



College of Education

**ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM DELIVERY SERVICES:
BASIS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM IN POST PANDEMIC PERIOD**

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Abstract

The study described the service delivery and challenges encountered by Alternative Learning System (ALS) implementers, teachers, and facilitators in four SDO of the Department of Education situated in Nueva Ecija, Baler Aurora and Occidental Mindoro for School Years 2018-2019, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. Descriptive survey method was utilized in the study. Gathered data were treated utilizing frequency count, percentage, and ratio and proportion and were presented using graphs and tables. Results showed that the number of enrollees in ALS for elementary and secondary levels are increasing every year before the pandemic and decreasing in this time of pandemic while the rate of graduates before and during the pandemic was critically low. Each ALS teacher is dealing with more than 100 ALS students. These teachers were hired despite being inexperienced in handling ALS programs being not a graduate of any ALS related program as there was no Higher Education Institution in Region III and Mimaropa Region that is offering ALS related program. Data likewise revealed the need for the provision of instructional materials intended for ALS students and capability building program for ALS teachers. The need for Higher Education Institution to offer curriculum aligned with Alternative Learning System, thereby producing pedagogically trained ALS teachers highlighted the recommendation addressing Sustainable Development Goal number 4.

Keywords: Alternative Learning System (ALS), ALS Education, ALS students, ALS implementers, ALS facilitators

Introduction

In the Philippines, there is an alternative way to learn if an individual missed to attend the formal education on a regular school year. This alternative means gives opportunity to obtain a diploma in elementary and secondary education and eventually become prepared in entering for college education. Such opportunity is available thru the government's program titled Alternative Learning System (ALS) Program. This program is being implemented by the Department of Education thru the Bureau of Alternative Learning System. The program has many facets that includes for one, is coordinating with the Technical Education, Skills and Development Authority (TESDA) for the delivery of informal education trainings under its program of action. Another face is the non formal education intended for those who stopped their education and desired to acquire skills essential for work, and for those who aspired to finish college is the Equivalency and Accreditation (A&E) Program which is in partnership with the Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation (CEME). This A & E Program provides



College of Education

avenue for those Filipinos who wish to continue their education and eventually pursue higher education. All of these facets embrace the principle underlying Sustainable Development Goal number 4 on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The world is continuously changing as an effect of being impacted by calamities and pandemic. This statement is true in all aspects of life, more so, in the field of education, which was not spared in the state of pandemic. According to Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA, 2020) Report, the functional literacy rate in the Philippines as of the year 2019 is about 91.6%, which covers the age range of 10 to 64 years old. This status of functional literacy was, accordingly, across all sexes and age groups and is considered as higher as far as the 2013 survey results is concerned as done by Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS, 2013). Based from the figures, it is quite easy to deduce that 8.4% or an approximate number of 9.4M illiterate Filipinos are needing attention by the government and the education sector. For the year 2021, there has been a recorded 98.18% literacy rate which covers the age range of 15 to 65 years old of the population. This means that for the current fiscal year, the rate of illiteracy is about 1.82% or an approximate number of more than 200,000 Filipinos in their productive ages. Though, there seemed to be a dramatic change from 2019 to 2021 in terms of figure or number, the state of illiteracy of a portion of the population is not only the concern, but most of all, the growing number of school dropped-outs and out-of-school youth, the issue on early pregnancy, and the scaling up of unemployment rate due to lack of educational qualification. As per data from PSA (November 2021) report, the unemployment rate in the Philippines was 6.5% which means that about 3.16 million Filipinos have no job due to various reasons that include the inability of workers to take on available jobs due to mismatched of skills or absence of skills.

This is where the government program on Alternative Learning System comes in. The Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS) of the Department of Education was established in 2004 by virtue of Republic Act No. 9155, otherwise known as the Basic Education Act of 2001. The BALS was in-charge of a lot of programs from the year it was launched up until 2020, the Bureau is continuously performing its tasks, to the best it can, until Republic Act Number 11510 or the Alternative Learning System Act was passed and enacted into law on December 23, 2020.

Under RA 11510, the ALS program is expanded and strengthened to provide increased opportunities for out-of-school children in special cases and adult learners, including indigenous peoples, to develop basic and functional literacy and life skills, and pursue an equivalent pathway to complete basic education. As discussed in its the rationale, RA 11510 shall enhance and make specific, the functions, duties and offices of the BALS now presently referred to as the ALS Task Force. The law also emphasized the hiring of more ALS teachers who are equipped with proper training and educational qualification for the better delivery of ALS services. To do this, the Task Force shall, accordingly, coordinate with the Department of Budget and Management and the Civil Service Commission. Republic Act Number 11510 institutionalized the Alternative Learning System in Basic Education for Out-of-School, Children in Special Cases and Adults and Appropriating Funds Thereof. It provides opportunities to improve knowledge, values, life skills needed for work and finding jobs, and readiness for higher education, through a system of non formal or indigenous education.

The Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology as a Teacher Education Institution is presently in partnership with four Schools Division Offices of the Department of Education, which are in-charge of the implementation of the goals of RA 11510. Under a signed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), NEUST envisioned to be locally responsive by addressing



College of Education

the needs of the community it served by producing educationally trained ALS teachers who are equipped with the needed pedagogical knowledge for the needs of more Filipinos in Region III and Mimaropa Region, who would help and assist the marginalized Filipinos towards a better future, that is by providing inclusive and equitable quality education thereby promoting lifelong learning opportunities. Through this action, the University shall realize its vision to be internationally relevant and responsive to local and regional needs.

Statement of the Problem

The study described the service delivery and challenges in the provision of ALS program before and during pandemic period. Results served as basis for capability building program. More specifically, the study answered the following questions:

1. How may the pre-pandemic and pandemic status of ALS in Region III and Mimaropa Region be described in terms of:
 - 1.1 Number of ALS enrollees before and during pandemic period;
 - 1.2 Rate of graduates in Elementary and Secondary levels; and
 - 1.3 Teacher-student ratio;
2. How many Higher Education Institutions in Region III and Mimaropa Region offering any ALS related program be described?
3. How may the pedagogical capacity of present ALS teachers in the Region be described in terms of educational qualification?
4. How does the implementation of ALS program, before and during pandemic period, by the implementers, facilitators and teachers be described in terms of:
 - 4.1 Challenges met; and
 - 4.2. Actions taken?
5. What curriculum may be developed for teachers of Alternative Learning System?

Scope and Delimitation

The study described the present status of ALS delivery involving three Schools Division Offices (SDO) of the Department of Education in Region III and one SDO in Occidental Mindoro, Mimaropa Region. Two of the subject SDO in region III are based in Nueva Ecija while the third SDO is based in Baler, Aurora and the last one was based in Mindoro, one of the biggest SDO in Mimaropa Region. A proposed curriculum for Post Baccalaureate Degree in Alternative Learning System (PB-DALS) culminate the outcomes of the study

The study was conducted during the Second Semester of School Year 2021-2022.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method Used

This study made used of descriptive survey method through a survey questionnaire sent to the Offices of Schools Division Superintendents (SDS) and Office of Alternative Learning System of each SDO in Region III and Mimaropa Region. The variables established in this study



College of Education

include the number of ALS teachers and students, teacher’s pedagogical background in terms of educational attainment related to ALS, the number of ALS completers or graduates and the identified challenges met and initiatives done by the ALS teachers, implementers and facilitators. A quick survey was also conducted through interview with the Education Supervisor in-charged of Teacher Education programs of the Commission on Higher Education in Region III (CHEDRO III).

Research Instrument and Sources of Data

Responses from the four ALS offices of the four subject SDOs were the primary source of data for the study. The survey questionnaire is composed of two parts. Part 1 queried on the number of ALS enrollees and graduates and the number ALS teachers, implementers and facilitators covering the pre-pandemic and pandemic period which includes the School Years 2018-2019, 2019-2020, and 2020-2021. Part II inquired on the challenges met by the ALS teachers, implementers and facilitators, the solutions which they thought best to address the program and recommendations for future implementation.

For the Higher Education Institution, the researchers of this study conducted an interview via SMS with the CHEDRO III Education Supervisor for Teacher Education Program as to the status of the offering of any ALS related program in the region.

Statistical Analysis

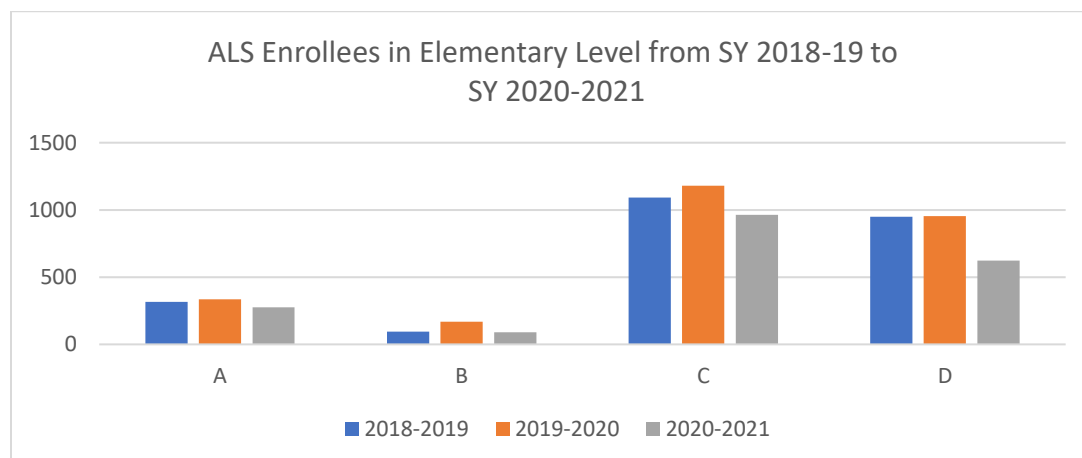
All gathered data about the identified variables were presented in tables and graphs and results of interview were documented for interpretation. Among the statistical tools utilized in treating the data were frequency distribution, percentage and ratio and proportion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Status of Alternative Learning System of Four Schools Division Offices of the Department of Education in Region III and Mimaropa Region

Tables 1 to 3 shows the status of ALS delivery in the four subject SDO of the Department of Education in Region III and Mimaropa Region in terms of ALS enrolees and graduates for both elementary and secondary levels and the present teacher-student ratio.

Figure 1. Number of ALS Enrolees from SY 2018-2019 to SY 2020-21 for Elementary Level

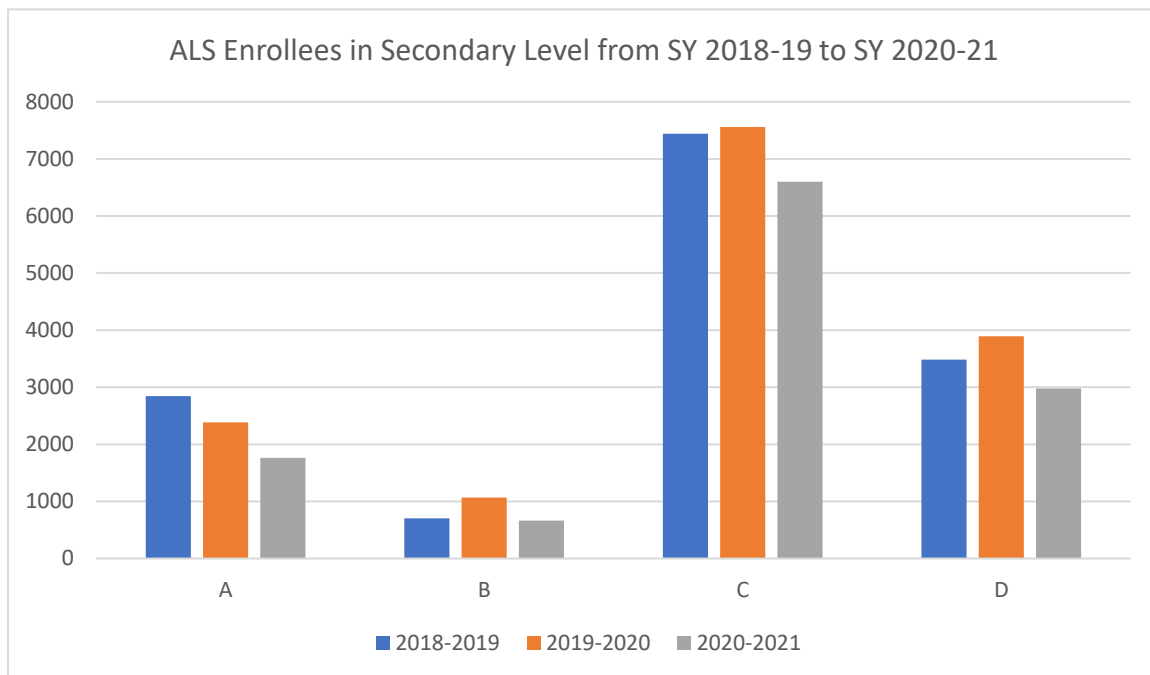




College of Education

As shown on Figure 1, for ALS enrollees in elementary level, in the two school years before the pandemic period, the increase in the enrollees was evident in 2019 in all four SDOs implementing the programs of ALS. During the time of pandemic, there was an evident decreased of enrollees in all four SDOs. The presence of enrollees is an evidence that the Department of Education is continuous in the delivery of ALS services to the out-of-school youth and other less privilege members of the society. The enrolment of ALS students in elementary level during the pandemic period, in the four schools divisions under study, was lower by 23.31% when compared to the average number of enrollees during the two pre-pandemic school years. This shows that the number of ALS learners was affected by the impact of the pandemic the same way as other schools.

Figure 2. Number of ALS Enrollees from SY 2018-2019 to SY 2020-21 for Secondary Level



For the ALS enrollees in the secondary level, the data are presented in Figure 2. The graph described that for the school years before the pandemic, Division B has lower enrollees than Division A while Division C has remarkable number much and much higher than the other two Divisions. The evident reason for this is the more populated location of SDO 3. The graph also shows that during the 1st school year of the pandemic, the number of ALS enrollees for secondary level decreased. Such finding is obvious in all four SDOs. The enrolment of ALS students in secondary level during the pandemic period, in the four schools divisions under study, was lower by 18.28% when compared to the average of two school years before the pandemic which clearly shows that enrolment of ALS program was also affected by the pandemic.





College of Education

Table 1. Rate of ALS Graduates from SY 2018-2019 to SY 2020-21 for Elementary Level

Schools Division	Pre-COVID19 Pandemic Period				Under the COVID19 Pandemic Period	
	SY 2018-2019		SY 2019-2020		SY2020-2021	
	Enrolees	Completers/ Evaluated	Enrollees	Completers Evaluated	Enrollees	Completers Evaluated
A	317	33 (10.41)	334	54 (16.16%)	276 (lowered by 15%)	On-going assessment
B	94	32 (34%)	168	121 (72%)	89 (lowered by 32%)	On-going assessment
C	1,091	148 (13.57%)	1,181	120 (10.16%)	963 (lowered by 15%)	247 (25.65%)
D	948	72	955	74	623 (lowered by 35%)	On-going assessment
Total or average	2,450	285 (11.63%)	2,638	369 (13.98%)	1,951 (lowered by 23.31%)	

Before the pandemic, considering the subject four schools divisions, out of 2,450 total number of enrollees of ALS in elementary level in SY 2018-19, 285 or 11.63% of the enrollee completed the program while in SY 2019-2020, out of 2,638 total number of enrollees, 369 or 11.38% of the total completed the program. Division B, located in a City, has remarkable turn-out of ALS graduates or completers in this level but with the lowest number of enrollees. These results are during the face-to-face or pre-pandemic set-up.

During the first school year of the pandemic period, of the four schools division under study, only one division provided the data on the completers. For the SY 2020-2021, only Division C provided data on completers which was 25.65% of the total number of ALS enrollees in elementary level.

When compared with the recorded percentage of ALS completers before the pandemic, the increase in the percent of graduates for SY 2020-2021 was twice the recorded percentage, which is considered a big leap. This imply that home schooling or compliance of school requirements which are done at home due to lockdown and quarantine related policies became more favorable among enrollees. As of the time of the data gathering, the other three schools division are waiting for the results of the on-going assessment of their ALS students in elementary level.

Table 2. Rate of ALS Graduates from SY 2018-2019 to SY 2020-21 for Secondary Level

Schools Division	Pre-COVID19 Pandemic Period				Under the COVID19 Pandemic Period	
	SY 2018-2019		SY 2019-2020		SY2020-2021	
	Enrollees	Completers	Enrollees	Completers	Enrollees	Completers



College of Education

		Evaluated		Evaluated		Evaluated
A	2847	692	2387	713	1761 (lowered by 33%)	On-going assessment
B	703	454 (64.6%)	1068	851 (79.7%)	663 (lowered by 25%)	On-going assessment
C	7,441	1,698 (22.82%)	7,557	2,300 (30.44%)	6,600 (lowered by 12%)	2,545 (38.56%)
D	3,483	497 (14.27%)	3,891	756 (14.43%)	2,979 (lowered by 19%)	On-going assessment
Total or average	14,474	3,341 (23.08%)	14,903	4,620 (31.00%)	12,003 (lowered by 18.28%)	

Considering the respondent four schools division, before the pandemic, out of 14,474 total number of enrollees of ALS in secondary level in SY 2018-2019, 3,341 completed the program, and that was 23.08% of the total, while in SY 2019-2020, out of 14,903 total number of enrollees 4,620 or 31.00% of the total completed the program. Moreover, Division B, located in a City, recorded a remarkable turn-out of ALS graduates or completers in secondary level but with the lesser number of enrollees. These results are during the regular face-to-face or pre-pandemic set-up.

During the pandemic period, of the four schools division under study, as of the time of data gathering, only one division provided the data on the completers which was Division C with 38.56% of the enrollees or 2,545 out of 6,600. When compared with the recorded percentage of ALS completers before the pandemic, the increase in the percent of graduates for SY 2020-2021 was still higher by more than 8.12%. This imply a positive impact of pandemic on the number of completers where studying at home during lockdown and other forms of restrictions become beneficial and favourable.

On the average, the enrolment of ALS students in Secondary level during the pandemic period, in the four schools divisions under study, was lowered by 18.28%.

Table 3. ALS Teacher-student ratio from SY 2018-2019 to SY 2020-21

Schools Division	Pre-COVID19 Pandemic Period				Under the COVID19 Pandemic Period	
	SY 2018-2019		SY 2019-2020		SY2020-2021	
	Total # of ALS students (Elementary & Secondary)	Total # of ALS Teachers and Implementers	Total # of ALS students (Elementary & Secondary)	Total # of ALS students (Elementary & Secondary)	Total # of ALS students (Elementary & Secondary)	Total # of ALS students (Elementary & Secondary)
A	3,164	19 1:167	2,721	27 1:101	2,037	27 1:76
B	797	9 1:89	1,236	19 1:66	752	18 1:42
C	8,460	69 1:123	8,738	87 1:101	7,563	87 1:87



College of Education

D	4,431	42 1:106	4,891	42 1:117	3,602	42 1:86
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As regards the ALS teacher-student ratio, the respondent four SDOs revealed that the ALS teachers for both elementary and secondary levels are the same and one. Responses declared that there is no distinction nor qualification set to distinguish between the teachers for elementary and secondary levels, since most of the enrollees are already adults, only with different needs. After doing a little Mathematics on the figures from the respondent SDOs, data showed that the ratio of teacher to students is found beyond and way, way above the normal ratio under the formal education set-up which is 1 teacher for every 35 to 40 students. While it is true that most of ALS students are adults, observance of standard teacher-student ratio must be observed to ensure better learning outcomes. Correlation between the student teacher ratio and achievement revealed that greater number of students per teacher tend to have a low achievement, (Nizam and Bekir, 2015).

The ALS teacher- student ratio in four subject SDOs is in critical status. Even if the four SDOs may not be considered as the representation of all ALS implementers in the Philippines, gathered results still proven the fact that the Department of Education is in high need of ALS teachers specifically trained for ALS delivery services.

2. Availability of Higher Education Institution Offering ALS Related Program in Region III

Based from the interview conducted with the Teacher Education Supervisor of the Commission on Higher Education in Region III, it was a sad truth that no Teacher Education Institution in the region has ever attempted to seek the notation of CHEDRO III for the offering of any program related to Alternative Learning System. The same information was shared by ALS focal person in the subject schools division in Mimaropa Region. The CHED Technical Panel for Teacher Education crafted CMO # 83, series of 2017 in response to Sustainable Development Goal # 4 focused on ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning. Hence, the state encourages that Teacher Education Institutions in the country developed curriculum for the offering of Post Baccalaureate Diploma in Alternative Learning System. Based from Policies, Standards and Guidelines governing the offering of the said program, the training of ALS teacher may take a year to be fully equipped with the pedagogical knowledge on the delivery of ALS services.

3. Educational Qualification of ALS Teachers, Facilitators and Implementers

Based from the responses of the four SDOs when asked about the educational qualifications of the ALS teachers, implementers and facilitators, results revealed that the teachers were not educationally trained to deliver ALS program and that none of the teachers was a graduate of any ALS related program. This condition was justified by the absence of any ALS related program offering in Region III and Mimaropa Region.

To support the ALS teachers and make them ready to do the many and varying tasks of an ALS implementer and facilitator, the mobile teachers are subjected to ALS training. These trainings are organized and facilitated by the ALS Task Force and by other agencies. Unfortunately, these are the only source of training that ALS teachers, implementers and facilitators are getting in relation to ALS delivery. Moreover, the frequency of ALS related trainings and webinars is not as often as that for teachers in basic and higher education.





College of Education

4. Challenges and Solutions Offered by ALS Teachers, Implementers, and Facilitators to Improve the delivery of ALS services

According to the ALS teachers, implementers and facilitators who regularly submit their reports to ALS Division Head, the following are the challenges met by them:

Lack or few permanent CLC (Community Learning Center). For several years since the implementation ALS program, very seldom that a particular town or barangay has Community Learning Center. More likely, classes of ALS students before the pandemic were held inside the elementary or secondary public schools and were scheduled at night or after the classes of students enrolled in regular program.

Lack or Limited instructional/learning materials. Accordingly, the multiple number of students per piece of instruction material is a long time concern which is being addressed by employing the principle of sharing. However, sharing of instructional materials is time consuming which often lead to non-completion of all intended lessons on time.

Lack or Limited contextualized instructional/learning materials. Contextualized learning materials is needed to meet the varying needs of learners who are enrolled in elementary and secondary categories or level. As of the present set-up, the learning materials for those enrolled in elementary level are the same for those enrolled in secondary level.

Lack or Limited ALS implementers/ALS teachers. Some of ALS implementers were not actually hired as teachers the way a regular teacher is hired in the Department of Education. Accordingly, some of them were hired to deliver short term courses and some were ALS teacher while waiting for any vacancy for regular item.

Lack or very limited funds.

Learners cannot pursue to higher education due to non-administration of A & E Test (Delayed ALS Accreditation and Equivalency Test). Accordingly, this problem is due to the big number of ALS enrollees from all over the country which are needed to be assessed by a single agency commissioned to provide results for A & E tests.

Adult/Working Learner's availability and schedule of classes. The adult learners have varying reasons of why some of them could not attend the classes and eventually dropped resulting to low number of completers. Accordingly, the reasons were mostly personal and financial.

Unavailability of gadgets for online classes of learners. This challenge emerged as an impact of the pandemic.

The ALS teachers, implementers and facilitators likewise offered remedies and initiatives to meet the demands of pressing challenges, which are:

1. Portfolio Assessment as basis for level completion



College of Education

2. Continues hiring of teachers
3. Requesting supports from LGUs for additional IM's
4. Strengthening stakeholder's support system/partnership with LGUS
5. Submission of proposal for funding by PGO, Ro and CO
6. Tie-up with internal and external stakeholders
7. Utilization of DepEd Learning Resource (LR) Portal
8. Practice safety and health protocols
9. Provision of distance learning modalities fit to all learners
10. Provision of modular learning for adults and learners with no access to modern/online media
11. Engagement of ALS facilitators in trainings for blended learning

Findings and Conclusions

1. The number of ALS enrollees for both elementary and secondary levels are increasing every year before the pandemic which means that this sector of the society needing ALS are increasing in number every year. There was a decrease on the number of enrollees during the pandemic due to various family, personal and economic reasons as an evident impact of lockdowns and restrictions on movement of the populace.
2. The number of ALS completers and graduates are likewise increasing every year before and during the pandemic. However, the rate of graduates is way and way below the number of enrollees. There is an alarming rate of dropped outs in the ALS program.
3. The ALS teacher-student ratio is far from the standard teacher-student ratio. There is an overwhelming needs for ALS teachers.
4. ALL of the ALS teachers hired by the four SDOs were not a graduate of any ALS related program and they were graduates of varying teacher education programs. Moreover, the ALS teachers for elementary level are the same for secondary level and ALS related webinars and trainings are not as often as that of the webinars and trainings intended for teachers in basic, secondary and higher education.
5. The ALS teachers, implementers and facilitators were faced by at least eight challenges which they constantly experience but despite the identified challenges, they managed to initiate at least eleven solutions.

From the above findings, after due considerations of all the identified conditions, and to become part of the solution to assist the Department of Education in realizing the course objectives of Republic Act No. 11510, the NEUST College of Education hereby crafted a capacity building plan which was developed and summarized in a matrix shown below:



College of Education

Capacity Building Plan for Teachers of Alternative Learning System

Target/Objectives	Activity/Project	Partner Agency	Budget and Source	Status
To offer an ALS Curriculum for the pedagogical training of Teachers in response to the provision of RA 11510 on the qualification of ALS teachers	Development of ALS Curriculum at NEUST in accordance with CMO #83, s.2017 for Elementary and Secondary Levels.	NEUST, CHED R3 CHED CO (OPSD)	Php. 50,000.00	Proposed Curriculum submitted to CHED Pending at CHED CO OPSD
To offer MOOCs training program for already hired ALS teachers	Development of Massive Open Online Courses for ALS teachers, implementers and facilitators	NEUST DepEd	Php. 500,000.00	On-going
Provision of local, regional, and national workshops/ conventions/ webinars to capacitate ALS teachers	Organization and facilitation of, at least one in every quarter, local, regional, national and or international trainings/workshops/conferences/webinars intended to capacitate the present ALS teachers/facilitators/implementers	NEUST DepEd	Php. 500,000.00	On-going
For NEUST to become Center of Teacher Training for ALS and partner of the Department of Education for ALS Delivery System	Organization and facilitation of NEUST application to become Center of Teacher Training for ALS	NEUST DepEd	Php. 500,000.00	Planning stage

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