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ALS Research Agenda: **In-Program Tracking of Learners**

Improving Learner Completion in the Alternative Learning System: Evidence-Based Inputs for an Intervention Program in SDO Misamis Occidental

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Abstract

This study examined the factors influencing the completion of Junior High School learners enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Schools Division Office of Misamis Occidental, Philippines, to inform the design of a targeted intervention program. While ALS serves as a second-chance education pathway for out-of-school youth and adults, learner completion remains a persistent challenge that limits program effectiveness. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected through structured surveys, complemented by interviews and focus group discussions to contextualize learner experiences. The study analyzed key determinants including socioeconomic conditions, personal and family responsibilities, educational gaps, and community-related factors, as well as demographic variations in age, sex, and socioeconomic status. Findings indicate that financial constraints, competing work and household responsibilities, low academic preparedness, and limited family and community support significantly affect learners' persistence and completion. Differences across demographic groups further highlight the need for differentiated support strategies. Based on these results, the study proposes the development of a comprehensive intervention program incorporating financial assistance mechanisms, parental and family engagement strategies, customized learning plans, and community advocacy initiatives to strengthen learner retention and completion. The study contributes empirical evidence on learner persistence in alternative education contexts and underscores the importance of systematic in-program tracking and responsive interventions to improve ALS completion rates. Strengthening these mechanisms is essential to ensuring that more learners successfully complete the program and achieve meaningful educational and socio-economic outcomes.

Keywords: *completion, cohort survival, intervention program*

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I. Introduction

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) is an educational program designed to provide learning opportunities for out-of-school children, youth, and adults who are unable to finish formal education. However, completion of ALS programs can be influenced by several factors. Key determinants commonly associated with low completion include socio-economic challenges, limited support systems, health problems, employment constraints, and lack of motivation. Hussain et al. (2010) revealed that psychosocial factors such as motivation, self-esteem, stress, test anxiety, help-seeking behavior, academic overload, student adjustment, self-efficacy, mental distress, major life changes, and lack of social support can significantly affect a learner's ability to continue their studies.

In the past three years, the Schools Division Office (SDO) of Misamis Occidental recorded a notable decline in ALS completion rates—from 81.7% in 2020 to 64.4% in 2021. This 17.24% decrease raises concerns about the capability of the program to sustain learner engagement until completion. ALS learners, many of whom are out-of-school youth, present diverse backgrounds shaped by socio-economic conditions, cultural contexts, and personal circumstances. They may encounter limited social support from their families or communities and may experience stigma, social isolation, or exclusion that affects their well-being and persistence in the program. Some also face heightened risks such as substance abuse, violence, or early marriage due to the absence of structured activities and supportive environments. The diversity and complexity of these circumstances highlight that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to supporting out-of-school youth. Addressing their needs requires a comprehensive understanding of their individual situations and the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including educators, families, policymakers, and community organizations.

Education plays a vital role in breaking the cycle of poverty. Providing out-of-school youth with educational opportunities increases their chances of gaining skills and qualifications that can lead to better employment prospects and improved quality of life. It also reduces the likelihood of intergenerational poverty. Beyond economic benefits, education empowers individuals by developing their knowledge, competencies, and personal agency. It equips them to make informed decisions, pursue their aspirations, and meaningfully contribute to society.

Given these realities, examining the factors that affect ALS learner completion is both urgent and essential. This study is significant because it addresses a critical issue in the education sector: the persistently low completion rates of junior high school ALS learners. By understanding the challenges faced by learners, ALS implementers and facilitators will be able to design targeted teaching strategies, develop responsive interventions, and inform policy enhancements that address systemic barriers. The findings of this research are also valuable for families and communities, as the insights may strengthen support mechanisms, reduce stigma, and encourage the establishment of local initiatives that promote ALS participation and completion. Furthermore, the study contributes to the body of knowledge on ALS, providing a foundation for future research, especially in underserved or high-need areas.

To ensure a focused investigation, the study concentrated on completers and non-completers in SDO Misamis Occidental for School Year 2022–2023. Among the sixteen districts in the division, only those with the highest records of completion and non-completion were included. From these districts, 10% of the total number of completers and non-

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completers served as respondents. As Creswell (2009) notes, qualitative studies require a limited number of participants to allow for meaningful interaction and in-depth exploration; thus, the findings of this study are not intended for broad generalization but rather for contextual understanding and intervention design within the division.

Thus, this study was conducted to identify the personal, socio-economic, and institutional factors affecting learner completion in the ALS program in SDO Misamis Occidental. By examining both completers and non-completers, the research aimed to generate evidence-based insights that would inform the development of a responsive intervention program designed to improve learner retention, strengthen facilitator support, and enhance ALS implementation in the division. The study contributes to the broader national goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable educational opportunities for all learners.

This study focused on the factors affecting the completion of learners in ALS program. Specifically, it will seek to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the profile of ALS completers and non-completers in SDO Misamis Occidental on School Year 2022 – 2023 in terms of age, sex, and employment status?
2. What are the factors that motivate out-of-school learners to enroll in the ALS program?
3. What are the factors that affect the completion of learners in ALS program in SDO Misamis Occidental?
4. What are the challenges faced by the learners that hinder their completion in the ALS program?

II. Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design to explore the factors affecting the completion rates of junior high school learners in the ALS program, ensuring a well-rounded analysis of the issues at hand.

The quantitative aspect involves administering structured surveys to ALS learners. These surveys are designed to capture demographic information, socioeconomic status, and perceived barriers to program completion. The data collected provide measurable insights into trends and correlations, enabling statistical analysis. To complement the numerical data, interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) are employed. These methods delve deeper into the individual experiences, challenges, and perspectives of the learners, facilitators, and parents. This component provides a richer understanding of the nuanced factors that influence learner completion.

This design was chosen to address the complexity of the research problem. While quantitative data offer generalizable trends, qualitative insights reveal the contextual and subjective experiences of stakeholders. Together, these methods provide a holistic understanding of the factors affecting ALS completion rates.

Participants

A total of 230 Junior High School ALS learners participated in the study. Using stratified purposive sampling, ten (10) to fifteen (15) learners were selected from each district to ensure representation across all areas covered by the ALS program. These respondents completed

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the survey questionnaire, which was further enriched through key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents per district.

Table 1
Respondents of the Study

District	Number of Respondents
Aloran	15
Baliangao	15
Bonifacio	15
Calamba	15
Clarin North	15
Clarin South	15
Concepcion	10
Don Victoriano	10
Jimenez	15
Lopez Jaena	15
Panaon	15
Plaridel North	15
Plaridel South	15
Sapang Dalaga	15
Sinacaban	15
Tudela	15
Total	**230**

Interview Protocol

The researchers designed an interview protocol instrument and briefly discussed the purpose of the interview and assured participants of confidentiality and voluntary participation. The instrument includes a set of open-ended questions aligned with the research objectives, allowing flexibility for follow-up questions based on participants' responses.
With participants' consent, interviews were recorded for accurate transcription and analysis.

Data Collection

Quantitative surveys were designed to capture demographic information and measure the extent of personal, socio-economic, and institutional factors affecting completion. Questions included multiple choices, and open-ended options. Moreover, a Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was used to explore shared experiences, perceptions, and recommendations for improving ALS completion. The discussions were semi-structured, guided by key themes derived from the research questions.

Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (e.g., learners, implementers, and community leaders) provided in-depth insights into the challenges faced by learners and the support systems in place. Questions were flexible to adapt to the respondent's context and responses. Conduct of observations during ALS sessions were done to understand the teaching-learning dynamics and identify potential barriers to engagement and completion.

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Data Analysis

Frequency counts and percentages were utilized to analyze the data collected from the survey. Through this, the factors with the highest percentages were identified and were considered in crafting an intervention program to improve the completion rate of ALS learners in SDO Misamis Occidental.

IV. Results and Discussion

ALS Completers and Non-Completers according to Age

As seen in Figure 1, the graph illustrates clear age-based patterns in the completion and non-completion of learners enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS), specifically in SDO Misamis Occidental. The highest concentration of both completers (48) and non-completers (51) is observed in the under 18 age group, indicating that while many young learners are engaging with ALS, a slightly larger proportion struggles to complete the program. This suggests heightened vulnerability among minors, who may face competing demands such as household responsibilities, economic pressures, or limited academic preparedness. A similar pattern is evident in the 18–24 age group, where non-completers (43) slightly outnumber completers (41), reflecting transitional life challenges commonly associated with early adulthood, including employment pressures and family formation.

Figure 1

Profile of ALS Completers and Non-Completers according to Age

PROFILE OF ALS COMPLETERS AND NON-COMPLETERS ACCORDING TO AGE

■ Completers ■ Non-completers
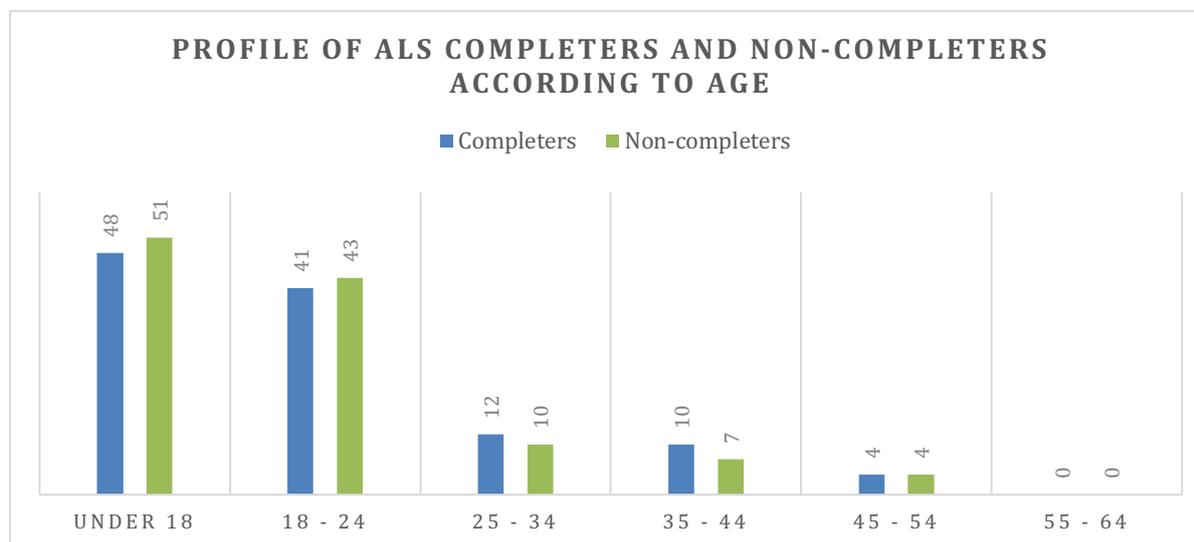
In contrast, the 25–34 and 35–44 age groups show higher completion than non-completion, with completers (12 and 10, respectively) exceeding non-completers (10 and 7). This trend suggests that adult learners in these age brackets may demonstrate stronger goal orientation, clearer motivation, and greater commitment to educational completion, likely driven by employment and family responsibilities. The 45–54 age group shows parity between completers and non-completers (4 each), indicating balanced persistence and attrition.

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Notably, there are no recorded completers or non-completers in the 55–64 age group, suggesting minimal participation of older adults in ALS within the sampled population.

Overall, the pattern indicates that younger learners are more at risk of non-completion, while adult learners exhibit higher persistence and completion tendencies. These findings highlight the need for age-sensitive intervention strategies, particularly targeted support mechanisms, mentoring, and engagement programs for younger ALS learners to improve retention and completion outcomes.

ALS Completers and Non-Completers according to Sex

Based on Figure 2, the graph presents a comparative profile of ALS completers and non-completers by sex, revealing notable gender-based patterns in learner persistence and completion. Among male learners, completers account for 55%, while non-completers comprise 49%, indicating a slightly higher completion tendency among males. This suggests that male learners in the ALS program may exhibit marginally stronger persistence or continuity in participation, possibly influenced by employment-driven motivations, goal orientation, or social expectations related to economic productivity.

Figure 2

Profile of ALS Completers and Non-Completers according to Sex
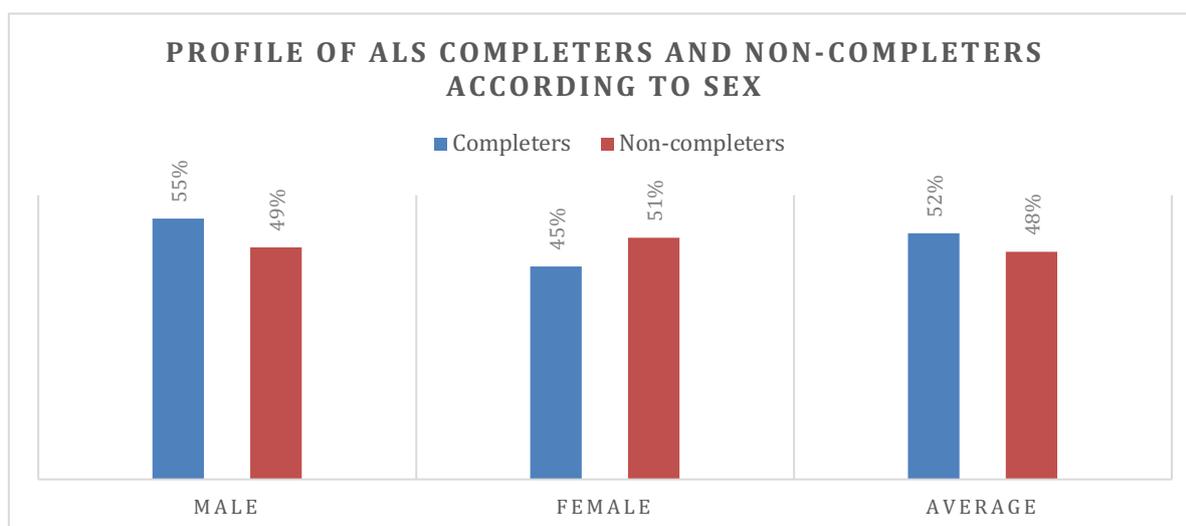
On the other hand, female learners show a reverse pattern, with 45% completers and 51% non-completers, indicating a higher proportion of non-completion among females. This trend may reflect the disproportionate burden of domestic responsibilities, caregiving roles, early motherhood, and household management that often fall on women, particularly in low-income contexts. These responsibilities can interrupt learning continuity and limit time and energy for sustained educational engagement, thereby increasing the risk of attrition.

When averaged across sexes, the overall completion rate stands at 52%, while non-completion is 48%, suggesting a generally balanced pattern but with underlying gender disparities. The divergence between male and female completion trends highlights the need

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for gender-responsive interventions in ALS programming. Specifically, targeted support mechanisms such as flexible scheduling, childcare support, family engagement strategies, and psychosocial assistance may be necessary to improve completion outcomes among female learners. Addressing these gendered barriers is critical to ensuring equitable access, participation, and success in alternative education pathways.

ALS Completers and Non-Completers according to Employment Status

In terms of employment status as seen in Figure 3, the graph reveals distinct patterns in ALS completion and non-completion when disaggregated by employment status, underscoring the significant influence of work conditions on learner persistence. Among full-time employed learners, completion is notably low at 4%, while non-completion stands at 7%, indicating that learners engaged in full-time work face substantial challenges in sustaining participation in ALS. The demands of regular employment, long working hours, and physical fatigue likely limit their capacity to attend sessions consistently and complete program requirements. This pattern suggests that full-time employment is a strong risk factor for attrition in ALS.

Figure 3

Profile of ALS Completers and Non-Completers according to Employment Status
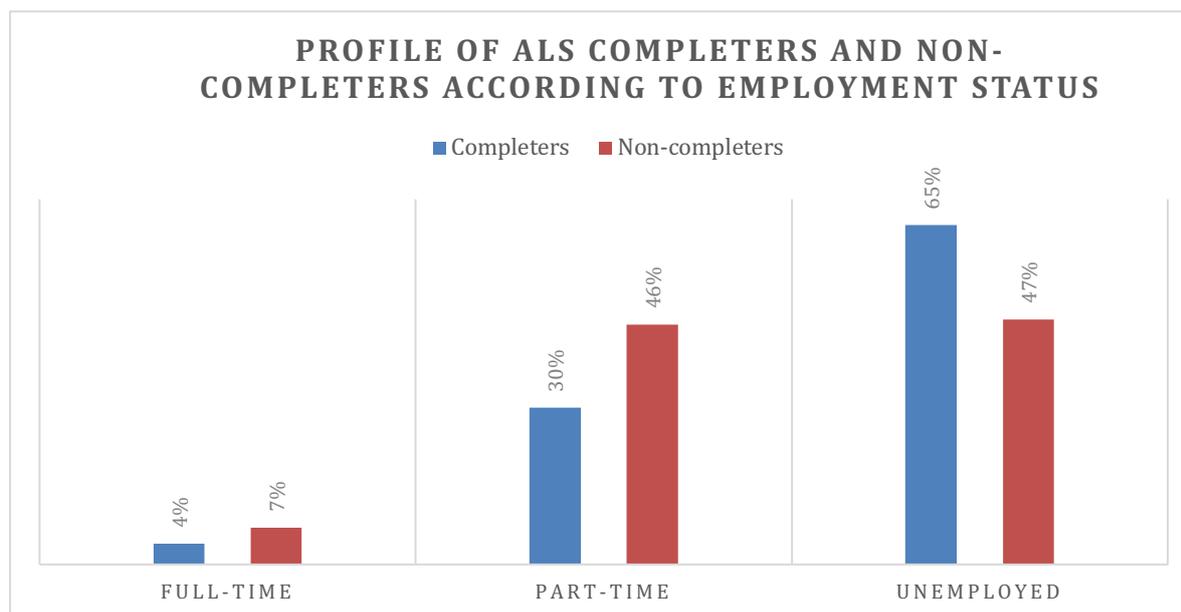
A more pronounced disparity is observed among part-time employed learners, where 30% are completers compared to 46% non-completers. This indicates that while part-time work may offer some flexibility, it still poses significant barriers to completion, particularly when work schedules are irregular or unstable. The higher proportion of non-completers in this group reflects the tension between income generation and educational engagement, highlighting the need for more adaptive scheduling and learner support mechanisms.

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In contrast, unemployed learners show the highest completion rate at 65%, with non-completers at 47%. This suggests that learners without employment have greater availability and flexibility to engage in ALS activities, leading to stronger persistence and higher completion outcomes. However, it also reflects the reality that many unemployed learners turn to ALS precisely as a pathway to improve their employability.

All in all, the data indicate that employment status is a critical determinant of ALS completion, with working learners—particularly those in full-time and part-time employment—being more vulnerable to attrition. These findings underscore the need for work-responsive ALS delivery models, such as flexible schedules, modular pacing, weekend or evening classes, and employer-linked learning arrangements, to support working learners and reduce dropout risks.

Motivation to Enrollment in Alternative Learning System

As gleaned in Figure 4, the graph illustrates the primary motivations that drive learners to enroll in the Alternative Learning System (ALS), revealing clear patterns that have direct implications for learner persistence and completion. The most dominant motivating factor across both completers and non-completers is the need for a high school diploma or its equivalent, with the highest combined frequency among all categories. This underscores the instrumental value of ALS as a pathway to formal certification, employment eligibility, and social mobility. The strong reliance on ALS for credential attainment highlights the program's critical role in addressing structural educational exclusion.

Figure 4
Factors that Motivate Enrollment in Alternative Learning System
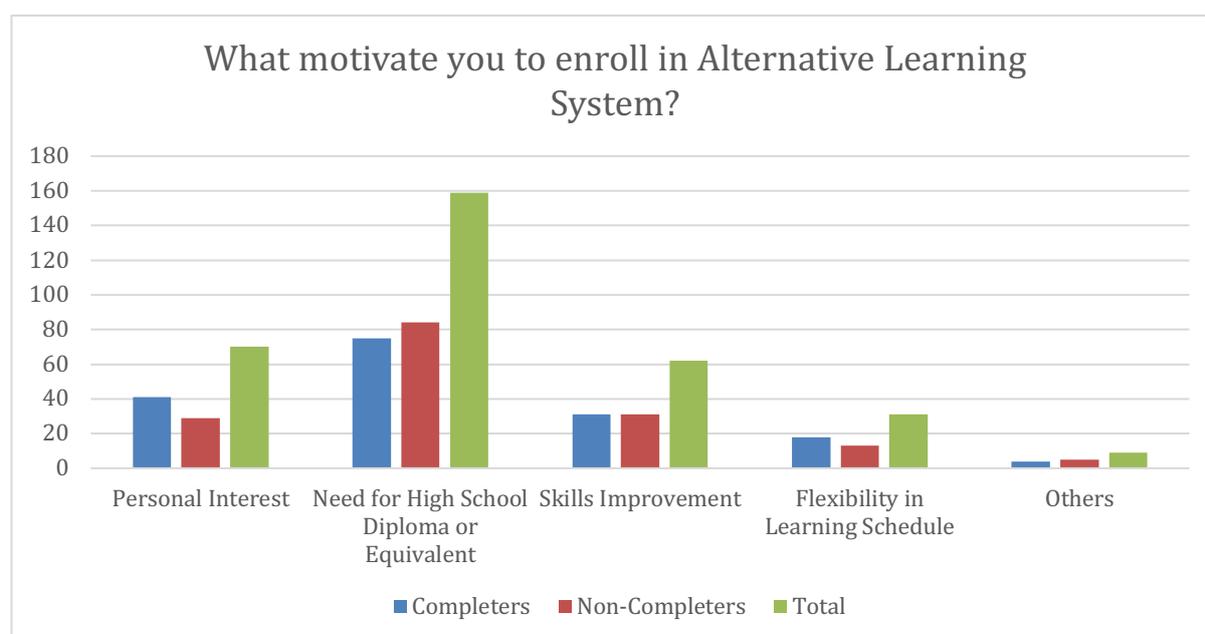
Personal interest emerges as the second most cited motivation, with a notably higher representation among completers than non-completers. This suggests that intrinsic motivation

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plays a significant role in sustaining learner engagement and increasing the likelihood of completion. Learners who enroll due to personal interest may possess stronger goal orientation, self-regulation, and commitment to learning, which are essential for persistence in non-formal education settings.

Skills improvement is also a significant motivating factor, particularly among completers, indicating that learners who perceive ALS as a means to enhance competencies and employability are more likely to persist. This aligns with human capital theory, where education is viewed as an investment in personal and economic advancement. In contrast, flexibility in learning schedule, while valued, appears less dominant, suggesting that while flexibility attracts learners, it is not the primary driver of enrollment. The "others" category registers the lowest frequency, indicating that most motivations are captured within the major categories.

These data suggest that credential attainment, intrinsic interest, and skills development are the strongest motivational drivers in ALS enrollment. These findings imply that interventions should reinforce these motivations through clear pathways to certification, visible skills outcomes, and learner-centered approaches to strengthen engagement and completion.

Learners' Completion in Alternative Learning System

The graph in Figure 5 highlights the key support systems and resources that learners found helpful in completing the Alternative Learning System (ALS) program, revealing a clear hierarchy of influence. **Instructor or tutor support** emerges as the most significant factor, with the highest frequency among respondents. This underscores the central role of ALS implementers in facilitating learner persistence, comprehension, and motivation.

Figure 5
Factors that Contribute to the Completion of Alternative Learning System

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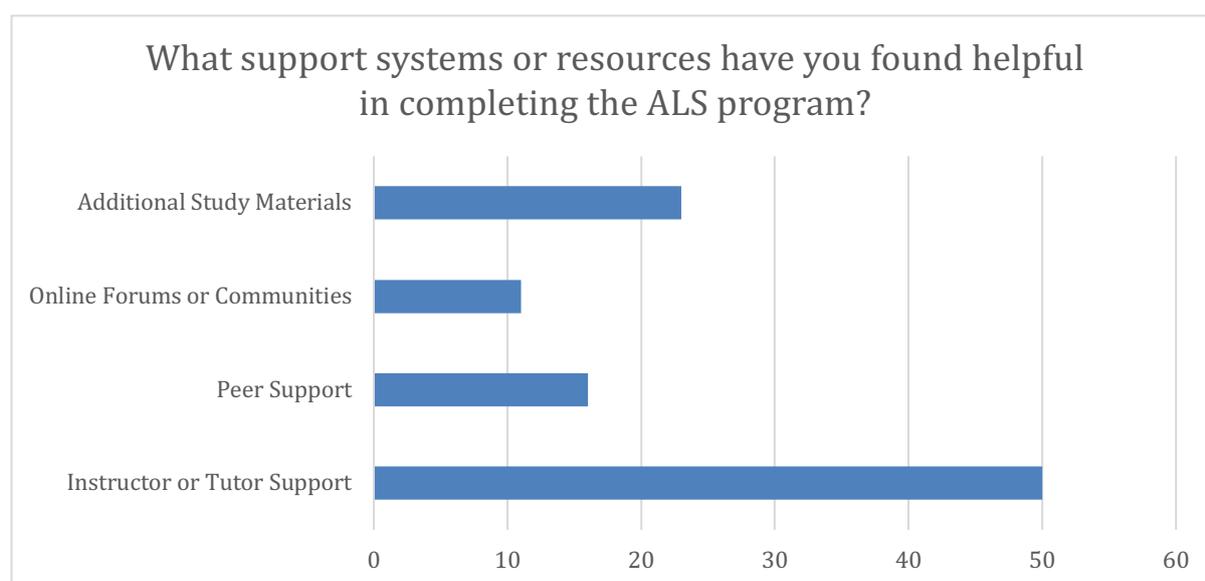
Additional study materials rank second, indicating that access to supplementary learning resources significantly enhances learners' ability to understand content and prepare for assessments. This finding reflects the importance of resource availability in supporting independent study, especially for learners with gaps in foundational knowledge. The presence of peer support as a notable factor further highlights the value of social learning environments, where learners benefit from shared experiences, mutual encouragement, and collaborative problem-solving. Peer networks appear to provide emotional reinforcement and practical assistance that contribute to sustained engagement.

Online forums or communities register the lowest frequency, suggesting limited access, awareness, or utilization of digital support platforms among ALS learners. This may reflect constraints related to internet connectivity, digital literacy, or the predominance of face-to-face support mechanisms in ALS contexts.

The findings indicate that human-mediated support—particularly from instructors and peers—plays a more decisive role in learner completion than technology-based resources alone. These results emphasize the need to strengthen teacher capacity, expand access to learning materials, and institutionalize peer-support mechanisms within ALS programs to enhance learner retention and successful completion.

Learners' Non-Completion in Alternative Learning System

As seen in Figure 6, the graph illustrates the major challenges encountered by learners that contribute to non-completion in the Alternative Learning System (ALS), highlighting the complex interplay of time, cognitive, motivational, and psychosocial factors. The most dominant barrier is lack of time, which accounts for the highest proportion of responses. This finding underscores the reality that many ALS learners juggle multiple responsibilities, including employment, household duties, and caregiving roles, which significantly limit their capacity to attend sessions regularly and complete learning requirements. Time poverty thus emerges as a primary structural constraint to learner persistence.

Closely following are difficulty in understanding the learning material and lack of motivation, both registering equally high frequencies. These factors point to cognitive and affective barriers that undermine learning continuity. Learners who struggle academically or fail to see immediate relevance in the lessons may experience frustration, disengagement, and eventual withdrawal. This suggests the need for differentiated instruction, scaffolded learning approaches, and motivational strategies to sustain engagement and comprehension.

Personal issues or stress also feature prominently, indicating that emotional, psychological, and family-related concerns play a significant role in disrupting learners' educational trajectories. Such stressors may include financial insecurity, family conflict, health issues, or social pressures, all of which can erode learners' focus and commitment. Inadequate support or resources, while less dominant, remains a notable factor, reflecting gaps in access to instructional materials, guidance, and learning support. The minimal representation of "others" suggests that most non-completion drivers are captured within the major categories identified.

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Figure 6

Challenges that Lead to Non-Completion of Alternative Learning System
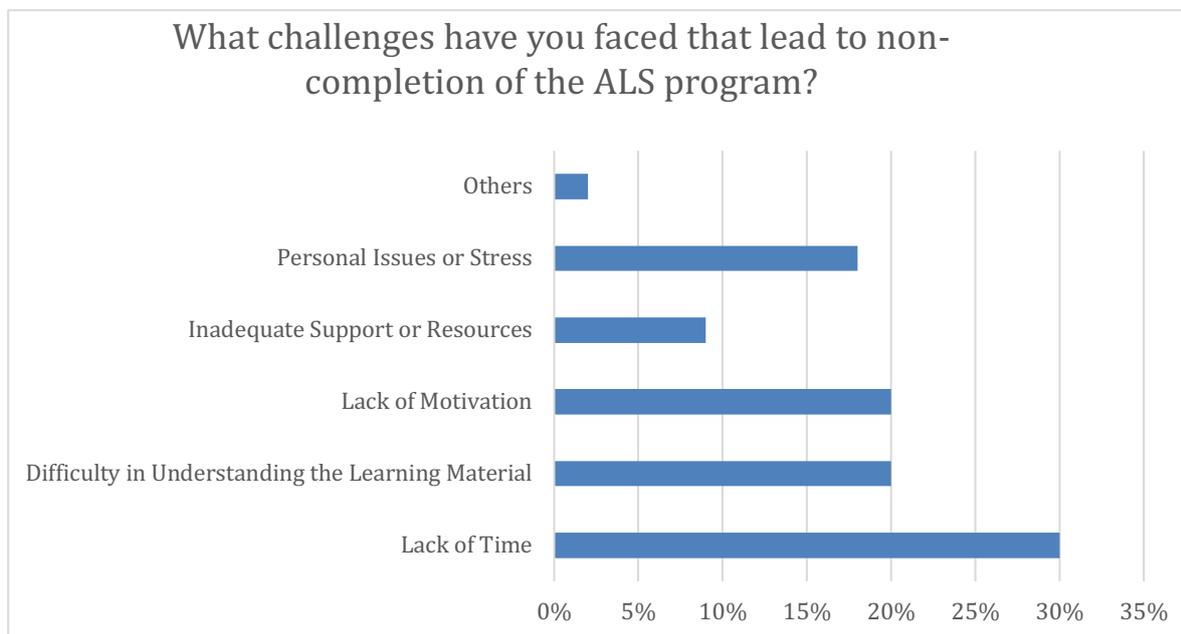
These data reveal that non-completion in ALS is driven more by structural and psychosocial constraints than by lack of access alone. These findings highlight the urgent need for flexible learning schedules, learner-centered pedagogy, psychosocial support mechanisms, and strengthened instructional scaffolding to address the root causes of attrition. Designing interventions that are responsive to learners' time constraints, academic needs, and emotional well-being is critical to improving completion outcomes in alternative education contexts.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the factors affecting learners' completion in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) and aimed to provide a basis for an intervention program. The research identified various personal, socio-economic, and institutional factors that influence learners' ability to complete the ALS program.

Key findings revealed that personal factors, such as motivation, self-discipline, and prior educational background, play a crucial role in learners' persistence. Many learners struggle with self-confidence and time management, which affect their commitment to completing the program.

Socio-economic factors also significantly impact completion rates. Financial constraints, the need for employment, and family responsibilities were found to be major barriers, causing learners to prioritize work over education. Additionally, lack of support from family and peers further hinders their progress.

Institutional factors, including teacher competency, availability of learning materials, and accessibility of learning centers, were also found to influence learner retention.

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Inconsistent scheduling, limited resources, and gaps in instructional delivery were identified as challenges that affect learners' engagement and completion.

Along these, the study highlights the need for a comprehensive intervention program that addresses these challenges. Recommended interventions include flexible learning schedules, financial assistance programs, enhanced guidance and counseling services, and capacity-building for ALS facilitators. By addressing these factors, the ALS program can better support learners in completing their education and achieving their academic and career goals.

The following recommendations are proposed to enhance ALS learner completion rates:

1. Implementation of a Flexible Learning System – Develop more adaptable learning schedules and modalities (e.g., blended learning, modular instruction, and online platforms) to accommodate working learners and those with personal constraints.

2. Financial Assistance and Support Programs – Provide scholarships, livelihood assistance, and transportation allowances to help mitigate the financial challenges that hinder learners from completing the program.

3. Guidance and Counseling Services – Strengthen counseling programs to address learners' motivational and psychological barriers, promoting self-confidence, goal setting, and persistence.

4. Capacity Building for ALS Facilitators – Conduct regular training and workshops for ALS educators to improve their teaching strategies, learner engagement techniques, and ability to provide individualized support.

5. Enhanced Learning Resources and Infrastructure – Increase the availability of learning centers, digital resources, and instructional materials to create a more conducive learning environment.

6. Community and Parental Involvement – Foster partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and parents to create a strong support system for ALS learners through mentorship programs and advocacy campaigns.

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