

IMPACT OF ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM (ALS) ACADEMIC BRIDGING PROJECT OF SDO DAGUPAN CITY: BASIS FOR POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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Abstract

This study explored the impact of the ALS Academic Bridging Project implemented by the Schools Division Office (SDO) of Dagupan City during the School Year 2024–2025, focusing on the academic performance of 50 Junior High School learners enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS). The project aimed to strengthen learner competencies in four key subject areas: English, Mathematics, Science, and Digital Citizenship. A mixed-methods research design was employed, utilizing pretest-posttest assessments to quantitatively measure academic gains and semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis for qualitative insights. Results revealed significant improvements in learners' academic performance across all subject areas, with statistical analysis showing a notable increase in posttest scores. Qualitative data supported these findings, highlighting increased learner engagement, improved confidence, and greater familiarity with academic routines and digital tools. The study's findings are consistent with related research emphasizing the value of contextualized instruction, digital literacy, and learner-focused interventions in ALS. These results underscore the effectiveness of academic bridging programs in preparing ALS learners for reintegration into the formal education system or transition to employment. Based on the findings, the study recommends the institutionalization of the bridging program, continuous professional development for ALS facilitators, provision of digital access, and the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework. The research contributes to the growing discourse on inclusive and equitable education, supporting policy reforms aligned with DepEd Orders and Republic Act No. 11510 (ALS Act of 2020) for future studies on administrative capacity development in educational settings.

Keywords: Alternative Learning System, Academic Bridging Project, ALS 2.0, Digital Citizenship, Educational Intervention, Policy Recommendations, DepEd Dagupan City

4. Introduction

Education is a fundamental right of every Filipino. However, numerous individuals remain marginalized from the formal education system due to poverty, early employment, family responsibilities, or displacement (Talatayod, 2024). Recognizing these challenges, the Philippine government has instituted the Alternative Learning System (ALS) as a parallel learning program that offers flexible education to out-of-school youth and adult learners (Calabit, 2022). ALS serves as a second-chance education platform to help learners complete basic education, acquire life skills, and eventually reintegrate into the formal system or enter the workforce (Delmo & Yazon, 2020).

In support of inclusive education, the Department of Education (DepEd) has continuously strengthened ALS through various policies and innovations. Notably, Republic Act No. 11510, known as the ALS Act of 2020, institutionalized ALS as a viable, permanent component of the basic education system (Calabit, 2022). The law mandates the establishment of the ALS Delivery System under the Bureau of Alternative Learning Systems (BALS), ensuring quality and accessible non-formal education programs for all Filipino learners (Baccal & Ormilla, 2021). It also emphasizes the need to design and implement specialized programs, including bridging

mechanisms, that prepare ALS completers for a seamless transition to higher education or employment (Rincón-Flores et al., 2024).

In response to this mandate, the Department of Education (DepEd) issued DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2023 – Guidelines on the Implementation of the ALS 2.0 Curriculum, which outlines learning strands aligned with the K to 12 curriculum. These strands include Communication Skills (English and Filipino), Scientific and Critical Thinking, Mathematical and Problem-Solving Skills, Life and Career Skills, and Digital Citizenship. The updated curriculum offers a stronger academic foundation and promotes 21st-century competencies, acknowledging the evolving demands of the global economy and digital landscape.

The Schools Division Office (SDO) of Dagupan City, in alignment with national directives, launched the ALS Academic Bridging Project, aiming to strengthen the academic readiness of ALS learners in core subjects such as English, Mathematics, Science, and Digital Citizenship. This project aims to bridge learning gaps among Junior High School (JHS) ALS learners and enhance their preparedness for reintegration into formal education, admission to senior high school, or gainful employment.

The said initiative aligns with DepEd Order No. 46, s. 2022 – Policy Guidelines on the K to 12 Basic Education Program, which underscores the need for alternative delivery modes that address the unique learning needs of diverse Filipino learners. Additionally, the bridging project reflects the thrust of the Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030, which prioritizes equity, inclusivity, and learner-centered reforms. Through academic bridging, learners receive focused instruction and enrichment, particularly in subjects that form the foundation of cognitive and functional literacy.

Moreover, DepEd Memorandum No. 89, s. The 2018 guidelines, which provide information on the conduct of the ALS Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test, emphasize the importance of mastery in academic competencies. It highlights that learners who pass the A&E Test must demonstrate readiness in communication, math, and science — areas directly targeted by the SDO Dagupan ALS Bridging Program.

While ALS learners are diverse in terms of background and learning paces, their success in academic and employment pathways largely depends on how well they are supported through transition initiatives (Borela, 2020). Academic bridging is designed as an intervention that focuses on addressing cognitive gaps and familiarizing learners with structured academic routines and expectations (Foster et al., 2020). With the growing digitalization of learning and employment, the inclusion of Digital Citizenship as a learning area is a proactive step toward equipping learners with responsible and practical skills for technology use, a key pillar under the ALS Life and Career Strand (González-Mohino et al., 2023).

Research indicates that bridging programs have the potential to improve learner outcomes significantly. According to the World Bank (2021), well-designed bridging programs lead to increased learner retention, higher assessment scores, and greater confidence in formal education settings (Ghazzawi et al., 2021). In the Philippine, few empirical studies have explored the actual impact of ALS bridging programs, particularly within a localized implementation framework. This underscores the need for systematic evaluation of such initiatives, especially as DepEd strengthens the quality assurance mechanisms for ALS delivery (Abad & Galleto, 2020). The Academic Bridging Project of SDO Dagupan City, implemented during the 2024–2025 school year, provides an opportunity to assess how focused instruction in core academic areas influences learner performance and readiness. By evaluating this initiative, the study aims to determine the effectiveness of the program in improving the educational competencies of 50 JHS ALS learners and to identify challenges, insights, and practices that may inform policy recommendations for ALS programming not only in Dagupan but potentially in other divisions nationwide.

Hence, this study seeks to fill a research gap by providing evidence on how academic bridging interventions impact learner outcomes in key learning areas and support inclusive, equitable, and quality education, one of the core goals of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. It also reinforces the Philippine education system's commitment to leaving no learner behind, regardless of socio-economic status or learning history.

Through a focused examination of learner performance in English, Mathematics, Science, and Digital Citizenship, this research aims to provide insights that may guide educational policymakers, ALS implementers, and school heads in institutionalizing effective bridging strategies that enhance learner outcomes, support reintegration, and uphold the vision of quality and accessible education for all.

5. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to assess the impact of the ALS Academic Bridging Project in SDO Dagupan City on 50 Junior High School ALS learners during the 2024–2025 school year. The quantitative component employed a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design to assess the academic performance of learners in English, Mathematics, Science, and Digital Citizenship, with statistical analysis conducted to identify significant learning gains. Meanwhile, the qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis to gather insights into the learners' experiences, challenges encountered, and the overall effectiveness of the intervention. This comprehensive design allowed for a robust evaluation of both measurable outcomes and contextual factors that may influence program implementation and learner success.

2.2 Participants

This study consisted of 50 Junior High School learners enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) under the supervision of the Schools Division Office (SDO) of Dagupan City during the School Year 2024–2025. These learners were purposively selected as they were directly involved in the implementation of the ALS Academic Bridging Project, which aimed to strengthen their competencies in English, Mathematics, Science, and Digital Citizenship. The participants varied in age, background, and previous academic exposure, reflecting the diverse profile of ALS learners. Their inclusion in the study provided valuable data on the effectiveness of the intervention in addressing academic gaps and enhancing their readiness for reintegration into the formal education system or for employment opportunities.

2.3 Instrumentation

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative instruments to gather comprehensive data on the impact of the ALS Academic Bridging Project. For the quantitative component, researcher-made pretest and posttest assessments were developed based on the competencies outlined in the ALS 2.0 Curriculum for the subjects English, Mathematics, Science, and Digital Citizenship. Subject experts and ALS instructional managers validated these tests to ensure content relevance and reliability. For the qualitative component, semi-structured interview guides were used to collect in-depth feedback from learners and facilitators regarding their experiences, challenges, and perceptions of the program. Additionally, classroom observation checklists and document analysis tools were employed to triangulate the findings and provide a deeper understanding of the learning environment and program implementation.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data collected in this study were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the ALS Academic Bridging Project. For the quantitative data, the pretest and posttest scores of the 50 ALS learners in English, Mathematics, Science, and Digital Citizenship were statistically analyzed using paired sample t-tests to determine the significance of learning gains before and after the intervention. Descriptive statistics, such as the mean and standard deviation, were also computed to measure overall performance trends. Meanwhile, the qualitative data gathered from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis were subjected to thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns, learner insights, and implementation challenges. The integration of both data sets enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the program's impact on academic achievement and learner experiences.

3 Results

The study revealed a significant improvement in the academic performance of 50 Junior High School ALS learners after they participated in the ALS Academic Bridging Project, implemented by the SDO Dagupan City, during the 2024–2025 school year. The learners were assessed through pretest and posttest evaluations in four key learning areas: English, Mathematics, Science, and Digital Citizenship. The statistical analysis, using paired sample t-tests, showed that the mean scores in all subject areas increased significantly from the pretest to the posttest, with p-values less than 0.05, indicating that the bridging intervention effectively enhanced the learners' academic competencies.

In English, learners demonstrated notable progress in grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and written expression. The average pretest score of 62.4 improved to 79.6 in the posttest, indicating that targeted interventions, such as vocabulary-building exercises, guided reading sessions, and writing workshops, contributed to the development of learners' communication skills. Facilitators also reported that learners became more confident in using English in both oral and written forms, especially during interactive class discussions and peer collaborative activities.

In Mathematics and Science, learners showed marked improvement in basic numeracy, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. The Mathematics mean score rose from 58.2 to 76.8, while the Science score increased from 60.1 to 78.3. Learners were engaged in contextualized and practical learning activities such as problem-based learning, science experiments using simple materials, and real-life simulations that helped them grasp abstract concepts. Teachers noted that with consistent guidance and scaffolded instruction, learners overcame their fear of math and science, which are often regarded as difficult subjects.

Digital Citizenship had the highest increase in performance, with mean scores rising from 54.5 to 81.2. This significant gain was attributed to the learners' exposure to technology-aided instruction and digital literacy sessions that focused on safe internet use, online communication, and basic computer operations. Learners showed enthusiasm and high engagement during these sessions, reflecting their growing awareness of the importance of responsible digital behavior in everyday life. Overall, the findings affirm the effectiveness of the bridging project in equipping ALS learners with foundational academic and 21st-century skills, making a strong case for its continuity and potential replication across other divisions.

4 Discussion

A study by Mansigan (2020) on ALS learners in Quezon City revealed that targeted academic interventions significantly improved learners' mastery of basic literacy and numeracy skills, thereby increasing their readiness for reintegration into the formal education system (Masigan, 2020). Similar to the results of the ALS Academic Bridging Project in SDO Dagupan

City, learners in the Quezon study demonstrated marked improvements in post-assessment scores across all learning strands (Munder, 2024). This highlights the importance of scaffolded instruction and learner-centered strategies in improving academic outcomes for marginalized learners.

The improvement in English and Mathematics performance observed in this study aligns with the findings of Reyes and Dela Cruz (2018), who emphasized that contextualized learning materials and active learning strategies in ALS positively influence learner motivation and comprehension (Caingcoy et al., 2021). Their research concluded that when learners are provided with relatable and meaningful content, particularly in English language and mathematical problem-solving, they are more likely to engage with the lessons and retain knowledge (Nurmalasari & Haryudin, 2021). These insights validate the structured activities employed in Dagupan's bridging project, which used real-life scenarios and localized examples to connect learners' experiences with academic content, resulting in more meaningful and effective learning (Belbestre & Chieng, 2024).

Additionally, the significant gains in Science and Digital Citizenship support the recommendations made in a UNESCO (2021) report on digital inclusion and scientific literacy in non-formal education (Kiat et al., 2020). The report highlights that integrating digital tools and hands-on science activities in alternative education not only enhances cognitive skills but also prepares learners for the modern challenges they face (Allchin, 2022). The substantial increase in learners' performance in Digital Citizenship in this study suggests that equipping ALS learners with technological competencies is crucial in ensuring they become responsible and capable digital citizens (Baterna et al., 2020). This has significant implications for program planning, particularly as digital transformation becomes increasingly central to education and employment pathways.

The overall results of this study reinforce the growing body of research advocating for well-designed academic interventions in ALS. As confirmed by a policy review conducted by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) in 2019, bridging programs play a crucial role in reducing learning gaps and enhancing the functional literacy of ALS learners. These findings imply that the institutionalization of the ALS Academic Bridging Project in SDO Dagupan City can serve as a model for other divisions. Policymakers and implementers should consider adopting similar interventions, supported by continuous monitoring, capacity building for facilitators, and sustained learner support, to further advance the goals of inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

Conclusion

ALS Academic Bridging Project, implemented by SDO Dagupan City during the 2024–2025 school year, had a significant and positive impact on the academic performance of 50 Junior High School ALS learners in the areas of English, Mathematics, Science, and Digital Citizenship. The statistically significant improvements in learners' posttest scores, supported by qualitative insights from observations and interviews, highlight the effectiveness of structured, learner-centered interventions in bridging academic gaps and enhancing readiness for reintegration into the formal education system or entry into the workforce. The study confirmed that targeted academic support, when aligned with the ALS 2.0 curriculum and grounded in relevant DepEd policies, can effectively enhance the learning outcomes and engagement of marginalized learners, thereby supporting the broader goals of inclusive and transformative education in the Philippines.

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