designed around their lives, not the other way around. That is what makes it not just a program, but a promise kept.

Theme 3: The Role of Support Systems in Sustaining Academic Engagement

This theme highlights the how relational, social, and institutional support networks play an important role in keeping ALS learners academically engaged. Across all eleven studies, learners consistently identified teachers, family members, peers, government programs, and community organizations as the primary forces that sustained their motivation and academic persistence. Three sub-themes were identified under this theme.

Sub-theme 3.1: Teacher and Institutional Support as Academic Lifelines

ALS teachers and the institutions behind the program played a significant role in keeping learners motivated and on track. Pimienta-Mendoza (2024) ^[21] found that ALS teachers are trained to provide personalized instruction to learners coming from varied backgrounds, and that watching their students succeed was what kept them going — especially in communities that are often overlooked. Cagang (2024) ^[7] added that teachers demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility, going as far as conducting home visits and actively monitoring their learners' progress.

Community Learning Centers, too, were identified as key players. Mahinay and Manla (2025) ^[15] recognized them as essential in bridging the education gap for learners who are frequently left behind by the mainstream system. For many ALS learners, the Community Learning Center is not just a place of instruction. It is, in many ways, the only space where they feel they actually belong in the educational landscape.

This shows how the teacher-learner relationship kept surfacing across the studies as one of the quiet but powerful reasons the program works. Pimienta-Mendoza (2024) ^[21] described it as grounded in respect, trust, and genuine understanding. Curriculum can be revised, materials can be improved, and centers can be built — but if the person standing in front of the learner does not genuinely care, none of it holds. For ALS learners who have already been failed or forgotten by the system at some point, having a teacher who shows up — literally and figuratively — can make all the difference.

Sub-theme 3.2: Family and Peer Networks as Academic Motivators

When it came to what kept ALS learners going, family and fellow learners were the most consistent answers across the studies. Bometivo *et al.* (2024) ^[4] found that family was a primary driving force — many participants sharing that their motivation came from wanting to build a better life for the people they loved. Ucab and Luzano (2023) ^[27] echoed this, with learners pointing specifically to their children, husbands, and family as their main source of inspiration.

It is one thing to study for yourself, but it is another thing entirely to study for someone you love. For many ALS learners, especially the mothers, the decision to keep going was not really about them — it was about making sure their children would not have to go through the same struggles they did. That kind of motivation does not come from a classroom or a curriculum. It comes from somewhere much more personal, and in many ways, it is the most powerful kind.

Their peers also played a meaningful role — not just academically, but emotionally. Ucab and Luzano (2023) ^[27] found that the friendships formed inside the classroom had a direct effect on how learners engaged with their studies, and that learning alongside fellow ALS learners was one of the key ways completers managed to cope with everything they were carrying. There is a certain comfort in being surrounded by people who understand exactly what you are going through — people who do not need an explanation because they are living the same story. That shared experience.

Sub-theme 3.3: Government and Community Partnerships Expanding Academic Opportunities

Support from outside the classroom also had its share in keeping learners on track. Bometivo *et al.* (2024) ^[4] found that some participants credited a foundation offering free education — from ALS all the way through college — as one of the most significant forms of help they received. For rebel returnees, the support system looked different but was just as meaningful. Saplagio and Ibañez (2025) ^[26] noted that the collaboration between different agencies — including the 39th Infantry Battalion, DSWD, and ALS teachers — was instrumental in helping them ease back into community life and continue their education.

Reintegrating into society after the life they had lived is already an enormous undertaking on its own, and yet here they were, going back to school on top of it all. That does not happen without a strong network of people willing to walk alongside them — and it says something about what coordinated, multi-agency support can actually look like when it is done with genuine intent.

Faith and community also surfaced as sources of strength, particularly among rebel returnees (Saplagio & Ibañez, 2025) [26]. The role of belief and belonging in keeping a person going. For many ALS learners, especially those coming from the most difficult circumstances, having something larger than themselves to hold on to — whether that is their faith, their community, or both — seems to be part of what gives their continuing education a deeper sense of purpose.

In summary, the three themes and seven sub-themes collectively reveal that the academic experiences of ALS learners are shaped by a complex interplay of adversity, pedagogical enablement, and social support. No one dimension could fully explain either the challenges they face or the transformations they achieve. It is precisely the tension — and the resolution — among all three dimensions that defines the ALS learner’s academic journey, and that constitutes the meta-theme of resilience amid barriers.

The Resilient Recovery Framework: An Integrative Framework

The synthesis of findings across all eleven studies culminates in the Resilient Recovery Framework (RRF), shown in Figure 2, an integrative framework that conceptualizes how ALS learners navigate, persist through, and are ultimately transformed by their academic experiences outside the regular classroom setting. The RRF proposes that learning beyond barriers is not the product of a single force but the outcome of three simultaneously operating dimensions — the Friction of Survival, the Architecture of Re-Entry, and Transformative Agency — each corresponding directly to the three themes identified in this study, and all converging at a shared center: academic persistence and personal transformation.

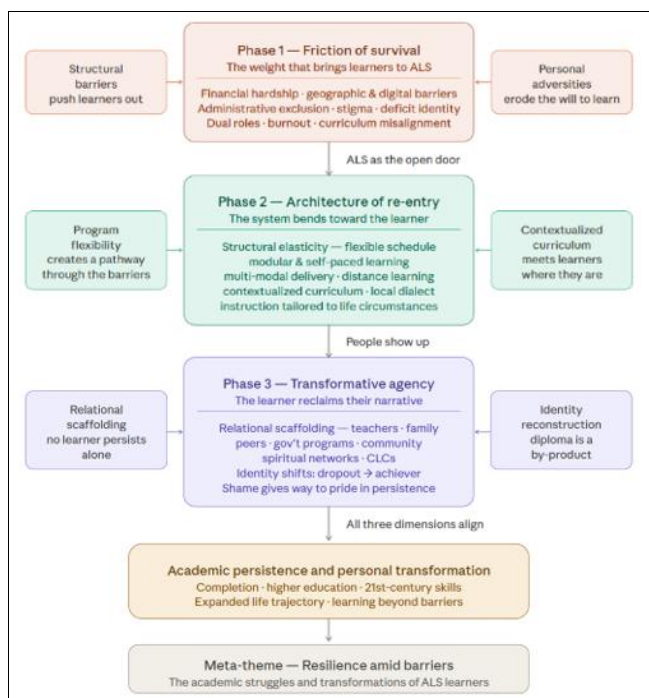


Fig 2: The Resilient Recovery Framework: An Integrative Framework for ALS Learners’ Academic Experiences

Phase 1: The Friction of Survival (Theme 1: Navigating Structural & Personal Adversity)

The first dimension, the Friction of Survival, covers Theme 1 and describes the structural and personal struggles that define what life looks like for ALS learners even before they set foot in a learning center. These are not just obstacles they happen to encounter — these are the very reasons they were outside formal education in the first place.

Among all the barriers documented, financial hardship stands out as the most consistent and far-reaching. For many ALS learners, the decision to attend class on any given day is weighed against immediate material needs — food, transportation, and basic household expenses. Education, even when offered without tuition, carries hidden costs that learners from economically disadvantaged households often cannot absorb.

What makes this particularly difficult is that financial constraints do not only prevent access to the program — they continue to limit learners even after they complete it. Acquiring skills through ALS does not automatically translate into the ability to use those skills, especially when putting them into practice requires capital that most learners simply do not have. The program can open a door, but material poverty has a way of keeping it just out of reach.

Geographic distance from learning centers places an additional burden on learners who are already managing multiple responsibilities at home. For adult learners who are also workers, parents, or caregivers, the time and energy required to travel to a learning center is not a minor inconvenience — it is often the deciding factor between attending and not attending.

When learning moved online, the barrier did not disappear; it took a different form. Access to a reliable device and a stable internet connection cannot be assumed for ALS learners, and the shift to digital platforms created new forms of exclusion for those who were already on the margins. Technology is only an enabler when it is actually accessible, and for a significant portion of ALS learners, that condition is not met.

Even administrative procedures became walls. Enrollment requirements that seem routine — such as submitting a birth certificate — function as practical barriers for learners in disadvantaged situations. When the program’s own entry points exclude the people it is designed to serve, the system is working against its stated purpose. These are design failures, not personal failings.

The adversity ALS learners face is not only practical. Social stigma surrounding the ALS program and its participants creates a psychological burden that follows learners well beyond the walls of the learning center. The fear of being judged — seen as someone who gave up on school, as lesser than those who went through the formal system — is a real and documented experience, not an exaggeration.

For learners who eventually transition to formal post-secondary education, that stigma does not simply fade. Some continue to encounter condescension from peers and even educators who view an ALS background as a mark of inferiority. The emotional weight of navigating those perceptions, on top of the academic demands of college, is a burden that most of their classmates do not carry.

Beyond stigma, many ALS learners are also carrying the demands of multiple overlapping roles simultaneously. Being a parent, a worker, and a student at the same time is not an unusual situation for ALS completers — it is the norm. The expectation that learners can simply

compartmentalize these roles and focus on studying ignores the reality of how intertwined these responsibilities actually are. Role overload is not a personal limitation. It is a structural condition that the program and its stakeholders must take seriously.

The Friction of Survival, taken as a whole, reframes what it means for an ALS learner to persist. Every day that a learner continues, despite financial pressure, geographic distance, inadequate technology, administrative barriers, and emotional exhaustion, is an act of considerable determination. The RRM treats these conditions not as background details but as the foundational context without which nothing else in the model can be properly understood.

Phase 2: The Architecture of Re-entry (*Theme 2: The Transformative Power of Flexible Pedagogy*)

The second dimension describes the structural and pedagogical features of the ALS program that make continued learning possible despite the adversities captured in Phase 1. At the heart of this dimension is what the model terms Structural Elasticity — the principle that the program bends to fit the learner's life rather than requiring the learner to set that life aside in order to participate.

This is a meaningful departure from how formal education is typically organized. Conventional schooling is built around fixed schedules, fixed locations, and a standardized pace that assumes learners can conform to the institution's timeline. ALS operates on a different logic. The question it implicitly asks is not how the learner can fit the system, but how the system can fit the learner. That reorientation, while simple to state, is difficult to sustain — and when it works, it explains much of what makes ALS effective for the populations it serves.

The flexibility of ALS class schedules is consistently identified as the program's most valued feature among learners. For individuals who are also caregivers, workers, or household managers, the ability to study at times that do not conflict with these responsibilities is not a convenience — it is the condition that makes participation possible at all. A program that demands attendance at fixed hours effectively excludes everyone whose obligations prevent them from being free at those hours.

The learner-centered design of ALS — whether delivered in face-to-face, blended, or distance learning modalities — allows participants to make progress without sacrificing the other roles they cannot set aside. The program's structure acknowledges that its learners have lives outside of school, and it accommodates those lives instead of competing with them.

The modular, self-paced approach of ALS is especially significant for learners who cannot follow a fixed class schedule. Being able to work through learning materials at one's own pace, and to manage the sequencing of that work around other demands, reduces the pressure that rigid timelines would otherwise create. This is not simply a matter of convenience — for many learners, it is what keeps them enrolled at all.

Teacher adaptability is equally important within this dimension. ALS teachers who extend deadlines, simplify instructional content, and communicate in the learner's own language — including the local dialect — are not just making accommodations. They are putting the principle of Structural Elasticity into practice at the relational level. Flexibility in ALS is not only structural; it is also

interpersonal. A system can be designed to be flexible and still feel rigid if the people within it do not operate with the same orientation.

Community Learning Centers extend this logic geographically. By bringing learning opportunities closer to where learners actually live, these centers reduce one of the most persistent practical barriers to participation. For learners in remote or underserved communities, proximity to a learning center is not a minor logistical detail — it is the difference between access and exclusion.

The outcomes made possible by the Architecture of Re-Entry go well beyond completion of a basic education program. When the program's structural features are functioning as intended, learners are able to use ALS as a genuine pathway — not a dead end, not a consolation prize, but a legitimate route from non-formal education toward higher learning, professional certification, and meaningful employment.

The transition of ALS completers into post-secondary education, board examinations, and careers — including opportunities abroad — demonstrates that when the architecture is in place, the program can do more than simply bring learners back to educational parity. It can launch them into trajectories that were previously closed off. That potential, however, is contingent on the program actually delivering on its structural promises — which is precisely why the gaps in policy implementation, resource availability, and technological access documented across the studies matter so much.

There is a tendency, in how ALS is sometimes described, to frame it as a program for people who could not succeed in 'real' school. The findings of this synthesis reject that framing. ALS, when the Architecture of Re-Entry is functioning well, is a launching pad. The people using it are not there because they failed — they are there because the first system failed them.

Phase 3: Transformative Agency (*Theme 3: The Role of Support System in Sustaining Academic Engagement*)

The third dimension brings together two closely related phenomena: the relational and institutional support that sustains learners through the program, and the transformation in self-perception that emerges as learners progress and complete it. These two aspects are treated together because they are inseparable — the support makes the transformation possible, and the transformation is what gives the support its lasting significance.

One of the clearest findings across the studies is that no ALS learner completes the program entirely on their own. Behind every completer is a network of people and institutions that helped carry the weight — teachers who went beyond their job description, family members who kept the motivation alive, peers who provided solidarity, and community structures that filled the gaps. Acknowledging this is not a diminishment of individual effort. It is an honest account of how resilience actually works.

ALS teachers occupy a role that extends well beyond instruction. The most effective among them provide individualized support, mentor learners through personal challenges, offer emotional encouragement, and maintain consistent contact with their students even outside of formal class sessions. This level of engagement is not required by any job description — it reflects a personal commitment to the learners they serve.

The teacher-learner relationship in ALS carries a particular weight because many of these learners have already experienced being failed or overlooked by an educational system. A teacher who shows up consistently, who listens, and who adjusts their approach to meet each learner where they are does something that goes beyond pedagogy. For a learner who arrived at ALS with damaged confidence and a history of educational exclusion, that kind of presence can be genuinely transformative.

Across the studies, family emerges as the most consistently cited source of motivation for ALS learners. The drive to persist is rarely described in purely personal terms — it is almost always relational. Learners continue not simply because they want a credential, but because they are working toward something for the people they love: a better life for their children, stability for their household, the ability to provide in ways that their own parents could not.

This relational dimension of motivation has important implications. It means that the will to persist is not primarily generated from within the individual — it is sustained by connection. When those connections are strong and supportive, the learner's capacity to endure difficulty is significantly amplified. When they are absent or strained, even the most determined learner may find it difficult to continue.

The relationships formed among ALS learners themselves also play a meaningful role in sustaining engagement. Studying alongside people who are navigating the same kinds of difficulties — who are also managing roles outside of school, who also carry the social stigma of the ALS label, who also know what it means to have left formal education and returned — creates a form of solidarity that formal instructional design cannot replicate.

This peer solidarity affects not only emotional wellbeing but academic behavior. Learners who feel understood and supported by their classmates are more likely to remain engaged, to seek help when they need it, and to continue when the weight of their circumstances becomes difficult to carry alone.

Beyond the immediate classroom environment, broader institutional and community support networks play an important role in sustaining ALS learners' educational journeys. Foundations that offer extended support — covering not only ALS but continuing education through college — remove financial barriers that would otherwise terminate a learner's academic trajectory at the point of completion. Government agencies, community organizations, and faith communities each contribute to a network of support that makes continued engagement possible.

For learners coming from particularly difficult circumstances — including those reintegrating into civilian life after involvement in armed conflict — multi-agency coordination is not a supplementary benefit. It is essential. The process of rebuilding a life and rebuilding an educational identity at the same time requires a kind of sustained, multi-layered support that no single institution can provide alone.

Transformative Agency is not only about the external support learners receive — it is also about the internal shift that takes place as a result. For many ALS learners, the act of completing the program produces a change in how they understand themselves, their capabilities, and their futures. Learners who entered the program carrying a quiet sense of

having no real prospects begin to see themselves differently as they progress.

This shift in self-perception — from someone who left school to someone who found a way back — is one of the most significant outcomes documented across the studies. It is not a minor side effect of earning a credential. It is, in many cases, the most meaningful change that ALS produces. A learner who finishes the program with a certificate but still does not believe in their own capacity has not been fully served by it. A learner who finishes knowing they can do hard things — and having the evidence to prove it — carries something that no future obstacle can easily take away.

For rebel returnees, this transformation takes on an additional dimension. Education becomes not merely a path to employment but an act of reclaiming civilian identity and envisioning a future that armed conflict had foreclosed. The phrase *Kakayanin Kahit Mahirap* — 'We can do it even though it's hard' — captures something essential about this: that the determination to continue is itself a form of self-affirmation, not just a means to an end.

The diploma, in this light, is almost secondary. What ALS produces at its best is a person who has rebuilt their sense of what they are capable of, who has reclaimed a future that circumstance had closed off, and who carries forward not just a qualification but a different understanding of themselves.

The RRF's main point is that these three dimensions do not work on their own — they need each other. If the Friction of Survival is not addressed, it will wear down whatever the Architecture of Re-Entry has built. If the Architecture of Re-Entry is there but Transformative Agency is missing, what you end up with are people who have a certificate but still do not feel like they have their dignity back. And if Transformative Agency is expected to happen without the relational support around it, then everything is being placed on the shoulders of individual willpower alone — which is not a fair or reliable foundation.

It is only when all three dimensions come together — when the program adjusts to the learner's life, when the people around them show up, and when the barriers are honestly acknowledged and dealt with — that learning beyond barriers stops being just a possibility and becomes something real and lasting. That is the logic behind the Resilient Recovery Framework, and that is what the findings of this meta-synthesis, taken together, say about what ALS truly is as an educational experience in the Philippines.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

This meta-synthesis of eleven qualitative studies reveals that ALS learners' academic experiences are shaped by three inseparable forces: the structural and personal adversities that pushed them out of formal education, the flexible design that made re-entry possible, and the relational support that kept them going. These are reflected in the Resilient Recovery Model's three phases — the Friction of Survival, the Architecture of Re-Entry, and Transformative Agency.

ALS learners do not choose the program over formal schooling. They arrive because poverty, family instability, stigma, and institutional failures left them no other door. What ALS offers in return is not a replacement for what they lost, but something genuinely different — a structure that bends to fit their lives. And what sustains them is not

willpower alone, but teachers who go beyond their roles, families who carry the motivation when learners cannot, and peers who understand without needing an explanation.

The most significant outcome this synthesis points to is not completion, but transformation — the shift from seeing oneself as someone who failed school to someone who found a way back. That shift, present across all eleven studies, is what ALS produces at its best. The diploma, in that sense, is almost secondary.

What I hope readers — and learners themselves — take from this is that the adversities that brought them to ALS are structural conditions, not personal failures. The determination they show in continuing their education is, in itself, an achievement worth claiming. ALS, when working as intended, is not a fallback. It is proof that education, designed with honesty about people's actual lives, can reach everyone it was always meant to serve.

For teachers and program administrators, the RRF offers a practical lens for understanding where a learner is struggling and what kind of response is appropriate. The three-phase structure makes visible the difference between a learner held back by material poverty and one who lacks relational support — two situations that look similar on the surface but require different interventions. This kind of diagnostic clarity can inform how teachers engage, how programs are monitored, and how resources are directed. On that regard, professional development for ALS educators must include training in individualized instruction, trauma-informed practice, and community-based outreach as core competencies, with the extended work teachers already do — home visits, learner monitoring, emotional support — formally recognized and institutionally supported rather than left to personal initiative.

At the policy level, the framework's insistence on the interdependence of its three phases makes the case that underinvestment in any one dimension undermines the entire program. Flexible scheduling means little if learners cannot afford to attend. Teacher dedication means little without institutional support. The RRF gives policymakers a coherent framework for evaluating whether the implementation of Republic Act 11510 is actually addressing the conditions that determine whether learners persist or disengage. However, material support mechanisms — including transportation subsidies, learning material assistance, and streamlined enrollment requirements — must be integrated directly into ALS program delivery as conditions of access, not afterthoughts. The Community Learning Centers in underserved and remote areas should be expanded, and device and internet access must be treated as a basic program requirement wherever online or blended modalities are used. Also, the curriculum articulation between ALS and post-secondary education should be formally addressed through bridging programs and academic transition support, so that completers are not academically unprepared when they enter higher education.

More broadly, this study contributes to the argument that second-chance education is not a peripheral concern but a direct measure of a society's commitment to genuine inclusion. The people ALS serves are not lacking in capacity — they are lacking in access. Treating ALS as a core component of an equitable education system, rather than a stopgap, is both the practical and moral conclusion this synthesis points toward. In this, families, local government units, non-governmental organizations, and faith

communities should actively reduce the social stigma surrounding ALS participation and coordinate with the program to fill resource gaps that institutional support alone cannot cover.

Also, for future research, a longitudinal studies following ALS completers into college, employment, and community life are needed, alongside dedicated research into the identity transformation the RRM identifies as the program's most meaningful — and least measured — outcome, and studies that examine program failure as rigorously as program success.

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