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Contributions and Partnership Strategies of External Stakeholders in the Implementation of the Alternative Learning System in Bontoc District: Insights from Teachers

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Abstract. The involvement and partnership of stakeholders have been identified as crucial factors influencing program implementation. This study focuses on examining the contributions and partnership strategies of external stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) program in Bontoc District, Mountain Province. Using a qualitative research design through interview, observation and focus group discussion, the study identified and described the contributions and partnership strategies of external stakeholders in the ALS program implementation, based on insights provided by the five ALS teachers in the district. Through thematic approach, the results show that external stakeholders play a significant role in the implementation of ALS programs in Bontoc District. They contribute through financial assistance and provision of learning spaces by the Municipal and Barangay Local Government Units, monetary and non-monetary donations from alumni, learning materials from the Provincial Local Government Unit (LGU), free skills trainings and certifications from Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and psychosocial support from parents. These contributions are the result of effective partnership strategies employed by the stakeholders, including resource sharing, collaboration with professional colleagues, engagement with alumni, and partnering with TESDA. ALS teachers recognize the value of these engagements in enhancing program implementation. However, they also acknowledge the need to strengthen partnerships with these stakeholders to fully leverage their potential for strengthening the ALS program implementation. Establishing networks and linkages with external stakeholders such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is identified as a means to significantly enhance the curricular and instructional efficiency and effectiveness of the ALS program.

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Keywords: alternative learning system; partnership; strategies; contributions; implementation; stakeholders

1. Introduction

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a program initiated by the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines to address the educational needs of individuals who are unable to access formal education due to various challenges such as poverty, geographical isolation, conflict, and disabilities. ALS offers basic literacy education and equivalency programs, including the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test, to equip learners with functional literacy and numeracy skills and provide opportunities for further education and employment. The successful implementation of ALS relies on the collaboration and partnership of various stakeholders, including the government, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), community leaders, and volunteers. Partnership strategies are the approaches that guide how two or more entities work together in a collaborative relationship. In the context of this research, it refers to how schools and its external stakeholders share their resources to improve the implementation of ALS. Subsequently, this partnership results to contributions that come in various forms.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization or UNESCO (2017) emphasizes the crucial role of local stakeholders in ensuring the sustainability of literacy programs. The government provides financial support and resources, while NGOs, community leaders, and volunteers contribute additional services and resources that align with the program's goals. This partnership ensures the efficient and effective implementation of the program. Previous studies have highlighted the significant influence of external stakeholders in formal educational institutions. However, there is a dearth of research examining the involvement of external stakeholders in the implementation of alternative education programs, such as the Alternative Learning System (ALS). While there have been several studies on the implementation of ALS in the Philippines, scant attention has been given to exploring the contributions and support of stakeholders in facilitating its successful implementation. Thus, the need for this study.

In the Municipality of Bontoc, where this study was conducted, there appears to be limited involvement of other stakeholders beyond the monetary assistance provided annually by the Local Government Units (LGUs). During initial interviews with some ALS teachers, it was noted that parents are not providing adequate support to their children enrolled in the ALS program. Additionally, the involvement of barangays, smallest administrative division and the primary unit of local government in the Philippines, is restricted to the provision of learning centers, which are typically repurposed barangay halls, Day Care Centers, or residential homes that serve as temporary housing for ALS learners during learning sessions. The Mountain Province State Polytechnic College, as a higher education institution offering teacher education programs, is well-positioned to lead this program and provide expert support and other resources to ALS teachers to improve the delivery of the program's curriculum and instruction. This study is significant because it may contribute to the development of a framework for

effective stakeholder partnership in ALS. The findings of this study may inform policy and practice in promoting effective partnerships among stakeholders in ALS program in the Philippines and other similar contexts. The implementation of the ALS program is a complex endeavor that requires collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, private sector entities, and community members. External stakeholders, in particular, can play a critical role in contributing to the success of the program through their expertise, resources, and networks. This paper aimed to explore the contributions and partnership strategies of external stakeholders in the implementation of the ALS program in the Bontoc District through the lens of the ALS teachers' insights. Specifically, it sought answers to the following problems:

1. What are the contributions of the external stakeholders in the implementation of the Alternative Learning System?
2. What are partnership strategies of external stakeholders in the implementation of the Alternative Learning System?

2. Review of Literature

Collaborative partnerships and engaging stakeholders facilitate the exchange of crucial information, ideas, and resources, which are essential for effective policy implementation in the modern era. These cooperative arrangements between multiple organizations are expected to yield enhanced policy outcomes and organizational performance that surpass what would be achievable in traditional hierarchical settings. Nonetheless, our understanding of how collaborative partnerships contribute to a wide range of potential impacts, including both direct substantive outcomes and indirect process-oriented enhancements, remains constrained (Conner, 2015). In the context of education, stakeholders' involvement and partnership have been identified as key factors that can affect the implementation of an education program. In the study of Çayak and Karsantık (2020), stakeholders can exert influence over educational activities and elevate their quality. The importance of active involvement from these stakeholders is recognized as a key factor in enhancing educational excellence. Relative to this finding, Darrel, et al. (2020) found that the involvement of stakeholders enhances both learner performance and the overall quality of education. Within a school setting, stakeholders encompass individuals who contribute, either directly or indirectly, to the school's attainment of its goals and objectives.

Parents as Stakeholders. Parental engagement is widely recognized as a positive factor in improving children's academic achievements. Previous studies have acknowledged the influence of the family and community on students' learning (Erdem & Kaya, 2020; Roy & Giraldo-Garca, 2018). However, there is no universally agreed-upon definition of parental involvement in education, as it encompasses a range of practices and behaviors related to students' educational processes. In this study, parental involvement refers to the active and meaningful participation of biological parents, both financially and behaviorally, in their children's learning both at home and at school. To encourage parental involvement, parents are strongly urged to participate in activities such as attending parent-teacher conferences, which provide an opportunity to

familiarize themselves with school policies and initiatives. Regular communication with teachers is also recommended to stay informed about their children's academic performance (Newman et al., 2019). Learning at home is another important aspect of parental involvement, ensuring that families have access to information that guides them in supporting their children's education (Ramirez et al., 2022). This type of involvement has been associated with positive outcomes, including improved academic performance, perception of parents as educational partners, and higher levels of self-efficacy among students (Eguico et al., 2022; Garbacz et al., 2017). Furthermore, parents are encouraged to participate in decision-making processes by taking on roles as committee leaders and representatives, often through Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTOs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). Numerous empirical investigations and meta-analyses consistently demonstrate a significant correlation between parental participation and academic performance, with a predominant positive influence (Erdem & Kaya, 2020; Tarraga et al., 2017). This involvement has also been linked to improved self-esteem in children (Garbacz et al., 2017), increased motivation and self-reliance (Carpenter & Dunn, 2021), as well as better school retention and attendance (Ross, 2016), leading to improved academic performance regardless of economic background (Carpenter & Dunn, 2021; Shao et al., 2022). Research further supports the effectiveness of programs aimed at promoting parental involvement in education, benefiting not only children but also families and the broader school community (Sebastian et al., 2017). On the other hand, inadequate parental involvement has been found to correlate with lower student performance and engagement (Tarraga et al., 2017).

Community as Stakeholders. When considered as stakeholders, a community refers to a collective of individuals or entities who possess a direct or indirect involvement in the affairs of a school. As stakeholders, community members hold a vested interest or concern in the implementation of school programs. Active involvement in school management, with a focus on cultural alignment in teaching and learning, plays a crucial role in fostering a broader acceptance of the educational process. It has been well-established that community participation in school activities enhances accountability for learning outcomes and the equitable allocation of school resources. Additionally, community involvement encourages the voluntary contribution of local resources, including human capital, materials, and financial support, to support educational initiatives (Mwila & Meremo, 2022). When communities and parents are genuinely engaged as stakeholders, actively contributing to school infrastructure, teacher recruitment, security, and partnerships, significant achievements can be witnessed in the education sector (Razzaq, 2015). Ataine and Nkedishu (2017) further highlight the pivotal role played by community members in providing land for the construction of various schools. Similarly, community involvement in students' academic activities encompasses monitoring homework, ensuring regular school attendance, recognizing children's efforts, and acknowledging teachers. This approach has been associated with improved attendance, better grades, and effective college preparation. Thus, community participation in diverse school activities, including financing and infrastructure development aligned with specific school needs, is essential to promote quality education in any country. HakiElimu (2017) stresses

that school development is not solely the responsibility of the government but should involve parents and community members, including local business owners in the school vicinity. Despite the government's provision of free education to all children, the community and parents play a significant role in ensuring the delivery of quality education. However, a study by Hussein et al (2018) revealed that community members supported students but had limited involvement in school management. This suggests that the level of community engagement fell short of satisfactory expectations.

Local Government Units as Stakeholders. The Education for All (EFA) 2015 Report in the Philippines accurately emphasizes the significant role of education in the country's political, economic, social, and cultural aspects. Education has long been regarded as a crucial element of national development and a key pathway for social and economic advancement. Reflecting this perspective, Article XIV, Section 5(5) of the 1987 Constitution explicitly mandates that education be given the highest budgetary priority by the State. In line with this directive, the Department of Education (DepEd) consistently receives the largest allocation from the annual State budget. According to the law, LGUs, which enjoy fiscal autonomy, are mandated to provide financial assistance for public education. Through the creation of a Special Education Fund (SEF) and School Boards under RA 5447, provinces receive a share of the collections from an additional 1% real property tax. The School Boards are responsible for deciding the allocation of the SEF, following criteria established by the Bureau of Public Schools or the Bureau of Vocational Education and approved by the Secretary of Education. In 1991, the Local Government Code was enacted, amending RA 5447. This new law stipulates that the proceeds from the additional levy must be exclusively allocated to the SEF and automatically released to the Local School Boards (LSBs). In the case of provinces, the proceeds are evenly divided between the provincial and municipal school boards. The LSBs are tasked with determining the budget allocation, with priority given to areas such as buildings and facilities, repair and maintenance of school buildings, establishment and maintenance of extension classes, and sports activities. The collection and utilization of the SEF vary among different LGUs, highlighting the importance of transparency and accountability of the LSB in administering the funds. Evaluating the actual expenditure becomes a critical mechanism to assess the level of local support for public schools. In the 2019 National Literacy Conference of the Department of Interior Local Government Unit, The role of the Local Government was emphasized. LGUs share in the responsibility of enhancing quality education by improving their collections to fund local education expenditures through Special Education Fund (SEF). SEF come from an additional 1% tax on real property that LGUs are mandated to impose and collect per Local Government Code (RA 7160 of 1991). While SEF spending does not seem large when compared to either total general government education spending on basic education (7.4%) or total DepEd spending (8.1%), it is substantial when reckoned relative to DepEd spending on non-personal services (69%) or DepEd maintenance and operating expense or MOOE (110%).

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the concept of partnership as a collaborative relationship between stakeholders involved in the implementation of the ALS. The study draws on the social partnership theory, which emphasizes the importance of cooperation and collaboration among different actors in achieving common goals (Aubry & Kiggundu, 2012; Broucker & Van den Broeck, 2016). This theory highlights the need for stakeholders to work together to address complex social problems that require collective action, shared resources, and joint decision-making. The study also draws on the resource dependence theory, which suggests that organizations rely on external resources and partnerships to achieve their objectives (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). This theory emphasizes the importance of partnerships in securing resources such as funding, expertise, and support from external actors, which are critical for the successful implementation of the ALS Basic Literacy Program. Finally, the study draws on the stakeholder theory, which suggests that organizations have a responsibility to consider the interests of all stakeholders in their decision-making processes (Freeman, et al, 1984). This theory highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement and participation in ensuring that the ALS Basic Literacy Program meets the needs of all stakeholders.

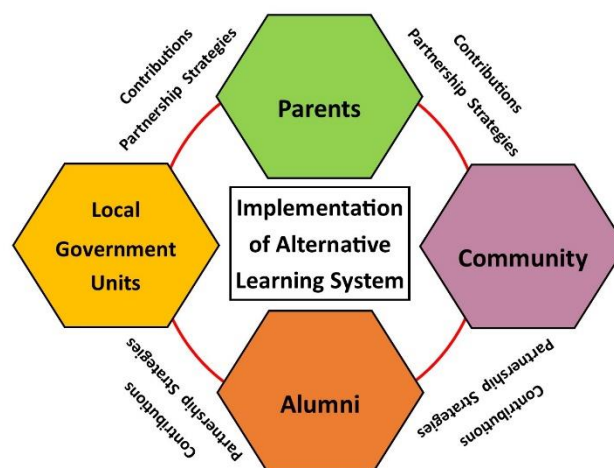


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

The qualitative research design specifically the narrative approach was used in this study as it was the most appropriate to describe the perspectives of the ALS teachers. Qualitative research is often used to gain an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon or experience from the perspectives of the participants (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the researchers described the contributions and partnership strategies of external stakeholders in the implementation of the ALS program based on the insights of the ALS teachers.

3.2. Participants and Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in Bontoc, Mountain Province. The Municipality of Bontoc has 16 barangays, all of which are clustered in seven ALS Community Learning Centers (CLCs). These centers are comprised of the following:

CLCs	Coverage (Barangays)	Number of ALS Teacher
1. Alab CLC	Alab, Balili, Gonogon	1
2. Central Bontoc CLC	Bontoc Ili, Samoki, Poblacion, Caluttit	1
3. Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) Mountain Province CLC	Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL) of BJMP Mountain Province	
4. Caluttit CLC	Caluttit	1
5. Maligcong CLC	Maligcong, Talubin, Bayyo	1
6. Mainit CLC	Mainit	1
7. Guina-ang CLC	Guina-ang	

Five ALS teachers are handling learners in these CLCs. Three of them hold a baccalaureate degree in elementary education and the other two in secondary education. Bontoc district was selected as the study's focus due to its higher number of ALS centers compared to other districts in the province. Additionally, the district has a larger enrollment of ALS learners. The respondents for the study were chosen through total enumeration, as there are only five ALS teachers in the district. All five teachers willingly participated in the study.

3.3. Data Gathering Tools

Initial data was gathered using an unstructured interview guide. The same interview, however modified to make it more comprehensive, was used during the focus group discussion with the teacher-respondents. Open-ended questions were asked related to the contributions and partnership strategies of external stakeholders in the implementation of ALS program in the seven CLCs of ALS in Bontoc district. Some of the questions asked were: What are the contributions of the external stakeholders in the implementation of ALS program? How did the external stakeholders establish partnership with ALS schools? Document analysis was also used to validate the financial assistance of the Municipal LGU.

3.4. Data Gathering Procedure

After permission to conduct the study was sought from the College Management and the Schools Division of Mountain Province, being the implementer of the program, the researchers arranged a schedule with the ALS teachers for the conduct of a focus group discussion with them. Before proceeding with the study, the researchers obtained the participants' consent to ensure their willingness to take part in the research. During the FGD, they were asked to identify the external stakeholders that are actively involved in the program. They were likewise asked to identify the contributions of these stakeholders and describe how such efforts have helped improve the implementation of the program. Their responses were audio recorded and transcribed. Recurring responses were identified and

properly coded. These codes were properly categorized into themes that are used to provide a comprehensive discussion of the problems raised in this study. Prior to the one-session focus group discussion (FGD), initial data was collected through interviews with selected teacher-respondents. These interviews helped inform and refine the interview guide used during the FGD. A chat group was also created which was used to ask the respondents some follow-up or clarificatory questions relative to their prior responses during the FGD.

3.5. Treatment of Data

The data collected through the FGD was analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques such as thematic analysis and content analysis. The analysis involved identifying the common responses of the respondents, categorizing these responses into themes, and establishing connections between the data.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Contributions of the External Stakeholders in the Implementation of the Alternative Learning System

External stakeholders play a vital role as essential partners in the successful implementation of the ALS program in the Bontoc District. Their contributions extend to various areas, encompassing financial assistance, provision of learning spaces, both monetary and non-monetary donations (such as alumni contributions), reproduction of learning materials by the Provincial Local Government Unit (PLGU), the provision of free skills training and certifications by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), as well as psychosocial support from parents. These collective efforts and support from external stakeholders greatly enhance the effectiveness and impact of the ALS program in the Bontoc District despite its observed deficiencies in facilities and learning resources.

4.1.1. Financial Assistance

A notable and impactful contribution from external stakeholders, greatly appreciated by the teacher-respondents, is the financial assistance provided by the Municipal Local Government Unit (MLGU) of Bontoc. This effort was the initiative of the former Mayor of the Municipality. Annually, the MLGU allocates 50,000 pesos from their Gender and Development (GAD) fund to cater to the needs of ALS teachers and learners in the district. As confirmed by the Secretary of the municipal school board of Bontoc, the fund is disbursed upon request prepared by ALS teachers and approved by the LGU. The records from the municipal school board indicate that the requested funds are utilized to cover the expenses associated with the acquisition of school supplies, such as bond papers, printer inks, ballpoint pens, and pad papers, which are essential for the ALS learners' educational learning process.

Teacher A confirmed *"We receive annual financial assistance from the Municipal LGU based on our request. The money is being used to purchase school primarily supplies for our students' use."* It is important to note that ALS expenses related to school supplies are not covered by the Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE), a fund specifically designated for formal schools in basic education. The financial assistance provided by the MLGU not only helps alleviate the burden of

purchasing school supplies but also contributes to covering the monthly rental fees for ALS learning spaces. Among the five learning centers used as classrooms, two are rented from a church facility. Out of these two, one is paid for through MLGU fund assistance, while the other one receives support from the Barangay LGU fund.

Teacher B said *“Our barangay LGU defrays our rental expenses because we are using the Church facility in our place as a learning center because we do not have our own learning center.”* Additionally, there is another learning space hosted in the house of an ALS teacher, who generously offers the venue free of charge. Some BLGUs not only cover the rental costs of learning spaces but also pay the electric bills and provide monetary assistance specifically for purchasing school supplies for the teachers and learners. Baccali & Ormilla (2021) believed that support from the parents and government officials or cooperation from stakeholders plays a big role in the ALS program for the security of the learners and implementers in the community.

In a focus group discussion with the teacher-respondents, they recognize the significant impact of the fund assistance on their work enabling them to acquire essential school supplies and support the rental expenses for learning spaces. They believe that institutionalizing this support within the MLGU's policies and programs would ensure its long-term sustainability. By formalizing the provision of funds specifically designated for ALS, the MLGU can demonstrate its commitment to inclusive education and the empowerment of ALS learners in the district. Additionally, they emphasize the need for an increased allocation to adequately cater to the growing demands of the ALS program. As the number of ALS learners and the scope of their educational needs expand, a larger financial allocation would enable the teachers to provide quality instruction and ensure the smooth operation of the ALS learning centers. With an increased budget, the teachers would be better equipped to address the various requirements of the ALS curriculum and improve the overall learning experience for the learners.

4.1.2. Learning Spaces

The ALS Bontoc District comprises seven Community Learning Centers (CLCs) that cater to ALS learners from all 16 barangays within the Municipality including the PDLs in the BJMP of Mountain Province. Two of these CLCs are owned by the barangays and are generously provided free of charge.

Teacher C said *“I use my house as a learning center because we do not have one in our community. I know it is not a conducive place but I thought it is necessary than having no place at all for my students to learn”.* Delmo & Yuzon (2020) found that ALS students attend the program in community learning centers, which are typically located in barangay halls, churches, or other designated spaces within the community where they can gather. Arzadon and Nato (2015) the ALS learning centers are sometimes found in unlikely places—village meeting hall, jails, basketball court, or a women shelter. In the Philippines the ALS learning center is found inside a market area. This makes it convenient for the market workers to go to the learning center during the lull hours of their working hours. The

requirement to go and find learners in difficult places poses a challenge to the teachers.

The contributions made by these select barangays are highly significant, particularly considering that the Department of Education-Mountain Province Division does not have its own dedicated community learning centers, as indicated in the interviews conducted with the respondents. As stipulated in Republic Act No. 11510, the DepEd collaborates with LGUs in delivering ALS programs to their constituents. LGUs, in partnership with other government agencies and stakeholders, assist in identifying and mobilizing prospective ALS learners, providing access to suitable learning environments, allocating available resources to ALS programs (such as Community ALS Implementors and ALS CLC sites), promoting post-program activities, and introducing local innovations as necessary. Several private and LGU partners have already been actively implementing the program with great commitment and enthusiasm to reach all learners, regardless of their circumstances.

4.1.3. Monetary and Non-Monetary Donations

While the ALS program is still in its early stages and has yet to produce a large number of successful graduates in Bontoc district, some concerned alumni who generously contribute to ALS teachers and learners. According to some teacher-respondents, there are instances when alumni step forward to cover their training fees when they attend workshops or seminars. In addition, other alumni donate school supplies. Although these donations are not received regularly, teachers have expressed that they greatly benefit their teaching and enhance the learning experience of their students. Teacher D shared *“Sometimes, we receive monetary donations from our alumni. Some of them also provide office supplies like bondpapers for the reproduction of our learning materials.”* According to Kwarteng and Obing-Ofori (2021), alumni play a crucial role in the development of an institution, especially in terms of providing financial support and other contributions. Justina, et al. (2022) found that alumni associations have made substantial contributions to the progress and advancement of their former educational institutions. Numerous examples can be found where alumni associations have constructed new structures and furnished their alma mater with chairs and other essential items. Alumni need to give back to their alma maters, both financially and in other meaningful ways.

4.1.4. Learning Materials

The Department of Education provides learning modules across the six learning strands offered in ALS, namely: Communication Skills in English; Kasanayang Pangkomunikasyon sa Filipino; Scientific and Critical Thinking Skills; Mathematical and Problem-Solving Skills; Life and Career Skills; Understanding Self and Society; and Digital Citizenship. In support of the ALS implementation in the province, the Provincial Local Government Unity (PLGU) of Mountain Province, through its Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) Federation, takes on the responsibility of reproducing the learning modules for the students' use. Before this arrangement, the teacher-respondents shared that they had to personally reproduce the learning materials since no budget was allocated for their reproduction. They expressed their frustration over having to spend their own

money to provide adequate learning materials for their students. Furthermore, they do not have MOOEs to cover these expenses, making it a personal sacrifice on their part. Abad and Galleto (2020) concluded in their study that although, the support mechanism to ALS instruction is low along with the financial resources, the scarcity of which may be due to the acquisition of instructional materials, facilities, and other school equipment needed in carrying out the ALS program. It can be deduced further that the budget allocated for the implementation reflects the high availability of instructional materials, facilities, and school equipment.

4.1.5. Free Skills Trainings and Certifications

The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) plays a pivotal role in the ALS program by offering valuable skills training and vocational education to learners. Collaborating with DepEd, TESDA develops and implements training programs tailored to meet the specific needs of ALS learners. Their comprehensive range of courses and certifications across diverse fields equips learners with the necessary skills for employment and entrepreneurship. TESDA also provides training for ALS teachers, integrating skills development into the curriculum. Republic Act No. 11510 states that the TESDA shall, assist the DepEd in equipping ALS learners with technical-vocational skills and provide access to national certification, as applicable, to improve their work readiness. It shall support the DepEd in implementing post-program support activities including providing access to scholarships. Concerning this study, the teacher-respondents reported that some of their learners had the opportunity to participate in various community-based training programs offered by TESDA, completely free of charge. These training programs encompassed a wide array of disciplines, including Massage Therapy, Bread and Pastry, Beauty Care, Meat Processing, Dishwashing Soap Making, Pizza Making, Automotive Servicing, Shielded Metal Arc Welding (SMAW), Bookkeeping, Cookery, and Food Preservation. As a result of their participation, these learners successfully passed the assessments and obtained National Certifications (NCs). These certifications, in turn, served as valuable credentials that enabled some of them to secure employment opportunities here and abroad. ALS students of Catanduanes were provided with skills training that helped them in starting up livelihood from their acquired skills (TESDA conducts free skills training for ALS learners, town residents in Catanduanes. PIA., n.d.).

4.1.6. Psychosocial Support

Inadequate parental support hinders students from studying effectively at home, thereby acting as a barrier to the successful implementation of remote learning. Students who lack emotional support from their parents experience negative impacts on their mental health and overall well-being. As a result, they are burdened with the additional responsibility of assisting their siblings with their schoolwork. Moreover, students who lack effective communication with their parents, either due to parental absence or excessive busyness, tend to underperform academically (Mao, 2022).

Teacher E lamented *“Sadly, there are parents who do not seem to care for their children enrolled in ALS. One time, one parent came to me and was surprised to know her child is*

enrolled in Als." As key external stakeholders, parents are entrusted with the crucial role of providing psychosocial support to ALS learners. However, regrettably, the teacher-respondents have observed that while some parents initially show support for their children enrolled in the ALS program, their commitment tends to wane over time. Specifically, they become inconsistent in monitoring their children's attendance, ensuring the completion of their children's modules, and supplying necessary learning materials. According to the respondents, a significant number of parents exhibit a lack of concern regarding their children's module submissions and attendance at learning sessions. This prevailing indifference is particularly notable among parents whose children come from dysfunctional family backgrounds. The reasons underlying this lack of parental engagement may vary, but it is disheartening to witness such diminished involvement in the educational journey of these learners. Teacher E further shared *"Some parents only show involvement if their children get promoted from ALS."*

Certain parents, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or minority groups, encounter obstacles when it comes to engaging in their children's learning. In the study conducted by Hanif and Alwi (2019), it was discovered that parents' attitudes towards their children's academics vary. However, it was observed that when parents show responsiveness to the school and engage interactively with teachers, their children tend to achieve better academically compared to those whose parents do not make an effort to meet with teachers. Additionally, parental interest in academics fosters positive behavior among students, reducing disciplinary issues within educational institutions. Consequently, the responsibility of educating and guiding these learners falls heavily upon the teachers' shoulders. In the absence of consistent parental support, they are left to take charge of these students' educational pursuits. Furthermore, the teacher-respondents emphasized that they bear the sole responsibility of not only delivering quality instruction but also addressing the students' psychosocial needs. This added role is necessary to compensate for the inadequate support the students receive from their homes. This situation poses significant challenges for teachers, as they must navigate the intricate dynamics of dysfunctional family environments while striving to create a conducive and inclusive learning atmosphere for their learners.

4.2. Partnership Strategies of External Stakeholders in the Implementation of the Alternative Learning System

The successful implementation of the ALS program can be attributed to the effective partnership strategies employed by the stakeholders, who serve as significant and invaluable partners in the program's execution. Their active involvement and collaborative efforts greatly contribute to the achievements and positive outcomes of the ALS program.

4.2.1. Resources Sharing

In the context of the ALS program, sharing resources involves the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders to provide and utilize their available resources to support the program's implementation. This includes sharing physical resources such as learning spaces, educational materials, or facilities, as well as sharing

financial resources, expertise, or manpower to ensure the successful execution of the program. Sharing resources fosters synergy and maximizes the collective impact of stakeholders in achieving the goals of the ALS program. The ALS program in Bontoc District faces challenges due to insufficient physical facilities and learning resources. It currently lacks Community Learning Centers (CLCs) and essential laboratory apparatuses, particularly for subjects like Digital Citizenship that require computer sets. The only available office equipment consists of a computer and printer for the teacher, along with printed learning modules for the learners. To address these resource limitations, the ALS program relies on collaboration and resource sharing among stakeholders. According to the teacher-respondents, the stakeholders have been highly responsive to their needs and requests.

Teacher A appreciatively expressed *"We are fortunate that our LGUs are very much ready to respond to our request. Although, still insufficient, their financial assistance greatly helped us especially in the purchase of office supplies."* Notably, many of these shared resources are provided free of charge. The teacher-respondents expressed optimism that by sustaining and strengthening partnerships with these stakeholders, it is possible to obtain additional resources. They believe that continued collaboration can lead to an increase in the availability of learning resources and the improvement of facilities. By leveraging the support and shared resources from stakeholders, the ALS program in the Bontoc District can overcome the deficiencies it currently faces. The willingness of stakeholders to lend their resources at no cost demonstrates their commitment to the success of the program. With sustained and strengthened partnerships, the ALS program can access even more resources, thereby enhancing the learning experience and opportunities for ALS learners in the district. In her report, Salcedo (2023) identified a significant challenge faced by ALS teachers in Nueva Ecija, namely the inadequacy of educational resources that fail to meet the students' needs. As a result, teachers are compelled to source appropriate learning materials from external channels. Moreover, certain areas suffer from unstable internet connectivity, making it difficult to access online resources. Consequently, teachers must scout for reliable spots where they can download these materials. Additionally, ALS teachers frequently encounter the need to secure decent chairs, tables, and learning materials within CLCs. In some instances, they even resort to using their funds to reproduce modules, purchase paper, and pens, and sometimes even provide food for their students (Cortez A., et al., 2018).

4.2.2. Collaboration

In this particular context, collaboration entails the sharing of expertise among ALS teachers to effectively address the diverse needs of ALS learners in terms of understanding learning content. In the Bontoc District, there are five ALS teachers responsible for facilitating the program. However, a significant challenge arises from the mismatch between their teaching workload and their educational and training preparation. Teacher E, who is a graduate of Secondary Education major in English shared *"The problem is that we were not trained in our baccalaureate programs to teach ALS learners. Subsequently, I find difficulty teaching other subjects."* This finding is substantiated by the study conducted by Cortez et al. (2018), which uncovered that none of the ALS teachers hired by the four SDOs had graduated

from an ALS-specific program. Instead, they were graduates of diverse teacher education programs. Additionally, it was observed that the ALS teachers employed for elementary and secondary levels were identical, while webinars and training sessions related to ALS were not conducted as frequently as those intended for teachers in basic, secondary, and higher education.

These teachers are expected to cater to learners with varied needs, including aptitude, emotional, and social requirements. However, they lack specialized training to effectively address these specific learner needs. Three of the teachers hold degrees in elementary education, making them generalists, yet they are tasked with teaching subjects at the junior high school level of the ALS program. Similarly, two of the teachers have degrees in specific fields from secondary education, but they are required to teach across all disciplines covered in the ALS curriculum. They openly expressed their concerns about this mismatch, noting that it often leads to a focus on teaching the content they are most familiar with, while downplaying or even disregarding topics they struggle to teach. They attributed this to the fact that during their pre-service teacher training in college, they were not adequately prepared in terms of pedagogy and content to teach in the ALS. As a result, this lack of preparation has made their role in teaching ALS learners a significant challenge. To address this challenge, they collaborate closely with their colleagues who have expertise in the subjects they find difficult to teach. By working together, they ensure that learners receive comprehensive instruction in all necessary concepts. Although effective, they recognize this is only a short-term intervention. Research has demonstrated that schools characterized by a high degree of collaboration exhibit more favorable academic outcomes for students compared to schools with lower levels of collaboration (Collaborative Teaching- Sharing Best Practice, 2021).

The respondents recognize the importance of being capacitated in terms of curriculum content, as it would enable them to more effectively teach all subjects. They acknowledge that their teaching strategies are generally sound, but they identify a serious issue with their knowledge of certain subject matters. To address this gap, they emphasize the need for professional development and training that specifically targets their knowledge and understanding of these content areas. Such capacity-building efforts would enhance their ability to provide quality education across all subjects within the ALS curriculum. Moreover, the teacher-respondents strongly believe that improving their knowledge of subject matters is crucial for the holistic development of ALS learners. They acknowledge that effective teaching strategies are important, but without a solid understanding of the content, their instructional efforts may fall short. Thus, the need to collaborate with subject specialists, mentors, and resource persons who can provide guidance and support in areas where they feel less confident.

4.2.3. Alumni Engagement

The teacher-respondents in this context recognize the value and importance of a partnership strategy focused on alumni engagement within the ALS (Alternative Learning System) program. While they acknowledge that some ALS alumni have found employment and are giving donations to the ALS program, they believe that there is still untapped potential in strengthening the connection between

these successful alumni and current ALS learners. One aspect that the respondents emphasize is the need to go beyond monetary and non-monetary donations.

Teacher D said *“I think there is really a need for us to organize an alumni association so that we can maximize their involvement in the program. By this, we could invite them as resource speakers for our students.”* While financial support is undoubtedly beneficial for the ALS program, they believe that a more comprehensive approach is required. They propose the establishment or institutionalization of an alumni association specifically dedicated to ALS graduates. By creating an alumni association, the respondents aim to foster a stronger sense of community and camaraderie among ALS alumni. This association would serve as a platform for networking, mentorship, and career guidance for current ALS learners. The teacher-respondents recognize that the experiences and achievements of ALS alumni can be a valuable resource for those currently enrolled in the program, providing them with insights, inspiration, and guidance as they navigate their own educational and career paths. Moreover, this alumni association would facilitate career orientations and opportunities for ALS learners. It would allow them to connect with successful ALS graduates who have firsthand knowledge and experience in various fields. Through mentorship programs, internships, workshops, and other collaborative initiatives, ALS learners could receive practical guidance and support to explore different career options, develop essential skills, and make informed decisions about their future. The respondents view this proposed alumni association as a means to strengthen the overall impact and effectiveness of the ALS program. By tapping into the resources and expertise of ALS alumni, they believe that current learners will not only benefit from the financial contributions but also gain access to invaluable career guidance and mentorship. This holistic approach to alumni engagement has the potential to empower ALS learners, increase their confidence, and enhance their prospects for success beyond the ALS program.

Alumni engagement plays a vital role in supporting school turnaround strategies through various means. This includes actively participating in school mentoring programs, providing tutoring assistance, and ensuring the availability of life coaching programs for both parents and students. Alumni also contribute to establishing and sustaining strong school-business partnerships, while raising funds to support scholarships and other direct benefits that promote engagement. Additionally, alumni take the lead in coordinating community-building activities such as job fairs, health fairs, and similar initiatives (Allen, 2017).

4.2.4. Partnership for Skills Training and Certification

One of the goals of the ALS program is not only to integrate its learners into formal education but also to enhance their skills. As partners in technical education and skills development, TESDA extends its free services to ALS learners by providing community-based trainings. Through these platforms, ALS learners can obtain National Certificates (NCs) that are valuable for securing jobs related to their skills. This enables them to become economically productive citizens while they continue their learning journey in the ALS. The teachers participating in the program have shared that some of their ALS graduates are already working abroad. However, they recognize the importance of instilling in the learners the

value of pursuing and completing a college education as an alternative pathway to finding a rewarding career. The teachers have observed that many learners are primarily interested in obtaining an ALS certificate, rather than pursuing higher education at the college level. "From 2017-2019, TESDA had been closely working with us in terms of providing skills trainings and national certifications for our students. We are happy that some of our students who were given these NCs are now working abroad", teacher E related.

5. Conclusion

The involvement of external stakeholders in the implementation of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) program in the Bontoc District has been identified in this study. This discovery highlights the recognition of ALS teachers regarding the potential benefits that these engagements can bring to the program. The contributions made by these external stakeholders are seen as valuable assets that can contribute to the overall improvement of the ALS program in the district. However, while ALS teachers appreciate the significance of these contributions, they also acknowledge the need to strengthen partnerships with these stakeholders to fully capitalize on their potential. By establishing networks and linkages with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the curricular and instructional efficiency and effectiveness of the ALS program can be greatly enhanced. Collaborating with NGOs can bring several advantages to the ALS program. These organizations often have extensive experience and expertise in addressing educational issues and providing support to marginalized communities. They can offer resources, materials, and training opportunities that can enrich the ALS curriculum and instructional strategies. Additionally, NGOs can assist in mobilizing community support, advocating for policy changes, and creating awareness about the importance of education for out-of-school youth and adults. Similarly, partnering with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can bring numerous benefits to the ALS program. HEIs possess specialized knowledge and research capabilities that can contribute to the development and improvement of the ALS curriculum. They can provide access to academic resources, engage in capacity-building initiatives for ALS teachers, and offer opportunities for ALS learners to access further education or vocational training. This research acknowledges that the data collected relied solely on the perspectives of the teachers. As a result, there is a recognized necessity to expand the scope of this study through further research. Finally, results of the research study will be presented to the Local Government Unit through the Local School Board and the Department of Education, Mountain Province Division for the possible budget inclusion of ALS and inclusion in the provision of additional resources such as classrooms, learning materials, and other needs of the program.

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Appendix 1

Sample Open-ended Guide Questions for FGD and Interview

1. Can you provide examples of specific contributions made by external stakeholders to support the implementation of the ALS?
2. In your opinion, what are the key benefits of involving external stakeholders in the implementation of the ALS?
3. How do external stakeholders engage with ALS learners and educators to enhance the effectiveness of the program?
4. What strategies have external stakeholders employed to mobilize resources and support for the ALS implementation?
5. What else do you think need to be improved in these strategies?
6. Can you discuss any successful initiatives undertaken by external stakeholders in the context of the ALS implementation?
7. How do external stakeholders ensure the sustainability and continuity of their involvement in the ALS implementation?
8. What do you think are some strategies that ALS implementers can explore to improve its implementation?