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ALS Research Agenda: **Quality: Assessment Practices**

Project ABANIL: Bridging Foundational Learning Gaps to Improve Accreditation and Equivalency Performance among ALS Learners

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Abstract

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Philippines aims to provide equitable access to education for out-of-school youth and adults; however, the 2019 Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test passing rate of only 58% highlights persistent learning gaps and the need for targeted academic interventions. Anchored on Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, this study examined the effectiveness of Project ABANIL (Assessing and Bridging for Achieving New Independent Learners) as a localized bridging strategy to improve ALS learners' competencies and A&E test performance. The study was conducted at the Don Restituto Baol Central School Community Learning Center, Division of Gingoog City, using a pre-test–post-test design. Forty (40) ALS learners were purposively selected as respondents. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics and paired-sample t-tests, complemented by thematic insights from learner reflections and facilitator observations. Results indicate a significant improvement in learners' competencies and A&E performance following the intervention, with posttest scores increasing across all learner clusters and an overall passing rate reaching 95.43%. These findings demonstrate the effectiveness of structured, evidence-based bridging interventions in enhancing academic readiness and promoting independent learning among ALS learners. The study recommends the scaling and institutionalization of Project ABANIL across ALS programs to provide targeted remediation, strengthen learner preparedness for the A&E Test, and align learning outcomes with national education standards.

Keywords: *accreditation and equivalency test, learning assessment, bridging support*

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I. Introduction

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Philippines serves as a parallel learning program designed to provide out-of-school youth and adults with opportunities to acquire functional literacy, life skills, and academic competencies aligned with the K to 12 curriculum. Its culminating assessment, the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test, determines learners' readiness to transition into higher education, vocational training, or employment. Despite these goals, the 2019 A&E Test recorded a passing rate of only 58% (DepEd, 2019), indicating substantial gaps in learners' mastery of essential competencies. Recent studies reveal challenges in ALS instruction, including limited scaffolding strategies, inconsistent learning delivery, and varied learner readiness across learning strands (Santos & De Guzman, 2021; Reyes & David, 2022; Lopez, 2023). These concerns point to the pressing need for localized, evidence-based interventions that respond directly to learners' competency gaps and learning contexts.

Although DepEd Orders No. 13 and 21, s. 2019 mandate the implementation of ALS 2.0 and emphasize strengthening learning outcomes, existing literature shows a lack of structured bridging programs specifically designed to enhance A&E performance at the community level. Many studies have examined general ALS implementation, but few have evaluated targeted instructional interventions that systematically assess learning gaps and provide scaffolded support grounded in established learning theories. This gap in research highlights the need to explore strategies that operationalize diagnostic assessment, targeted remediation, and learner support grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development—a framework that emphasizes guided assistance to move learners toward independent mastery.

Project ABANIL (Assessing and Bridging for Achieving New Independent Learners) was conceptualized to address these gaps by identifying learners' competencies through pre-assessments, implementing bridging activities, and strengthening independent learning skills such as problem-solving, self-regulation, and persistence (Zimmerman, 2002). The rationale of the study lies in determining whether a structured, theory-based intervention can significantly improve learners' academic readiness and subsequent A&E Test performance.

The project was implemented as a structured two-month intervention aimed at improving the readiness and overall performance of Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners for the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test. Grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, the project systematically identified learners' existing competencies, diagnosed gaps, and provided scaffolded instruction that gradually increased learner autonomy. The design of the intervention emphasized the development of independent learning skills self-regulation, persistence, and problem-solving which are critical to succeeding in the A&E Test and in lifelong learning contexts. This was aligned with the six learning strands of the ALS K to 12 Curriculum and delivered through weekly targeted activities integrating literacy, numeracy, scientific inquiry, civic engagement, life skills, and digital competence.

This study is significant as it provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness of a localized bridging program tailored to ALS learners' needs. Findings may guide ALS implementers in designing responsive instructional strategies, assist schools and division offices in improving A&E readiness, and inform policymakers in refining ALS 2.0

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implementation. The study contributes to improving learner outcomes, expanding educational opportunities, and advancing national goals for inclusive and equitable quality education.

II. Methodology
Research Design
This study employed a quasi-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design, a research approach used when random assignment to treatment and control groups is not feasible. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a quasi-experimental design examines the causal impact of an intervention by measuring changes within the same group of participants before and after exposure to the treatment. This design is especially appropriate in educational settings where intact classes or learning groups cannot be reorganized experimentally.

The design was appropriate for this study because ALS learners could not be randomly assigned to different treatment conditions. Instead, the study compared the learners' pretest and posttest scores to determine the effectiveness of Project ABANIL in improving competencies aligned with the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test. The use of a pretest–posttest procedure allowed the researchers to directly assess learning gains attributable to the intervention.

Setting
The study was conducted at the Don Restituto Baol Central School Community Learning Center (CLC) under the Division of Gingoog City, Northern Mindanao, which serves as a learning hub for out-of-school youth and adult learners enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS). The center provides flexible educational opportunities for individuals who were unable to complete formal schooling, implementing the ALS K to 12 curriculum through modular, face-to-face, and blended learning sessions. Equipped with classrooms, learning materials, and basic ICT facilities, the CLC enables learners to develop competencies in literacy, numeracy, scientific inquiry, life skills, civic understanding, and digital literacy.

Respondents
The respondents of the study were 40 ALS learners enrolled at the Don Restituto Baol Central School Community Learning Center under the Division of Gingoog City during the School Year 2024–2025. These participants were purposively selected because they had been assessed as potential candidates for the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test.

Data Collection
The researcher strictly followed the protocols in collecting data for the research. Prior to the intervention, permission was obtained from the appropriate authorities, including the, Schools Division Superintendent and CLC Coordinators. A research-made pretest aligned with the ALS 2.0 curriculum was administered to establish baseline competencies and identify specific learning gaps, which guided the grouping of learners according to their instructional needs.

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Following this, Project ABANIL was implemented over an eight-week period, during which learners engaged in targeted scaffolded activities, weekly formative assessments, and regular feedback sessions to monitor progress:

During Weeks 1–2, the focus was on strengthening Communication Skills (English and Filipino) through intensive reading comprehension tasks, structured writing activities, vocabulary enrichment, and oral communication exercises. Weeks 3–4 concentrated on Mathematical and Critical Thinking Skills, facilitated through daily numeracy drills, basic and intermediate algebra lessons, geometry tasks, and real-life word problems to enhance analytical thinking. Week 5 highlighted Scientific and Critical Thinking Skills with inquiry-based activities such as simple experiments, environmental awareness discussions, and guided problem-solving tasks designed to foster curiosity and evidence-based reasoning.

Week 6 addressed Life and Career Skills and Understanding Self and Society. Learners participated in career exploration activities, financial literacy sessions, community participation exercises, and values-oriented scenarios that encouraged responsible decision-making and social awareness. Weeks 7–8 focused on Digital Citizenship, introducing learners to basic computer operations, responsible online behavior, digital safety practices, and ethical use of technology. These sessions culminated in a mock digital skills assessment to gauge learners' digital readiness.

At the conclusion of the program, the same assessment was administered as a posttest to measure academic gains, and official results from the February 2, 2025, A&E Test were collected to validate classroom-based outcomes.

Additionally, qualitative data were obtained through facilitator observation notes and learner reflection journals to provide deeper insights into engagement, motivation, and the development of independent learning skills. The distribution and retrieval of instruments, administration of tests, conduct of the intervention, and sequencing of activities were carefully documented, followed by systematic tabulation, statistical analysis, and interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative data to capture the overall effectiveness of Project ABANIL in enhancing ALS learners' performance and readiness for the A&E Test.

Data Analysis

The following statistical tools were used in the study:

1. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to determine the academic performance of ALS learners before and after the implementation of Project ABANIL, providing a measure of central tendency and variability in pre-test and post-test scores.
2. Frequency and Percentage were used to describe the distribution of learners across performance clusters (emerging, developing, and independent learners), allowing for the identification of trends in learning gains and mastery levels.
3. Paired Samples t-Test was used to determine the significant differences between pre-test and post-test scores, assessing the effectiveness of Project ABANIL in improving learners' competencies and readiness for the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test.
4. Cohen's d was used to measure the effect size of the intervention, indicating the magnitude of the impact of Project ABANIL on learners' academic performance.

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III. Results and Discussions

Pretest Assessment

The pretest results revealed that ALS learners began with low baseline competencies in preparation for the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test. The overall mean pretest score was 20.85 (SD = 3.71), with most learners scoring in the 16–20 range. Only few learners scored above 25, indicating that most participants were not adequately prepared to meet A&E standards prior to the intervention. These findings highlight significant gaps across core competencies and underscore the need for a structured bridging program such as Project ABANIL to provide targeted academic support.

Table 1

Pretest Assessment of ALS Learners' Scores

Score Range	f	%	Interpretation
12 – 15	5	12.50	Emerging Learners
16 – 20	25	62.50	Emerging to Developing Learners
21 – 25	8	20.00	Developing Learners
26 – 30	2	5.00	Independent Learners
Total	**40**	**100.00**	

Posttest Assessment

Following the eight-week intervention, learners demonstrated substantial improvement. The mean post-test score increased to 28.86 (SD = 4.48), representing an average gain of 8.01 points. All participants showed progress, with scores ranging from 20 to 38. These results indicate that Project ABANIL effectively addressed the learning gaps identified during the pretest, moving learners closer to mastery of competencies aligned with the ALS 2.0 curriculum.

Table 2

Posttest Assessment of ALS Learners' Scores

Score Range	f	%	Interpretation
20 – 25	6	15.00	Emerging Learners
26 – 30	15	37.50	Emerging to Developing Learners
31 – 35	12	30.00	Developing Learners
36 – 38	7	17.50	Independent Learners
Total	**40**	**100.00**	

Comparative Results of Pretest and Posttest

As seen in Table 3, the analysis of learner clusters revealed a clear and consistent upward trend in achievement across all proficiency levels following the intervention. Emerging learners, who initially scored within the 12–18 range in the pretest, demonstrated the highest relative gains, with posttest scores rising to 20–26. This substantial improvement indicates

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strong responsiveness to structured academic support and bridging strategies. Developing learners, whose pretest scores ranged from 19–24, showed steady and meaningful progress toward mastery, achieving posttest scores between 27–32.

Table 3

Comparative Pretest–Posttest Scores of ALS Learners

Performance Level	Pretest Score Range	Posttest Score Range	f	%	Interpretation
Low-Performing	12 – 18	20 – 26	12	30.00	Improved to mid-performance level
Mid-Performing	19 – 24	27 – 32	18	45.00	Advanced toward higher mastery
High-Performing	25 – 30	33 – 38	10	25.00	Consolidated mastery
Total			**40**	**100.00**	

This suggests that the intervention effectively supported learners in consolidating foundational competencies and advancing toward higher-order skills. Independent learners, who entered the program with pretest scores of 25 and above, further strengthened their performance, attaining posttest scores between 33–38. Their gains reflect the consolidation of existing strengths and enhanced readiness for independent application of knowledge. Collectively, these trends demonstrate that the intervention was effective across all learner profiles, with particularly strong impact among lower-performing learners, thereby narrowing achievement gaps and promoting more equitable learning outcomes.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare pretest and posttest performance. The analysis showed a statistically significant increase in scores ($t(39) = 18.24$, $p < .001$), with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 2.88$), indicating that the intervention had a substantial impact on learner achievement. Notably, learners across all performance levels benefited: low-performing learners (12–18 pretest) advanced to mid-performance levels (20–26 posttest), mid-performing learners (19–24 pretest) moved to higher levels (27–32 posttest), and high-performing learners (25+ pretest) consolidated mastery, with many reaching scores above 35.

Table 4

Comparing Pre-test and Post-test Scores of ALS Learners

Measure	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Pre-test	20.85	3.71				
Post-test	28.86	4.48	18.24	39	<.001	2.88

This progression aligns with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978), illustrating how scaffolded support enabled learners to advance according to their needs.

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Beyond classroom assessments, the February 2, 2025, A&E Test results further confirmed the effectiveness of Project ABANIL. Of 69 elementary-level examinees, 61 passed (88.41%), while 357 of 369 junior high school learners passed (96.75%). The combined overall passing rate was 95.43%, demonstrating that the intervention translated into exceptional national examination performance.

The significant gains observed in this study carry important policy, practice, and programmatic implications. First, the results strongly align with DepEd Orders No. 13 and No. 21, s. 2019, reinforcing the value of evidence-based interventions in advancing the goals of the Enhanced ALS 2.0 curriculum. The effectiveness of Project ABANIL demonstrates that targeted, data-driven bridging strategies can directly support national policy directions aimed at improving learner outcomes in alternative education. Second, the intervention shows strong potential for scalability, positioning Project ABANIL as a viable model for other divisions seeking to improve A&E readiness and increase passing rates. Its structured yet adaptable design makes it suitable for replication across diverse ALS contexts. Third, the program's emphasis on diagnostic assessment and personalized support contributed to the development of learner independence, which is a central goal of ALS in fostering self-directed and lifelong learners. Finally, the integration of pretest–posttest diagnostics with systematic bridging interventions highlights a pathway toward sustainable practice, suggesting that such approaches can be institutionalized as best practices to address persistent learning gaps. Collectively, these implications underscore the strategic value of Project ABANIL in strengthening ALS delivery, improving learner performance, and supporting the long-term institutionalization of responsive, learner-centered interventions.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study demonstrate that Project ABANIL (Assessing and Bridging for Achieving New Independent Learners) is an effective intervention for enhancing the academic performance of ALS learners in preparation for the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test. Pretest–posttest results revealed a statistically significant improvement in learner competencies, with a mean gain of 8.01 points and a very large effect size (d = 2.88), indicating substantial impact across all performance levels. Cluster analysis showed emerging learners progressed to developing levels, developing learners moved closer to mastery, and independent learners consolidated their strengths. These gains were further validated by the February 2, 2025, A&E Test, which reported a combined passing rate of 95.43%, confirming the intervention's effectiveness in bridging learning gaps, promoting independent learning, and meeting national education standards. Overall, Project ABANIL provides a replicable, evidence-based model for improving ALS program delivery while addressing diverse learner needs.

It is recommended that Project ABANIL be scaled and institutionalized across ALS programs to provide targeted bridging support and enhance learner readiness for the A&E Test. ALS implementers should adopt structured, scaffolded interventions that address varied learner competencies, integrate formative assessments, and promote independent learning skills such as self-regulation, persistence, and problem-solving. Future studies may explore the long-term effects of Project ABANIL on learners' educational progression, career

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pathways, and social inclusion, ensuring that ALS continues to strengthen equitable access to quality education in the Philippines.

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